

## **Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: An Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

by Steve Bohlert

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Universalist Radha-Krishnaism speaks of God in a manner philosophically and religiously opposed to the term's general understanding: therefore, we use the term God-dess.

God-dess does not mean the "Cosmic Moralist" who gives us a long list of unchanging, absolute laws, codes, rules, and regulations we must follow under threat of punishment either in this life or the next. Rather, God-dess wants us to enjoy life fully in relationship with him-her, others, and all creation. God-dess gives abundant grace and may ask us, at the time of death, why we did not enjoy life more.

Rather than an unchangeable, passionless absolute who remains aloof from and unaffected by the world, God-dess intimately relates to the world, enjoying and responding to and through all beings. God-dess dynamically experiences and adapts to creation. God-dess' existence remains ever-fresh like youth or spring.

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<sup>1</sup>This essay is indebted to *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition*, by John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin.

God-dess does not function as the "Controlling Power" who micromanages the world, deciding who lives and who dies, as well as the other details of what happens and what does not. God-dess set the processes of creation in motion. Those processes work according to natural laws, and God-dess does not suspend them to perform miracles. God-dess uses persuasion rather than coercion to carryout his-her will like when Krishna taught Arjun the *Bhagavad Gita* to encourage him to do his duty as an act of devotion.

God-dess does not sanction the status quo or will it to be as it is. A grand, evolutionary process, developing higher states of consciousness capable of greater enjoyment of experience, uses the status quo temporarily. The status quo needs to give way to new, novel ways of harmonious, conscious being. This should be obvious.

God-dess exists as male and female counterparts, emphasizing the feminine side. God-dess is Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple, engaged in an eternal love affair with each other and all beings. Devotees see the sixteenth century Bengali saint and mystic, Krishna Chaitanya, as an incarnation of Radha-Krishna in one body, the archetype of androgyny.

The past is past and cannot be repeated. The future remains open, not predetermined. The present happens now. The past

influences the present and the future. Many options for possible futures exist. We experience some freedom choosing our future. Each instant is new and unrepeatable. Only the "eternal now" exists. Therefore, we can live eternal life in relationship with God-dess now.

Radha-Krishna lovingly relate with each other and all beings. We relate with them and all beings too. Everything is interrelated and connected to all things. Yet, we maintain our individual existence. We ideally develop conscious relationships based on love and respect for all things. God-dess manifests everything. Nurture your interdependence more than your independence. The richer your relatedness, the greater your enjoyment of experience.

Our present experience includes a select, limited portion of the past. Our individual and collective experiences led us to this particular present. Similarly, the present becomes past and leads us to a new future. We influence the future by how we live in the present, the consciousness we develop, and most importantly, the loving relationship we develop with Radha-Krishna. We envision our desired future and enlist the aid of God-dess to get us there. We do this by surrendering to and living in the presence of God-dess constantly.

We experience the interrelatedness of all things as finite parts or emanations of God-dess. We relate to creation as part of God-dess, and care for it as we care for ourselves, for we depend on it, and it depends on us. Creation lives, and God-dess constitutes its Soul. God-dess expanded through the original, big bang to become all things. The One became many, but remains one.

Radha-Krishnaism teaches us to surrender our will to God-dess and act on God-dess' behalf as an agent rather than an actor. Thus, one becomes free of bondage to the past through natural detachment from the outcome of our work.

As the transcendental cupid, God-dess urges the world to new heights of enjoyment. Creation is divine sport or play, enjoying all kinds of experience. We maximize our enjoyment by considering the enjoyment of others and the environment. We co-create with God-dess, creating ourselves and our environment. Experiencing ever new, fresh possibilities enhances God-dess' enjoyment, as well as our own. God-dess exists as an essential part of all experience.

God-dess uses persuasive power, rather than control, to entice us into conscious relationship. By conscious entry into God-dess' play, we engage in ever new, enjoyable pastimes together. No one wants to experience the same old pastimes

repeatedly for eternity. We play a unique role on the cosmic stage with God-dess.

Entrance to the pastimes of Radha-Krishna opens a way of life in which we cultivate basic emotions, attitudes, and commitments favorable to Radha-Krishna. Beliefs, doctrines, and dogmas are secondary. We learn to live as the paradigmatic individuals in Radha-Krishna's spiritual abode, Braj, live. By following their examples, we attune ourselves with God-dess' promptings and our innate, pre-reflective knowing.

Our conscious beliefs and doctrines remain subordinate to what exists. Actual, objective reality imposes itself on us regardless of our conscious beliefs. Beliefs cannot change what is. Life places demands on us, and we must respond.

We often discern the truth of things better intuitively than rationally. Intuitive knowing comes from innate pre-reflective, prethematized, unconscious promptings from God-dess within. Intuitive knowing helps bring our beliefs in line with our deepest wisdom and external realities rather than living in denial, thinking our beliefs will change what exists simply by believing it to be so. We aim for psychic wholeness and consistency of action.

Beliefs matter. They influence our emotions, attitudes, and actions. As beliefs spread, they can have tremendous effects on

the world. Beliefs can be positive or negative. We benefit by embracing life affirming, empowering, and loving beliefs, while rejecting the opposite.

Beliefs come and go. Do not cling to them. Faith does not depend on belief. Beliefs are like the furniture of faith. They can be reorganized, replaced, or set aside. Some beliefs develop faith more than others. We need not believe the unbelievable, such as accepting the fantastic stories of the Puranas as literal history. We need not accept outmoded beliefs of the past such as uncritical acceptance of a guru's teachings. Development of religious thought follows an evolutionary, progressive way. As post-Enlightenment Westerners, we do not see things the same way as an uneducated Indian villager.

Since beliefs shape character, purpose, emotions, attitudes, and behavior, we benefit by examining our beliefs' appropriateness and adjusting them accordingly. Our current state represents the outcome of previous beliefs, values, purposes, emotions, and actions. We want to ensure that the present leads to a future of maximum enjoyment.

Beliefs also help decide which experiences we select and emphasize out of various potential experiences. By selecting and focusing attention on certain elements of experience, we heighten conscious awareness of them and increase their

effectiveness. For example, when we are conscious of and open to divine grace, an aspect of the universal experience of deity, we increase its benefits individually and collectively.

Most religious beliefs cannot be proven but are accepted as self-evidently true. We intuitively accept and understand far more than we can put into words. We accept a verbal expression of universal truth because it strikes a sympathetic chord and rings true in us. Reason and argument may help us accept it, but there must be that basic "Aha!"

Most religious doctrine describes prethematized, universal experience, while emphasizing selected features which differ from religion to religion. By studying the perspectives of various religions, we get a fuller picture of the universal religion.

Radha-Krishnaism comes out of a medieval Indian context which gives its particular flavor, form, and emphasis. As it meets new contexts, it must adapt. The language, images, and practices that work in the tradition's native context may not produce the same effects in a new foreign context. Therefore, I emphasize adapting Radha-Krishnaism to the current, Western context.

Before certain possibilities may be actualized, other possibilities must be actualized first. Considering a person's

history and present circumstances, he or she may or may not be able to actualize certain aspects of a belief system. We must work out our spirituality from where we stand and what is realistic for us.

While traditional Radha-Krishnaism contains universal truth, it also contains numerous practices and beliefs particularly derived from and relevant to medieval Indian culture. Some are transferable and others not. By de-emphasizing secondary, cultural externals, the lives and universal teachings of Radha-Krishna, Chaitanya, and their associates become more accessible to Westerners.

I spent three years in India in the early 1970s. I learned much and benefited greatly, in spite of the hardships of living there. Today, I see little reason for Western devotees to make the journey. The knowledge is now available in the West, and many of the traditional practices are not useful here.

Philosophy and religion are generally considered separate fields. Philosophy questions the ontological existence of God, and religious devotees unquestioningly serve a manifestation of God. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism consists of a philosophical, religious tradition with a comprehensive theology, developed over a period of more than two thousand years.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism comes under the heading of panentheism, which the *Oxford American Dictionary* defines as: "the belief or doctrine that God is greater than the universe and includes and interpenetrates it." God-dess manifests personally as Radha Krishna, impersonally as Undifferentiated Oneness, and as an immanent all-pervading presence, Cosmic Consciousness. Panentheism may be a better term for it. The more limiting and constraining our definition of God, the easier it is to disprove. God-dess is unlimited and undefinable. We do not want to worship a God that is too small and cannot stand up to intellectual scrutiny.

Our theology illumines contemporary human experience and coheres with the scientific world view. We study the nature of God-dess to harmonize our nature with God-dess' nature and attain spiritual consciousness. We enter into God-dess' personal realm of enjoyment, beyond the limiting time-space continuum. God-dess is love. The extreme love shared by Radha-Krishna and their devotees feels especially sweet and attractive. God-dess invites us to join this intimate community of lovers.

God-dess sympathetically experiences our happiness and pain out of pure love for us. As we develop love of Radha-Krishna, we sympathetically experience their bliss. This is much more intense than we experience on our own. God-dess created us for

infinitely new loving relationships. Radha-Krishna hide their awesome, majestic nature and emphasize their sweet, loving nature, so that we may relate as equals. God-dess responds to a devotee's love according to how the devotee approaches. The relationship involves give and take in both directions. It is like when a wealthy, powerful friend, who is totally unpretentious, makes us feel right at home.

Radha-Krishna and their eternal associates serve as paradigmatic individuals. Five hundred years ago, Krishna Chaitanya and his associates gave us an updated paradigm of devotional life. Buddha and Jesus are other paradigmatic individuals who incarnated in different times and places. Since our existence changed drastically in the past hundred years, paradigms need constant updating so they remain relevant.

We envision a spiritual identity in Radha-Krishna's eternal pastimes in the spiritual world. A spiritual reality exists with individuality, form, and variegation beyond space-time, birth, death, disease, and old age.

We free ourselves of false identification with the material body and its relations, and develop our spiritual identity as associates of Radha-Krishna. Rather than leaving our next life up to chance, we choose an identity, develop it, and attain it, just as one makes any major life change. I am here in Hawaii

writing this book now, because I envisioned it in Michigan several years ago. Of course, the goal should be attainable, the appropriate actions must be taken, and a certain amount of grace or good fortune thrown in.

When we identify ourselves as servants of God-dess, this spiritualizes everything and frees us from material life. We still live in the material body and world for as long as this life may last, but we transition our consciousness from this life to the next, since we know this life perishes.

While God-dess is formless, absolute, unchanging, and unmanifest, God-dess is also personal, relational, responsive, and loving. God-dess feels compassion for all beings in their happiness and distress. We model our lives on God-dess and develop compassion for all beings.

God-dess wills the good for all beings. However, God-dess uses the power of persuasion rather than coercive control to bring this about. God-dess does not micromanage creation, but permeates and supports it, while trying to persuade beings to follow the divine plan. The living entities possess free will to accept or reject God-dess' plan for our salvation, and thus, the possibility of evil exists. God-dess wants to engage in voluntary, loving relationships with us, not with automatons programed to do only the divine will.

Since God-dess uses persuasion rather than control, it behooves us to also use persuasion rather than control in our interpersonal and international relations. The *Mahabharat* provides the example of when Krishna tried mediating a peaceful settlement between the Pandavas and Kauravas regarding who rules the empire.

The Kauravas unjustly usurped the rule from the Pandavas and ruled as oppressive tyrants. Krishna, a friend of his devotees the Pandavas, reasoned with the Kauravas to reach an accommodation so the five Pandavas might have at least five small villages to rule over and make a living. The Kauravas would not give an inch, so war was the only alternative. For purposes of justice and ending suffering, sometimes military, coercive control is needed, but only after exhausting all peaceful means, and even then reluctantly. This is a useful model for today's international arena where coercive control is often the first option rather than the last. We need diplomats rather than thugs.

On a personal level, we benefit by advocating for peace and justice. We also attain the best results by using persuasion rather than coercion in interpersonal relationships. Relationships based on love naturally exclude control, domination, and violence. God-dess considers everyone dear and

showers grace on all equally. Some remain more open to grace, and therefore, appear more blessed. Just because one receives grace does not mean one's life will be easy, happy, or peaceful. Devotees often suffer greatly, as did the Pandavas. Yet they remain fixed in God-dess and their eternal, spiritual relationship. Devotees see death not as the end but the long awaited release from bondage. Preparing for death and transition to the next life during this life makes the transition easier. When we accept death, we can live fully without attachments that bind.

If we see all living entities as expansions, or parts of Radha-Krishna, and creation's purpose as expanding enjoyment of their play unlimitedly, then we can see life here as non-different than life in the spiritual world. When we model our life here on the lives of the residents of the spiritual world, our actions increase the enjoyment of Radha-Krishna. Just as we enjoy by identifying with God-dess' enjoyment, God-dess enjoys through us like parents enjoy through their children. Like any good parents, Radha-Krishna want us to enjoy ourselves. This adds to their enjoyment.

We benefit by holistically enjoying the life of body, mind, intellect, and spirit while engaged in natural devotion. We need not sacrifice one part of life for another. Live a well rounded

life progressing spiritually and materially. God-dess promotes our enjoyment. God-dess' loving, creative influence promotes what we experience as intrinsically good. Since God-dess wants all to enjoy, our enjoyment should not inhibit the enjoyment of others. We enjoy most by increasing the enjoyment of others, both now and in future.

We and God-dess experience life as an adventure because no one knows how it will turn out. Since, God-dess uses persuasion rather than control, the status quo cannot automatically claim divine sanction. Krishna did not sanction the Kauravas' corrupt rule. While outwardly not taking sides, Krishna worked through his devotees to reestablish their just rule. The outcome remains uncertain. The future is open.

As servants of the Supreme Enjoyer, we make the present and future enjoyable for all concerned. This is the primary moral question we should ask, rather than worry about negative rules or fixed principles considered immutable, moral absolutes that suck the enjoyment out of life. Determine the conditions required to maximize possibilities for present and future enjoyment and go for it.

God-dess creates unrest in the universe. Existence is process, and God-dess is the root of it. Whitehead called God the Divine Eros, just as Krishna is called the Transcendental

Cupid. Life enables God-dess and all beings to enjoy ever fresh, new, and novel experiences. This gives zest and enthusiasm for life.

Order is needed to maximize enjoyment. Life is really very ordered, but order must not be excessive and stifle intense enjoyment of experience. A fluid order, open to smooth change as part of the ongoing progress of life, is required. God-dess is the source of order. Order and novelty produce good, as far as they increase enjoyment. There must be balance. Impersonal order serves personal love.

As we progress from lower to higher states of enjoyment and order, chaos needs to reign sometimes. What was once in harmony with God-dess' will may not harmonize today. Times, circumstances, we, and God-dess all change. Therefore, we need fresh, novel ways of relating with God-dess today.

We, God-dess, and all beings participate in a great adventure into an unknown future with vast potential for intense enjoyment, as well as tragic beauty. It all started with God-dess' dream. We will see how it ends. Meanwhile, life is in the living of it, enjoying each moment consciously.

In the West, the traditional view of God is masculine. In India, there is a more balanced view. God may be seen as masculine, but with a female consort, energy, or aspect like

Radha-Krishna. Sometimes, Goddess is Supreme and has her masculine counterpart like Durga has Shiva.

Radha is Krishna's eternal consort, pleasure potency, or other half. Radha-Krishna exist as one in two or two in one. Radha's devotees consider her higher than Krishna because she controls him by her love. Krishna admits her superiority and incarnated in the same body with her as Krishna Chaitanya.

It is not important whether Radha or Krishna is higher in an ontological sense. They are one, two aspects of one divine being who do not exist separately. Radha-Krishna do not matter as much as the love they share. God-dess is love. We partake in that love, helping it expand in ever fresh ways, which increase God-dess' and our enjoyment. We relate to Radha-Krishna, God-dess as a whole. One without the other is meaningless.

Revelation is progressive. Chaitanya gave a higher revelation than the Vedas and previous understandings derived from them over the millennia. Bhaktivinode Thakur pointed out how in the golden Vedic age, they developed their relationship with God-dess in the mood of neutrality. Over the ages, the relational moods developed servant-hood, friendship, and parental affection.

Chaitanya opened the floodgates of the amorous relationship, which is highest, since it contains the elements

of the other relationships along with other sweeter tastes. Rupa Goswami explained these five moods of relating to God-dess based on his developed understanding of classical, Indian aesthetic theory. While summarizing all the relationships, Rupa focused on the amorous relationship, as do his followers.

Bhaktivinode, in a progressive, evolutionary manner, pioneered the movement of Radha-Krishnaism from India to the West. Bhaktivinode met the West as a college-educated, civil servant in nineteenth-century British colonial East India. He synthesized Western critical, analytical thought, Unitarian Christian theology, and traditional Chaitanyaism to appeal to other well-educated Bengalis.

He felt that when Radha-Krishnaism migrated to the West, as it has, it would benefit by the interaction. This book takes the interaction to a new level. As a theologically trained Westerner, I explain Radha-Krishnaism in clear theological language acceptable to well-educated Westerners. Bhaktivinode did not believe in rote repetition from one generation to the next. Each generation contributes to the evolution of thought. More complex forms evolve from simpler forms.

Radha-Krishna stepped from the parochial stage of India, where they star as the presiding deities of millions of persons for centuries, onto the world stage where they are not well

known. A theology that speaks the same language that the new, wider audience understands portrays Radha-Krishna as the living, active, universal God-dess. Bhaktivinode saw cultural externals of the faith tradition as secondary to its spiritual essence. The spiritual essence of Radha-Krishnaism may be preserved without the cultural trappings with which it was born.

Radha-Krishna provide harmony and intensity of experience leading to transcendental enjoyment unmatched in other theological systems. This life is a prelude to eternal life. We need not sacrifice enjoying this life to enjoy the next life. Recognize the source of all enjoyment and avoid that which reduces enjoyment. Radha-Krishna encourage maximum enjoyment now and eternally.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism promotes reverence for all life and sees the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. It is holistic in its approach. While we do not require vegetarianism, it remains an ideal, subject to individual dietary needs. We promote responsible use of resources so they remain for the enjoyment of others including future generations. We support a harmonious social order based on persuasion rather than control to maximize the enjoyment of all. We encourage committed relationships in which harmonious, intense love and respect is shared for maximum enjoyment of all.

We live in a unique time and must find unique ways to live with God-dess and creation. We need to take responsibility for our part in creating the future, even though things may spin out of control at times. When we differentiate our true, conscious self from the conditioned false ego identified with body, mind, family, nation, etc., we increase our ability to act responsibly in harmony with God-dess for the good of all. We attain freedom in this life. The more we realize our oneness with all things, the more we realize our unique individuality.

We model our relationship with Radha-Krishna on the eternal residents of Braj. Sources, such as the *Bhagavat Purana* and the writings of Chaitanya's followers, extensively document and develop the process of integrating oneself into the play of Radha Krishna. These writings contain exquisitely beautiful details of life in this transcendental land.

Consider God-dess' predilection for novelty, our unique identity, and in the *Bhagavad Gita* 4.11, Krishna says, "As a person surrenders to Me, I reciprocate accordingly." We cannot adequately imagine what it will be like when we attain our perfect spiritual body in relationship with Radha-Krishna. Still, devotees, practicing the natural path, imagine themselves in their perfect body, relating with Radha-Krishna throughout the day. Longing for relationship and self surrender to God-dess

attract the mercy of God-dess and enable actualization of that relationship.

Vedic religion includes many rituals. The rituals evoke certain emotions in the participants. An elaborate belief system rooted in ancient teachings and myths strengthens these emotions. It also includes a highly developed rationalization, which makes it the center of a coherent ordering of life involving thought and action toward a unified purpose.

One of the basic principles of Vedic thought is that we are not the body, mind, intellect, or false ego. We are taught to differentiate the self from these false identifications and experience ourself in relation to God-dess. The conscious self gains control of the lower nature and uses it in serving God-dess. This differentiates humans from animals, whose psyche mainly serves the body.

As we separate the conscious self from the lower self, our enjoyment moves from creaturely comforts to more spiritual joys. We need not give up creaturely comforts, but use them serving God-dess. We live abundantly in the world, but are not of it. We live as free spirits.

We give up only dysfunctions, which impede realization of our spiritual nature and true enjoyment of life. We attain and maintain balance in life. Combining harmony and intensity

creates enjoyable experiences eternally. One need not dominate the body or nature, but learn to live in harmony with all creation.

Material nature never corrupts the self. We remain qualitatively one with God-dess but quantitatively different. Our true self interest and maximum enjoyment exist with God-dess--the whole. By practice of devotion, the self awakens from material illusions and attains its true spiritual identity. Spiritual disciplines help us realize these truths for ourselves. The self may be covered over, but it remains eternally perfect.

When we open to the creative-responsive love of God-dess, we receive that which we cannot attain on our own. God-dess' grace opens the door to the eternal spiritual realm for our full enjoyment. As we surrender to God-dess' love, we give up self preoccupation and become channels of that love to all.

Persons such as Krishna, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, and Chaitanya brought new structures of existence into being. They developed new ways of being and looking at life that remain instrumental today. In the progressive, Reformed Christian tradition where I served as a pastor, I was impressed by how the church was reformed and ever reforming--in process. Through the ages, it managed to change and adapt to changing times with

reasonable success rather than remain rigid and fossilized. Some rare churches actualize this ideal more than others and provide shining examples in a sea of mediocrity. Still, the ideal model exists, and I apply it to Radha-Krishnaism.

Chaitanya's teachings are best expressed through a contemporary, devotional vision of the world. The forms and languages of the past carry less importance than a living faith connected to our needs and opportunities. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism's contemporary vision gives faith new life.

The life and teachings of Krishna Chaitanya, who incarnates the divine love of God-dess, forms the basis of this faith. Our conclusions are based on his teachings as developed by the disciplic succession. Chaitanyaism and process theology form a great combination. While learned and literate, Chaitanya left no systematized writings. His disciples, to whom he imparted his direct realizations of spiritual truth in summary form, expanded them in a systematic manner. Chaitanya lived an exemplary life showing us how to serve Radha-Krishna, while simultaneously embodying them. He paradoxically embodied God-dess and devotee.

God-dess pervades the entire creation and constitutes its guiding, ordering, designing principle, the ground of being, the cosmic Christ, the super soul, the one from which the many flows. We exist as parts or emanations of God-dess, and like a

piece of a hologram, we contain the image of the whole. God-dess within us guides and directs us through creative, persuasive love. We choose how to respond. God-dess manifests most fully in persons most open to that presence.

Devotional practices, such as hearing, chanting, remembering, worshiping, etc., open us to the presence of God-dess in our life. God-dess, the spiritual realm, the universe, heavens, hells, gods, and goddesses, all live within us in what Jung called the collective unconscious. The natural devotional path makes our relationship with God-dess conscious through constant remembrance.

As we remember our oneness with God-dess, we maximize our enjoyment by linking our consciousness with God-dess' and serving the whole. This transforms the devotee from a person of this world to an eternal resident of the spiritual world, a confidential associate of God-dess.

When we see things in this broader spiritual perspective, it puts our present life in a different perspective, harmonizing conflicting actualities and minimizing the impact of negative actualities. It transforms this life into a spiritual plane of existence, free from bondage to material illusion. God-dess most fully manifests in persons open to creative transformation.

Chaitanya reveals the divine through words and deeds. Accepting Chaitanya as the divine incarnation of Radha-Krishna and the manifestation of their love opens us to divine transformative impulses within us. The life of Chaitanya constitutes an important event, whose repeated remembrance strengthens its field of force, allowing him to live transformatively in us.

Krishna Chaitanya was human like us, as well as an incarnation of Radha Krishna. One does not deny the other. It reenforces his role as a paradigmatic individual. God-dess personally shows us by example how to be devotees. We enhance Chaitanya's transformative effect by accepting him as God-dess' revelation. We also enhance it when we deliberately place ourselves in his field of force, experiencing his presence in our life, and studying his teachings. Thus, we allow him to shape us.

Chaitanya's disciplic succession amplifies his field of force by spreading the memory of his life and teachings to ever new generations in different parts of the world. This keeps his presence alive with us today as it is passed from one devotee to another. Thus, he touches and transforms lives today.

God-dess is both immanent and transcendent. God-dess as divine love incarnate in Chaitanya remains non-different from

Radha-Krishna in the transcendental realm. Both embody equal aspects of deity. Cosmic Consciousness exists as an immanent aspect of deity.

When the future looks bleak, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a message of hope. We present a spiritual dimension of life composed of conscious knowledge and bliss. We begin the transition in this life. The more we shift our consciousness from the material view to the spiritual view, the more our life becomes spiritual. As more persons do this, the whole world becomes spiritual. The future remains open, not limited by past modes of being.

Progress is possible. It need not be linear. We can make quantum leaps. Radical change for the better comes through new ideals. We change the quality of existence. We took our individuality about as far as it can go. Now, we reclaim our interdependence on all levels. When we realize our enjoyment depends on the enjoyment of others and all are beloved children of God-dess, we work for the good of the whole, replacing egoistic selfishness with universal love.

Since the future depends on the many choices we all make, the outcome remains unknown. No matter what, all face death and the perishing nature of things in the temporal world. We long for eternal life because that is our nature. When the body dies,

the self continues on to the next life, taking the subtle body with it, and experiences its individuality in a new form.

Continually born, aging, getting sick, and dying, endlessly experiencing mixed happiness and distress does not ultimately satisfy us.

Therefore, advanced souls seek release from the cycle of birth and death. Some settle for ending individual existence, which they equate with suffering, by merging in the impersonal aspect of God-dess. Others strive to purify the self of mundane trappings and enter a personal relationship with God-dess, which is the true nature of the self. This leads to maximum eternal enjoyment. God-dess persistently uses persuasive love, beauty, and truth to attract us to perfect life.

When we begin living in union with God-dess, we develop an inner peace, which allows us to naturally detach from the ups and downs of life. It puts things in a different perspective. Artificial renunciation is not helpful. There is no one right way to live or act. We each follow our own way based on our unique individuality and life situation. We cannot effect our own salvation. By surrender to God-dess, we find our way by grace. Thus, we live with and in God-dess in this life.

We find a unique opportunity in Universalist Radha-Krishnaism's interaction with other religious, philosophical,

scientific, cultural and metaphysical worldviews. We benefit by their truths and incorporate them into our view when compatible. We need not cling to a dead past and adopt an insular, self-protective stance. We treat our predecessors with respect and build on their revelations. Yet, revelation did not end with Chaitanya or anyone else. God-dess actively reveals truth today. We open ourselves to new insights, regardless of their source, and adjust to them like scientists of the spirit. God-dess, as creative transformation, calls us to a new vision of Radha-Krishna as universal, divine love and offers ever fresh opportunities to live fully and abundantly, enjoying this life and the next harmoniously.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism provides solutions to the problems of contemporary life, individually and collectively. We recognize the urgency of the situation and the radical shifts that will occur in coming decades, one way or another. The future of humanity and the planet depend on the choices we make. Are they life affirming or life denying?

God-dess supports fullness and abundance of life. Yet, the forces of death and destruction remain strong. We need to choose where we stand and act accordingly. No safe middle ground exists. By not choosing, we also choose. Not to act is to act. We carry responsibility for our part. God-dess acts through us.