

# THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY *for* KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Founder-Acharya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

## FACT SHEET

### ORGANIZATION:

Popularly known as the Hare Krishna Movement, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a worldwide confederation of more than 400 temples, 100 vegetarian restaurants, and a wide variety of community projects

### HISTORY:

ISKCON belongs to the Gaudiya-Vaishnava *sampradaya*, or denomination, a monotheistic tradition within the broad Hindu culture. It is scripturally based on the 5,000-year-old Sanskrit text *Bhagavad-gita*, or “Song of God.” ISKCON traces its lineage directly to the speaker of that sacred book, Lord Krishna, who is revered as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and to Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a 16<sup>th</sup> century incarnation of God who emphasized the chanting of Hare Krishna as the most effective means of achieving self-realization and love of God in this age.

#### The Seven Purposes of ISKCON

- ❶ To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.
- ❷ To propagate a consciousness of Krishna (God), as it is revealed in the great scriptures of India, Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.
- ❸ To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus developing the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).
- ❹ To teach and encourage the *sankirtana* movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God, as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.
- ❺ To erect for the members and for society at large a holy place of transcendental pastimes dedicated to the personality of Krishna.
- ❻ To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler, more natural way of life.
- ❼ With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.

### FOUNDER:

In 1965, at the age of 70, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada journeyed alone from India to America, to bring the teachings of Krishna west. On July 11, 1966, Srila Prabhupada officially registered the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in New York City, and thus began the Hare Krishna movement in America. Srila Prabhupada passed away in 1977.

### MISSION:

This nonsectarian, monotheistic movement’s mission is to advance the well-being of society by promoting the science of Krishna consciousness. To that end, Srila Prabhupada enunciated ISKCON’s mission statement in seven purposes.

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### THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT IN NORTH AMERICA IS ROOTED IN THE ANCIENT VAISHNAVA TRADITION OF INDIA

*The Hare Krishna movement is historically very significant, for now for the first time since the days of the Roman Empire, an Asian religion is being openly practiced by people of western origin in the streets of western cities.*

- Dr. A.L. Basham; *A Cultural History of India*

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ISKCON traces its spiritual lineage directly to the speaker of the sacred book, Lord Krishna, who is revered as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The text teaches that the goal of life is to develop love of God, or Krishna. Love of God is realized through the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, the science of devotional service.

In the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a saint named Chaitanya Mahaprabhu revitalized the *bhakti-yoga* tradition by introducing an expansive spiritual movement that swept India. Central to this renaissance was Chaitanya's emphasis on the chanting of Krishna's name. Underlying this simple practice was a profound, rational, and intellectually comprehensive theology. Hare Krishna devotees worship Lord Chaitanya as an incarnation of Krishna for this age, and ISKCON is a vibrant continuation of the movement Chaitanya began.



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## HIS DIVINE GRACE A.C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPADA

*He was a genuine holy person with enormous integrity and compassion, and he had a powerful impact on those who met him. He never claimed authority and respect for himself; what he said and did was always in the name of Krishna...*

- Dr. Thomas J. Hopkins

When His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada entered the port of New York City on September 17, 1965, few Americans took notice — but he was not merely another immigrant. He was on a mission to introduce an ancient religion, which originated in India, into mainstream America. Before Srila Prabhupada passed away on November 14, 1977, at the age of 81, his mission proved successful. He had founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and saw it grow into a worldwide confederation of more than 100 temples, ashrams and cultural centers.



Srila Prabhupada was born Abhay Charan De on September 1, 1896, to a pious Hindu family in Calcutta. As a youth growing up in British-controlled India, Abhay became involved with Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience movement to secure independence for his nation. It was, however, a 1922 meeting with a prominent scholar and religious leader, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, which proved most influential on Abhay's future calling. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta was a leader in the Gaudiya Vaishnava denomination, a monotheistic tradition within the broad Hindu culture, and asked Abhay to bring the teachings of Lord Krishna to the English-speaking world. Abhay became a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta in 1933, and resolved to carry out his mentor's request. Abhay, later known by the honorific A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, spent the next 32 years preparing for his journey west.

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## ISKCON – EXPRESSING DEVOTION THROUGH THE ARTS

*I very much welcome events such as this, which will help us all to celebrate the values and benefits of diversity... but also shows the positive expression of belief that is characteristic of the Krishna consciousness movement.*

- Tony Blair, Prime Minister, United Kingdom

With roots in the traditions of ancient India, the Hare Krishna movement finds expression in vibrant colors, striking melodies, mouth-watering culinary creations, and joyous festivals—all with glorification of Krishna, or God, in the center. Here are a few of the ways in members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) convey their devotion through the arts:

### ○ **Music and Dance**

Tradition holds that in Lord Krishna’s abode “every word is a song and every step is a dance.” Music plays a key role in the lives of Krishna devotees. When Srila Prabhupada first brought the Krishna tradition West in 1965, he introduced the art of *kirtan*, devotional chanting accompanied by traditional Indian instruments. ISKCON devotees have shared this dynamic musical expression with the world, and many have gone on to become accomplished singers and musicians. Hare Krishna temples also regularly host stage performances and teach classes, highlighting classical Indian dance forms, such as *Bharata Natyam*, *Kathak*, and *Odissi*. These intricate and graceful performances are part of a rich tradition of depicting the divine activities of God or His devotees through dance.



### ○ **Fine Art**

Artists within the Hare Krishna movement have created hundreds of original paintings depicting Lord Krishna and His spiritual abode. With their characteristic blend of Eastern and Western styles, these works of art illustrate multiple volumes of books, decorate ISKCON temples, and help to visually present the Krishna tradition.

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### HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT PROMOTES VEGETARIANISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

*The International Society for Krishna Consciousness is doing a superb job in letting people know that vegetarian food is healthful, delicious, and pleasing to the eye... they cannot be praised enough for their success in promoting the cause of vegetarianism worldwide.*

- Scott Smith, Associate Editor, *Vegetarian Times*

Members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) believe that the Earth's resources, nature, and our own bodies are all sacred gifts from God and should be treated responsibly. The Vaishnava philosophy that the Hare Krishna movement is rooted in teaches that all living beings are interrelated through Krishna, the common father. Krishna devotees respect the animals' right to live, and practice a diet that seeks to minimize violence and exploitation. Thus they see vegetarianism – with its countless documented ecological, social, and health benefits – as most conducive to a compassionate, environmentally friendly, and wholesome way of life.

Sometimes referred to as “the kitchen religion,” the Hare Krishna movement actively promotes the benefits of vegetarianism. ISKCON temples offer visitors delicious sanctified vegetarian food, and host weekly Sunday open house programs that culminate in a free multi-course feast. The Krishna movement has established more than 100 vegetarian restaurants around the world, and has distributed more than 300 million nutritious vegetarian meals to the disadvantaged through its affiliate, Food for Life. Krishna devotees regularly teach vegetarian cooking classes at their temples and local universities, and several ISKCON members are authors of acclaimed cookbooks. Australian-born chef Kurma Dasa's popular “Cooking with Kurma” series has aired on public television stations around the world, and ISKCON member Yamuna Devi was awarded the 1992 James Beard Award for Best International Cookbook for her vegetarian text *Yamuna's Table*.

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### HARE KRISHNA FOOD FOR LIFE PROGRAM COMMITTED TO FIGHTING WORLD HUNGER

*Here they [the Hare Krishnas] have a reputation like the one Mother Teresa has in Calcutta: it's not hard finding someone to swear they are saints...*

- The New York Times, "Grozny Journal"

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is doing its part to combat world hunger. In the last three decades, ISKCON's "Hare Krishna Food for Life" program has served more than 300 million hot, nutritious, vegetarian meals to the disadvantaged throughout America, Asia, Africa, Australia and Europe.



In 1974, seeing street children rummaging through garbage for something to eat, ISKCON founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was moved to tears and instructed his followers that no one within a ten-mile radius of any Krishna temple should go hungry. Today, the program includes free food restaurants, mobile kitchens, and emergency relief services, and distributes upwards of 400,000 free vegetarian meals per day to needy people in more than 60 countries.

"Too much grief and despair in the world is caused by hunger," says Australian born Paul Turner, international coordinator of Food for Life. "Krishna devotees are dedicated to bring people hope by distributing healthy and sanctified foods."

Recently, Food for Life chapters in New Delhi and Mumbai inaugurated successful "Mid-Day Meal" programs to combat hunger. These programs aim to liberate underprivileged children from the vicious cycle of poverty; they seek to encourage school attendance by providing students with fresh, nutritious lunches, free of cost. In Mumbai, the program partners with the state government and the Times of India media group, and feeds more than 30,000 students in over 100 schools every day.

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## MAJOR HOLIDAYS & CELEBRATIONS

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness follows an annual calendar that is filled with holy days and celebrations. Observance may include worship or meditation, voluntary fasting, and festivities. Festivals often include special discourses, dramatic performances, and grand vegetarian feasts for members and guests.

Krishna temples, following tradition, determine the dates of their holidays by using the lunar calendar. Therefore, dates will vary from year to year when compared to the Western, or solar calendar. All events are open to the public.

Prominent holidays are listed below. For a more thorough list of holidays, please visit:  
[www.iskcon.com/culture/festival\\_year/fest\\_days.html](http://www.iskcon.com/culture/festival_year/fest_days.html).

### **KRISHNA JANMASTAMI**

— celebrated late  
August or early  
September.

Janmastami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, is the most holy day for ISKCON devotees. In India, Janmastami is a major holiday as well, celebrated by Hindus of all denominations.

ISKCON temples celebrate the day with special worship and programs including traditional dances, congregational singing, theater, and feasting. Devotees fast until midnight and then have a multi-course feast to commemorate the Lord's appearance on earth.

### **BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRILA PRABHUPADA**

— celebrated the day  
following Krishna  
Janmastami.

The birthday of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada is a day where devotees observe services to express their gratitude and appreciation of Srila Prabhupada, who crossed the ocean at the age of 69 to spread knowledge of Krishna throughout the world.

Krishna devotees gather to remember Srila Prabhupada and serve an elaborate mid-day feast in his honor.

### **RADHASTAMI**

— observed in  
September.

The appearance day of Radha, who is the feminine aspect of the Godhead and Krishna's eternal loving consort, is also celebrated with special songs, worship and feasting.

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### SCHOLARS WITH EXPERTISE ON THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT

*This is a brief list of scholars of religion and sociology qualified as experts in the study of the Hare Krishna Movement.*

Dr. Diana L. Eck                      Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies  
Harvard University, Committee for the Study of Religion  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
617-495-5781  
dianaeck@fas.harvard.edu

Dr. Ravi M. Gupta                      Assistant Professor of Religion,  
Centre College  
Danville, Kentucky  
859-238-5247  
ravigupta108@yahoo.com

Dr. Burke E. Rochford                      Professor, Department of Sociology,  
Middlebury College  
Middlebury, Vermont  
802-443-5303  
ravi.gupta@centre.edu

Dr. Graham Schweig                      Associate Professor of Religious Studies,  
Christopher Newport University  
Newport News, Virginia  
757-594-7959  
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Dr. Larry D. Shinn                      Office of the President,  
Berea College  
Berea, Kentucky  
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Dr. Kenneth J. Valpey                      Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Religion  
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*This material is available online at <http://www.iskcon.com/media>*

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## ISKCON RESOURCE LIST

### WEBSITES:

- **Krishna.com** — This “one-stop-site” for all things Krishna features informational text, online books, art galleries, downloads, links, streaming radio and video, an online gift shop, and a Live Help section with someone to answer questions in real-time via instant messenger.  
<http://www.krishna.com>
- **ISKCON.com** — The official website of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, this organizational site provides an academic context for Krishna consciousness. Included are sections on the organization’s mission, structure and historical roots; a list of worldwide centers and projects; an overview of the Vaishnava culture which ISKCON represents; and coverage of ISKCON news.  
<http://www.iskcon.com>
- **BBT.info** – ISKCON’s publishing arm, the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT), is said to be the world’s largest publisher of classic and contemporary works from the Vaishnava tradition. The BBT website includes an e-library with several titles available as free downloads, an online book store, and information about its many branches and projects.  
<http://www.bbt.info>
- **FFL.org** — The comprehensive website for ISKCON affiliate Food for Life (FFL) shares the latest news about the organization’s work around the world, spotlights specific projects, and provides facts and statistics.  
<http://www.ffl.org>

### ACADEMIC JOURNALS:

- **ISKCON Communications Journal** — A journal of dialogue, focusing on issues related to missionary development, communication, administration, social development and education which affect ISKCON. *Available by subscription from* ICJ, 63, Divinity Road, Oxford, OX4 1LH, UK. *Back issues are available online at* <http://iskcon.com/icj/>
- **Journal of Vaisnava Studies** — An interdisciplinary, refereed publication that is dedicated to the in-depth study of the Vaishnava traditions of India (not limited to ISKCON), from ancient times to the present. *Published by* Deepak Heritage Books, 10 Basil Sawyer Drive, Hampton, Virginia 23666.

### MAGAZINE:

- **Back to Godhead** — Begun by Srila Prabhupada in 1944, *Back to Godhead* is the magazine of the Hare Krishna movement. This bi-monthly color publication covers all aspects of the philosophy and practice of Krishna consciousness. *Available by subscription from* Back to Godhead, P.O. Box 430, Alachua, FL 32616 *or online at* <http://btg.krishna.com/>

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