

Who is Krishna?

Krishna is the Supreme Person, the Godhead. Krishna is the speaker of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is recognized throughout the world as one of mankind's greatest books of wisdom. In the *Gita*, as it is also known, Krishna says repeatedly that He is God Himself, the source of everything. Arjun, to whom Krishna is speaking, accepts Krishna's words as true, adding that the greatest spiritual authorities of that time also confirm that Krishna is God.

Traditions that follow in the line of these authorities have carried Krishna's teachings down to the present day.

"Unintelligent men, who do not know Me perfectly, think that I, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, was impersonal before and have now assumed this personality. Due to their small knowledge, they do not know My higher nature, which is imperishable and supreme." —Sri Krishna, *Bhagavad-Gita* 7.24

God, A Transcendental Person

The personhood of Krishna is not an idea invented by human beings naively creating a God in their own image. Nor is personhood a limiting concept when applied to God, or the Absolute Truth. As the source of everything, Krishna naturally has His own personal identity, just as each of us does. The Vedas define God as the one supreme conscious being among all other conscious beings. He is infinite, we are finite, and He maintains us all.

Naturally, the best way to understand God is to learn from Him. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* ("The Song of God"), Lord Krishna—a real person—tells us that He is God and reveals many things about Himself.

A Complete Conception of God

Many people have a hard time conceiving that God can be an actual person. But the Vedas tell us that God's unique personal identity is His highest aspect. Here's an analogy to show how God has three main features.

Looking at a mountain from a distance, we can make out only its size and shape. This is compared to comprehending God only as *Brahman*, His impersonal energy, which

emanates from Him just as light shines out from its source.

As we move closer, we'll start to make out more of the mountain's characteristics—the colors of its foliage, for example. This is compared to understanding that God is within our hearts as *Paramatma*, or the Super soul.

Finally, when we arrive at the mountain we can explore its soil, vegetation, animals, rivers, and so on. This is compared to understanding God the person, or *Bhagvan*.

Bhagvan is the source of *Brahman* and *Paramatma* and is therefore, in a sense, one with them. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Brahman*, *Paramatma*, and *Bhagvan* are called the three phases of the Absolute Truth.

What is God Like?

As with anyone in our experience, God is unique and complex. He's the transcendental Supreme Person, so there's infinitely more to know about Him than anyone else. The Vedas, especially *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, supply detailed information about Him.

Everything about God is fully transcendental, or spiritual. Because God is absolute, there is no difference between Him and His name, form, activities, qualities, and so on. Contact with any of these gives the same spiritual benefit, namely purification of our consciousness.

Krishna's Form

Transcendental Form - The Vedas tell us that spirit is composed of eternity, knowledge (or consciousness), and happiness. Both God and we souls possess spiritual forms, which are free of the limitations of material form. For example, each part of a spiritual body can perform the function of any other part.

Krishna's body never changes; He is an eternal youth.

Unlike we ordinary souls, who may possess a material body, Krishna and His body are always identical.

A Description of Krishna - The Vedas describe Krishna in this way: He is a beautiful youth with a glowing complexion the color of rain clouds. He plays a flute, attracting the hearts

of all. His cheeks are brilliant, His smile enchanting. He wears a peacock feather in His curly black hair and a flower garland around His neck. His beautiful garments are the color of lightning. His toenails resemble the light of the moon.

Not only do the Vedas tell us what Krishna looks like, but pure souls have received His audience and written of their encounters. And fifty centuries ago, Krishna revealed His transcendental form to residents of India when He lived there for 120 years, sometimes showing and sometimes hiding His divinity.

"I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all. But whoever renders service unto Me in devotion is a friend, is in Me, and I am also a friend to him." —Sri Krishna, *Bhagavad-Gita* 9.29

Krishna's Nature

Krishna is loving by nature. In our original pure state, we love Him fully. In the exchange of complete love, Krishna considers His devotees greater than Himself. In the spiritual world He always stays with His devotees, and in this world He resides in every heart as the Super soul. He wants His children in the material world to return to Him to enjoy with Him eternally.

Krishna is completely independent, and we cannot comprehend him completely. He cannot be conquered by knowledge. But He can be conquered—and seen directly—through pure love.

God has feelings: He is satisfied when someone offers Him a nice prayer. Even though He is great, He can be moved by our love. He responds to us according to how we approach Him.

"The pure devotee is always within the core of My heart, and I am always in the heart of the pure devotee. My devotees do not know anything else but Me, and I do not know anyone else but them." —Srimad-Bhagavatam 9.4.68

"Even if it were possible to count the atoms after smashing the earth into powder, still it would not be possible to estimate the unfathomable transcendental qualities of the Lord." —Srila Prabhupada, *Bhagavatam*, 1.16.26-30, Purport

Krishna's Qualities

Understanding that God is spiritual, people sometimes conceive of Him as having no qualities. But although Krishna has no material qualities, He is full of unlimited transcendental qualities, and those qualities attract us to Him. Thus great souls who have given up everything cannot give up attraction to Krishna, and they dedicate their lives to finding Him.

The following qualities are considered especially attractive, and Krishna possesses them in full: beauty, wealth, fame, influence, knowledge, and renunciation.

Being God, Krishna has innumerable qualities and seemingly contradictory qualities are resolved in Him.

Hearing of how Krishna shows these qualities can give us a sense of His greatness and of His power to attract all souls.

Krishna's Activities

While Krishna's expansions and incarnations perform duties in the material and spiritual worlds, He Himself simply enjoys with His most intimate devotees in His transcendental home, known as Goloka. By His desire, His associates there don't even consider Him God. They enhance His enjoyment in five loving moods: neutrality, servitude, friendship, parental affection, and conjugal love. In other words, Krishna's life is filled with unending bliss in the company of His associates.

Krishna enjoys Himself with abandon, frolicking as a youth in expansive fields and forests with His friends and cows. He dances, He plays His flute, He relishes whatever activity strikes His fancy at the moment.

To entice souls in the material world to join Him in Goloka, Krishna comes to this world periodically, as He did 5,000 years ago, and shows His confidential, intimate loving exchanges with His ever-liberated devotees.

Krishna's Relationships

Krishna savors diversity from various kinds of pure, transcendental love. As we enjoy a variety of relationships in our families and society, so does Krishna, but all of His

relationships are eternal, transcendental, and completely free of material contamination.

Each of Krishna's devotees interacts with Him in one of five primary relationships. In ascending order of intimacy, these five are neutrality, servitude, friendship, parental affection, and conjugal love. Each includes the primary sentiments of the ones before it, and then adds its own flavor. Pure love of God reaches its summit in romantic exchanges with Krishna.

Each devotee eternally feels one of these main moods predominantly:

- Devotees in the mood of neutrality witness and support Krishna's pastimes by their presence as plants, animals, streams, and so on, as well as normally inanimate objects like houses—all of which are fully conscious in Goloka.
- Devotees in the service mood run errands for Krishna, pack His lunch, wash His clothes, and perform other demonstrations of love for Him as the moment indicates.
- Devotees in the fraternal mood serve Krishna by being His friends. They are sometimes boastful, considering themselves equal to Krishna. In His company, they herd cows and enjoy games in the beautiful country setting.
- Devotees in the parental mood see themselves as Krishna's provider and protector. Krishna behaves with them like a dependent child. His mother cuddles Him, carefully prepares His meals, and thinks only of His protection. His father sees that He has all the comforts of a normal home.
- Devotees in the conjugal, or romantic, mood, offer service as Krishna's girlfriends, relating with Him in the intimacy of lover and beloved.

"The Supreme Lord has nothing to do, and no one is found to be equal to or greater than Him, for everything is done naturally and systematically by His multifarious energies." — Svetashvatara Upanishad 6.8

Krishna's Energies

Although Krishna is invisible to us in our present state, we can perceive His presence through His energies, which are everywhere.

Although innumerable, His energies fall into three primary categories.

Internal Energy - Krishna's internal energy expands as the spiritual world in all its variety, including His ever-liberated associates there. The internal energy is eternal and full of knowledge and happiness. Presently beyond our perception, the spiritual world makes up most of reality.

External Energy - Krishna's external energy consists of all that is matter: the material world, the laws of material nature, material bodies, and so on. The external energy is temporary and full of ignorance and suffering. It is inert by nature and must be moved by spirit. The material world is a tiny fraction of God's creation.

Marginal Energy - We finite spirit souls are expansions of Krishna's marginal energy. We can choose to live in the spiritual world or the material world. Or, to put it another way, we can be deluded by matter or illuminated by spirit.

Both the external energy (matter) and the marginal energy (we souls) can become fully spiritualized by contact with the internal energy through acts of devotion to Krishna (Bhakti-yoga).

"That supreme abode of Mine is not illumined by the sun or moon, nor by fire or electricity. Those who reach it never return to this material world." —Sri Krishna, Bhagavad-Gita 15.6

Krishna's Home

God owns everything, so in a sense His home is everywhere. But He Himself resides in the spiritual world in a place known as Goloka, the highest spiritual region. Reaching Krishna there is the highest achievement of human life.

Goloka is self-illuminated, and everyone there is liberated, shining with pure love for Krishna. Because Krishna is the center of everyone's heart, there is complete unity and peace. Goloka is built of transcendental gems that yield whatever one wants. The natural surroundings are beautiful, full of diversity and opulence. In Goloka, every word is a song, every step a dance, every moment new, fresh, and exciting.

Krishna's Names

Just as we may have different names according to our various roles—Mommy, Dr. Jones, Sweetheart, Professor, Your Honor—so does God. And since God is unlimited, He has innumerable names.

The names can be generic terms, such as "God" or "the Absolute Truth."

They can be in Sanskrit, such as Govinda, Gopala, or Shyamasundara.

They can be in other languages, such as Yahweh and Allah.

The name Krishna, which means "the all-attractive One," implies that each of us has an eternal relationship with God and we are always drawn either to Him directly or to His energies.

God and His names are identical, so by speaking them we enter His purifying company. Regularly reciting, singing, or chanting His names awakens our innate love for Him and gains us release from bondage to matter.

In contemplating the above, the reader may ask, "Where are you getting this knowledge from?" Apart from Sri Krishna's own words in His *Bhagavad-Gita*, the ancient Vedas (scriptures) of India extensively describe God in detail, His expansions, incarnations and pastimes.

"Completely rejecting all religious activities which are materially motivated, this Srimad-Bhagavatam propounds the highest truth, which is understandable by those devotees who are fully pure in heart. The highest truth is reality distinguished from illusion for the welfare of all. . . . This beautiful Bhagavatam, compiled by the great sage Vyasadeva [in his maturity], is sufficient in itself for God realization." —Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.1.2

Bhagavatam, A Major Contribution to the Understanding of God

The Vedas deal with many subjects. They are the books of a highly developed civilization and cover all departments of knowledge. Among them, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (also known as the *Bhagavata Purana*) deals exclusively with subjects about God. *Srimad* means "beautiful" or "opulent," and *Bhagavatam* means "related to God." Hence, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* can be translated as "The Beautiful Story of God."

Srimad-Bhagavatam describes God, our relationship with Him, and the process for realizing that relationship. Its 18,000 verses give detailed accounts of God's names, forms, nature, personality, devotees, activities, residences, and much more.

In one of the opening chapters, the narrator explains that the sage Vyasadeva, who wrote portions of the Vedic literature and compiled the rest, felt dissatisfied despite his accomplishments. Under the order of his guru, he then embarked on writing *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, considered the ripe fruit of the tree of the Vedas.