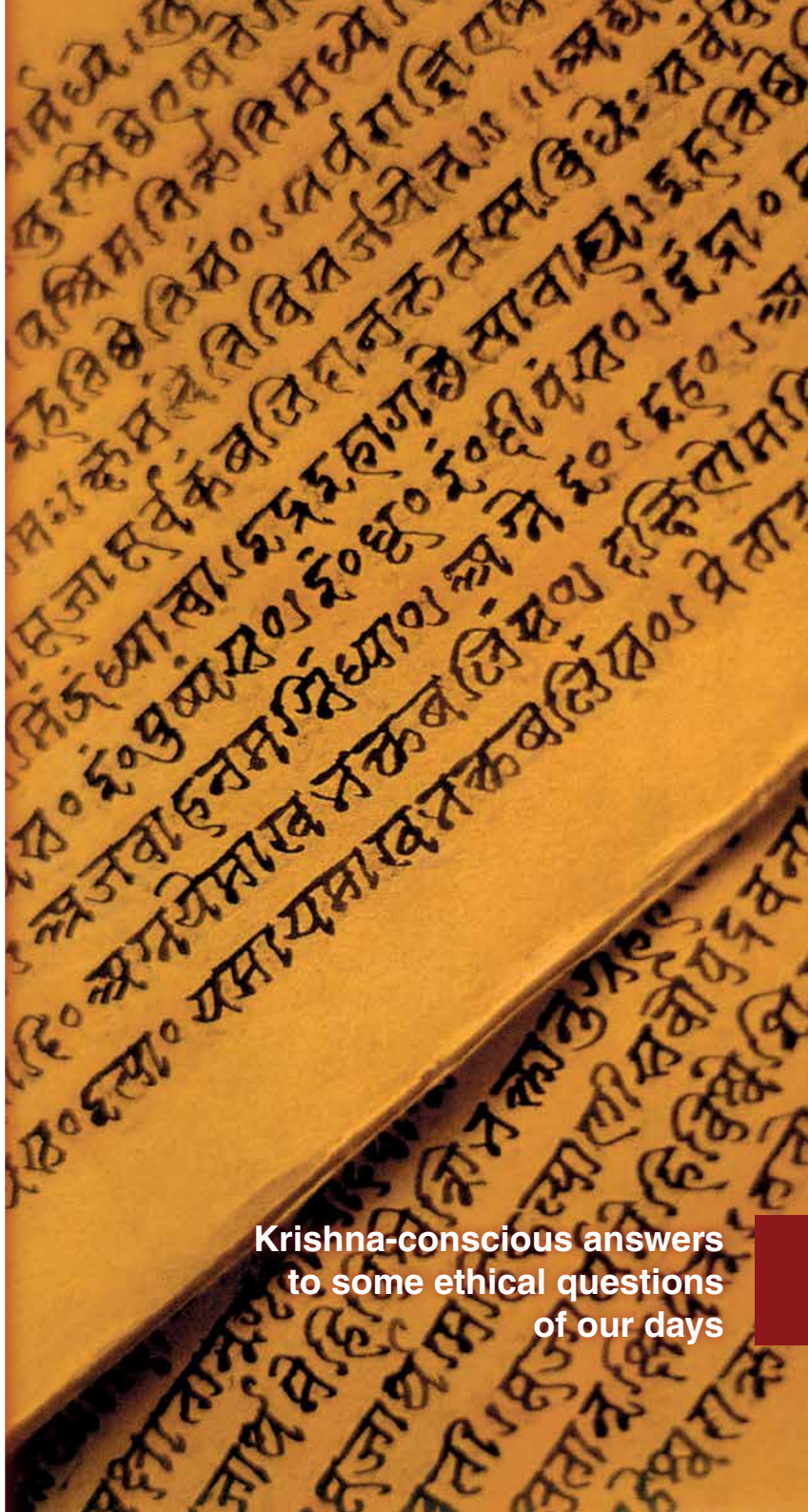




International Society
for Krishna-consciousness



Krishna-conscious answers
to some ethical questions
of our days



His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founding Ācārya of International Society for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness

His Divine Grace, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977) introduced the ancient tradition of Gaudiya-Vaisnavism into the West under the name of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. In 1966 he founded the International Society for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. Under his leadership, the organisation grew into a worldwide mission in a mere ten years, with temples, ashramas, schools, farming communities. His writings constitute a whole library of Vedic philosophy, religion, literature and culture.

हरि राम
राम राम

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In our constantly changing world, many issues arise on which Vedic scriptures give no direct guidance. At the same time, the basic principles of Vedic philosophy and culture provide a firm ground for the Kṛṣṇa-conscious to respond to such challenges. In the following, we summarise the position of the Hungarian Society for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness on some major social and bioethical issues.

The rights of living beings

One of the ethical dilemmas of modern society is what rights animals have, what the human race is allowed to do to them and what are beyond ethical limits. Because of the attitudes of the consumer society, killing animals for feeding and otherwise serving human beings is not considered a problem. On the basis of Vaisnava philosophy, however, we are aware that animals, plants and human beings are living beings of the same quality, only residing in different bodies, the latter determining the level of consciousness. Human beings bear responsibility for living beings on a lower level of consciousness, therefore they cannot cause pain to them nor are they allowed to kill them indiscriminately. In order to feed the society, only the killing of vegetables is allowed and only to the extent absolutely necessary. Any other kinds of violence is against God's laws and incur karmic reactions.



Environment, global warming

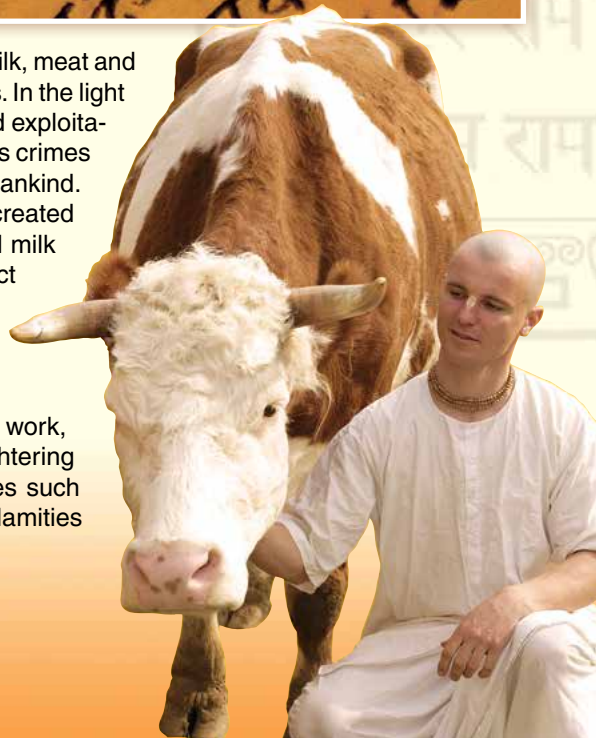


There is a high degree of consensus among scientists that a number of environmental problems — including global climate change — are caused by the Western way of production and consumption, by greed and excessive waste. Difficulties can be greatly mitigated if we avoid products the production of which or themselves are detrimental to the environment. Vegetarian diet can be a significant step towards a solution as well as the operation of such self-sustaining communities as Krishna-Valley in Hungary. The devastation caused by wasteful consumption can best be mitigated if the people

get to know the spiritual culture and experience spiritual satisfaction that comes from non-material sources.

Cow Protection

In our times, cattle are bred for their milk, meat and hide and get killed at slaughterhouses. In the light of the Vedic philosophy, this cruel and exploitative practice is one of the most serious crimes of modern society which will ruin humankind. Cows, as most useful animals, were created by Kṛṣṇa to provide us with milk and milk products, therefore we have to respect them as our mothers. Bulls can, in turn, help people's lives with work, therefore they should be respected as the fathers of society. Humankind is empowered to use their milk and work, not to kill them. The insensible slaughtering of cows entails carmic consequences such as wars, famine and other serious calamities for humanity.



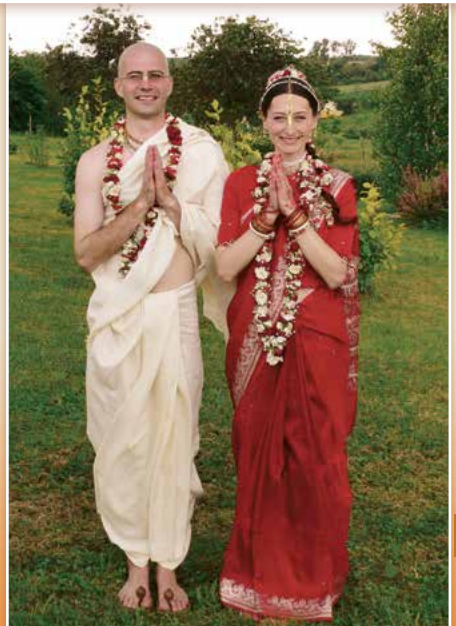
Abortion



According to Vedic scriptures, abortion counts as heinous sin, murder. The spirit soul enters the body at conception, therefore the destruction of the embryo is tantamount to killing a helpless human being. Killing a foetus has serious karmic consequences for those participating in the process. Any consideration otherwise can only be allowed in such, very rare medical cases when the pregnancy directly threatens the life of the mother or that of both the mother and the child. The direct goal should never be taking the life of the foetus. In such individual cases the decision should be made based on medical and ethical considerations. At the same time, the mother has the right to risk her own life to save and bear the child.

Contraception

The God-given purpose of sexuality is to beget children. The best method of family planning and contraception is when people only have sex within the wedlock and for the purpose of begetting children. We do not agree to the application of mechanical and chemical contraception methods, especially those which involve the destruction of conceived embryos. Chemical contraceptives involve a crude intervention in the fine operation of the organism and often result in infertility after their period of application. Therefore we consider their use as unethical and unacceptable.





Euthanasia

Life is caused by the presence of the spirit soul in the body. „Evicting” the spirit soul from the body is unacceptable as we did not create the body, therefore we have no right to destroy it, neither our own, nor that of someone else. The pains of the dying may, of course, be mitigated, but preferably in a way that does not make him unconscious so that he can remember God throughout. According to Vedic philosophy, the thoughts we entertain at the time of death determine the conditions of our next birth. Conversely, in the case of a terminally ill person, if he is clearly in the last phase, we consider mechanical attempts to prolong his life unnecessary. Instead, we should try to provide conditions conducive for the person to leave in dignity and preferably God-consciously. Therefore our basic principle is this: if someone can clearly live for some more time, his life should not be taken away, however, if he is clearly about to die, no artificial techniques should be applied to postpone natural death.

Transplantation

It is a contemporary question of bioethics whether the individual should consent for any of his organs to be used for transplantation after his biological death. In general, the Krishna-conscious believers do not have objections to transplantation. At the same time, based on the eternal message of Vaisnava scriptures, whether someone is healthy or is carrying some else's organ in his body during this bodily life, it is advisable that he consider the understanding and service rendered to the Absolute Truth [God] as his first and foremost goal. Krishna-conscious believers only agree to donate their organs to be transplanted into the body of someone else if that person intends to devote his life to spiritual development.

Origin of Life

According to the prevailing ideas these days, life on Earth emerged from anorganic chemicals and the species evolved spontaneously during a long time. These are but unproven theories based on pre-conceptions of materialistic philosophy. Even in scientific circles, alternative opinion is increasingly prevalent and there is a strong body of opinion refuting Darwinian ideas. According to Vedic scriptures, life on Earth and on other planets emerged through a complex process of creation. This process is initiated by Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead and keeps repeating with the cyclical re-creation of the universes.

Scientific world view

We cannot agree with the view that the world was created by an accidental explosion void of consciousness, leading to the emergence of the universe and living beings through a series of unguided processes. We consider such ideas to be the formulation of materialistic philosophy and not science. We are convinced that the world is a product of creation by a conscious will and, by His omnipotence and omniscience, God is present in the workings of the world.



Genetic engineering

In our view, the material world and the beings living in it appeared as a result of God's creation. Humankind should strive to learn the laws of nature given by God and learn to live with them rather than try to change natural endowments by laboratory methods like cloning, genetic engineering etc. To strike a balance of rational limits of interfering with nature one should think and live in a God-conscious way. Artificial methods alone will not bring about the perfection

of agriculture and the resolution of the problems of human civilisation — that requires a lifestyle which satisfies the Supreme Lord.



Suicide



Everything in the universe is created and owned by God, including living beings. The spirit soul of the human being is part and parcel of the transcendental body of God, whereas his body is an element of the material world created by Him. Just as someone may not take the life of another person, it is not permitted for one to take his own life because by committing suicide he trespasses the Lord's property and contravenes His will. Suicide has serious karmic consequences: as the perpetrator rejects the valuable human

body, he will probably be denied it in his next life and will be condemned to a life in a ghost body, subjected to serious sufferings.

Death Penalty

According to Vaisnava philosophy, all sinful deeds incur a reaction of the same measure and kind to the perpetrator. If someone has taken someone else's life, his life will be taken in a similar way either in the same life or in a future life. The „death sentence” passed according to the law of karma cannot be avoided. The traditional Vaisnava society did apply the death sentence for serious crimes, however, most of the modern states reject it on the basis that no one has the right to take someone else's life. Still, it would be a primary duty of the state to enforce God's laws and to achieve this, apply even the death penalty in appropriate cases.



Women's Liberation

We are all eternal spirit souls, our present bodily and sexual identity is not part of our eternal self. From a spiritual point of view, men and women are completely equal. Still, the psyche of man and woman work in different ways, therefore, ideally, their social role should be in line with their constitution. In the Varnasrama society which we regard as ideal, the traditional role of the man is to look after their family materially, while the women look after the house and children. Employment of the woman is acceptable so far as the employment does not overly interfere with fulfilling her primary role focusing on the family.

Homosexuality

The relationship between same sex people is outside the scope of relationships approved by Vedic scriptures. We do not support the sanctioning of the cohabitation of homosexual couples by the state or their marriage, or that such couples adopt children. Just as all kinds of material desires, the internal urge to enter into a homosexual relationship can also be contained even if someone was born with this inclination. Controlling such desires can best be achieved by acquiring Vedic knowledge and by executing an intensive spiritual practice, one rekindles his love towards God which can put an end to all mundane yearning.

Alcohol and Drugs

All forms of self-poisoning or artificial stimulation is detrimental to the human brain and spirit and hinders the achievement of the ultimate goal of life, acquiring knowledge about God and rekindling our love for Him. Besides, smoking, alcohol and drugs cause countless disruptions in society, therefore their consumption should be restricted if only to foster social peace. As they, together with coffee, are considered useless and impure things, the Vedic scriptures recommend to avoid them completely. Feeling „cool” and „free” through the use of these substances is illusory. Real happiness can be achieved by executing spiritual practices, especially chanting the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra.



Social inequalities, poverty

It is not necessary that people live in poverty: according to the scriptures, God has created enough of everything that is needed for the support of humankind, for a simple, vegetarian lifestyle. At the same time, people do not have to have the same endowments as their karma at birth are widely different due to their different pious and sinful deeds in previous lives. For this reason, their physical circumstances, individual abilities and their social status are widely different. Social inequalities are therefore natural and the Vedic system of Varnasrama adequately handles these differences. As the Varnasrama system focuses on the elevation of the spiritual nature of the individuals as against the betterment of their material conditions, the members of the society can handle these inequalities. Modern societies, however, are not based on God's laws but on the political philosophy of liberal democracy which regards all people equal. Failing to make a distinction between body and spirit soul, and being inclined to emphasize the predominance of the bodily, material aspect, it cannot properly grasp the existing social differences, arriving at the conclusion that, in the final analysis, all inequalities are unfair and should be eradicated. Even though the real cause of poverty is the neglect of God's laws, still, the states and affluent people should strive to reduce poverty in the name of social solidarity and compassion.

Racism, neo-Nazi movements

The person is not identical with his body — he is immortal soul and cannot be judged or rejected on the basis of a bodily trait or being a member of a certain group. Furthermore, being God's children, all human beings are equal and have the same rights to use God's creation as any other person. Human excellence is not based on bodily differences or bloodlines but is a result of perseverance, an endeavour to acquire knowledge and erudition, therefore it cannot be expropriated by any group of people, being the birthright and opportunity of all people. Therefore we reject all ideologies and movements that cannot tolerate the differences among people and profess the supremacy of one group of humans over others and who do not refrain from stigmatising or oppressing others on the basis of race.

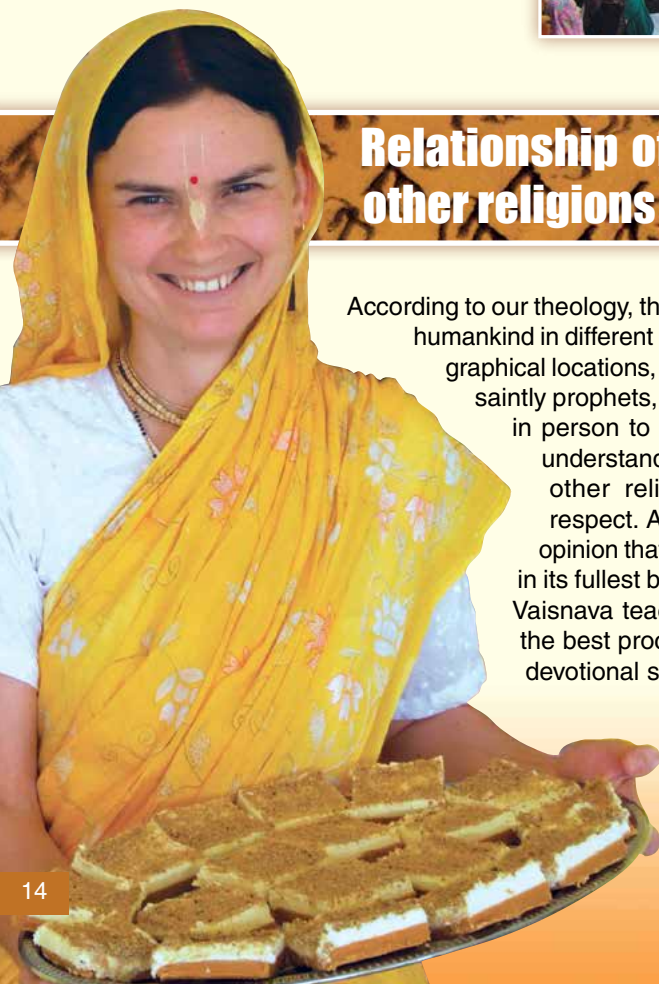
Religion and violence

We condemn the use of any religion to forcibly proselytise or to justify terrorism. We believe such misuse is against the spirit of all religions. Violence may only be justified to protect civilians, to ensure their bodily security and spiritual advancement. We profess religious tolerance as a basic principle following from our scriptures and reject intolerance and ensuing violence.

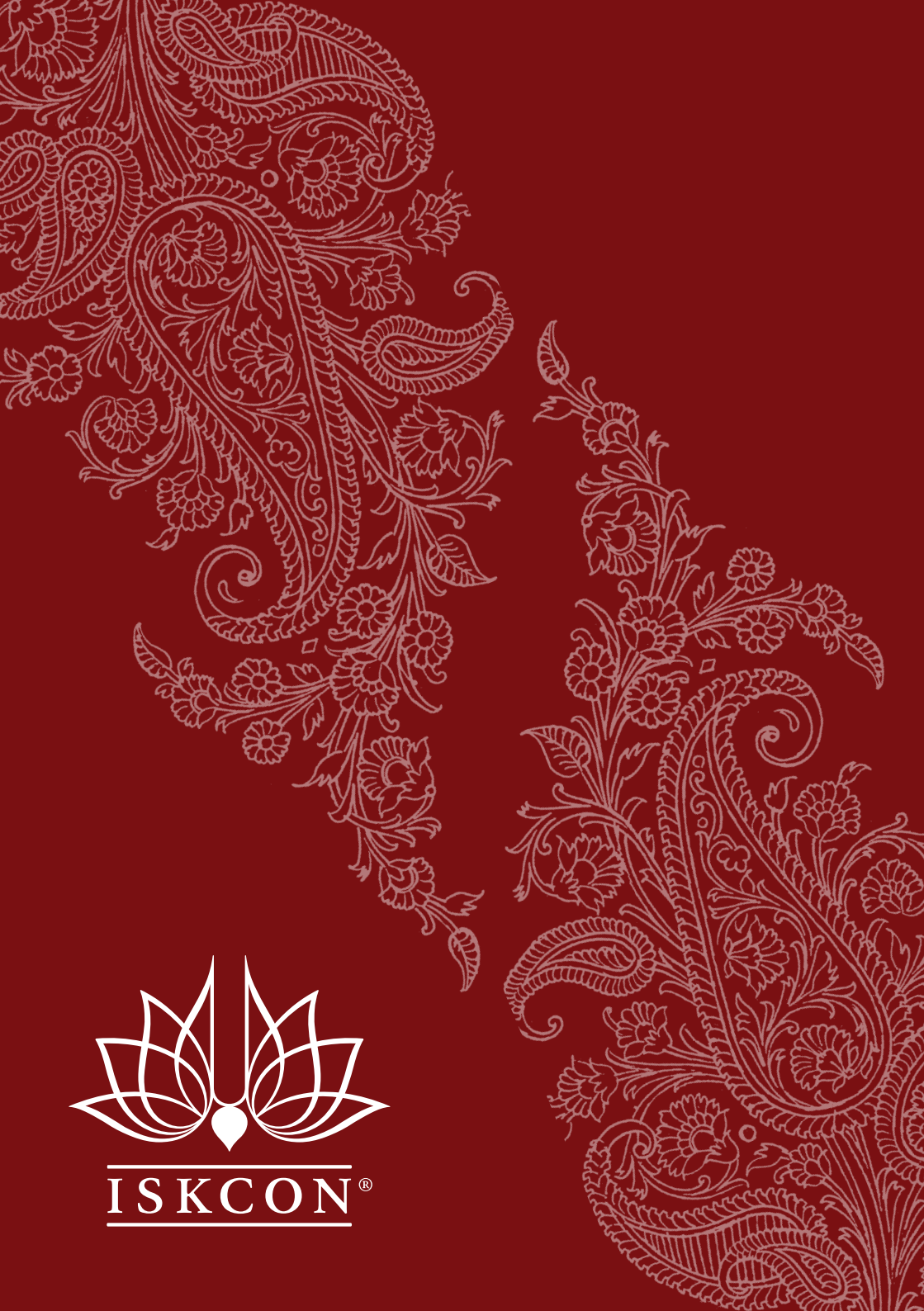


Relationship of Krishna-faith to other religions

According to our theology, the same Supreme God spoke to humankind in different historical times, at different geographical locations, through different scriptures and saintly prophets, and He occasionally descends in person to elevate people spiritually. This understanding demands that we approach other religions with appreciation and respect. At the same time, we are of the opinion that the Absolute Truth is described in its fullest by Vedic scriptures and Gaudiya Vaisnava teachers, and these writings offer the best process for practicing unmotivated devotional service offered to God, which is the fastest way to attain Him.







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