

SEX AND DEATH IN TWO SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE:

**“The expense of spirit in a waste of shame” (129) and
“Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth” (146)**

By Ravindra Svarupa dasa

I have been asked to choose as my topic a work in English literature that contains some Krishna conscious theme or philosophy. Since there's very little Krishna consciousness in English literature (although there are a lot of examples of the absence of it), I was at first a little daunted. But I turned up a few needles in the haystack. I want to talk about two sonnets by William Shakespeare. I think there's things in these two poems we can study with spiritual profit.

You may be surprised to find out that a surprising amount of what comprises some of the basic elements of Krishna consciousness could be found in the prevailing philosophy in Europe up until about the sixteenth century, until the period we call the Renaissance. Krishna conscious people will understand these two sonnets immediately once we get through some of the problems with old-fashioned language and other difficulties. Most people who have bought into the twentieth century lock, stock and barrel have no real empathy for or understanding of these poems of Shakespeare, because the view that these poems present is no longer in fashion, and hasn't been in fashion for about 500 years.

Five hundred years ago, Lord Caitanya appeared and began the Bhakti Renaissance — the renaissance of devotion. About the same time, Europe was undergoing another kind of Renaissance. I was brought up to think of this Renaissance, which began in Italy and the Netherlands and then spread all over Europe, as being a rebirth. “Renaissance” means literally “rebirth.” It was during this period that science was born and that modern material ambitions and aspirations—the spirit of taking the world and making of it what we want—arose. Until that time, Western Europe had been sunk in a religious tradition, marked by ignorance and superstition, but in the Renaissance, people woke up to the material world and began to explore with all their senses and try to understand and control it. So I always thought the Renaissance was a good thing. It was pointed out to me as a good thing. Then in college I began to realize that the problem of the modern world was the problem of values, the problem of nihilism. Why is there any reason to live? Is there any purpose for human life? Are there any truths upon which we can base human civilization? And the answer from every corner was either “No” or “Why are you asking questions like that? What do you need to know for?” So for a long time, humanity was in some kind of void and didn't have a grip on meaning, purpose, or direction for human life. If anybody came up with a theory or an idea, that was all right for them, but not for somebody else. How do I know

what's right for me? One changes from day to day, and there's just no grounding. So this became a problem I was wanted to figure out.

I majored as an undergraduate in philosophy, and I discovered that philosophy offered no way out. At least that's how it was taught to me. The best person I knew in the philosophy department told me that success in philosophy is being clear about what you're confused about. I found it disappointing. Generally, I was told not to ask certain kinds of questions. Certain questions were just forbidden. I remember the very first philosophy course I ever took. There were a whole bunch of us—freshmen and sophomores—in a class on the introduction to philosophy. The instructor, a graduate student from England, said, "What is philosophy?" And like idiots, we raised our hands and volunteered answers. So I said, "Philosophy means asking questions like, 'Who am I?' 'Where do I come from?' 'Where am I going?'" The guy kind of smirked and wrote it on the board. Some other people offered a few other answers, and he wrote them on the board. Then he turned around, "Ok, what is philosophy? 'Who am I, where have I come from, where am I going?'" He said, "Oh yes, there's only one person in this department who asks questions like that, and I reply: My name is Ken Young, I am coming from College Hall, and I am going to Bennet Hall," and he just struck a line through it. So much for those questions. Forbidden questions.

Anyway, those questions didn't go away. I decided after I finished with a degree in philosophy that I was going to study English literature. I went to the University of Massachusetts and spent a year studying English literature. What I found out from studying English literature was very interesting.

The first thing I found out is that at least in English literature, real problems were being discussed. The problem was nobody could propose any solutions, because it's just literature. But at least the real problems were being discussed. I started to read English writings from the nineteenth century, and I discovered that all the problems of the modern world that are discussed today, at the end of the twentieth century, were already being discussed, recognized, and analyzed by people in the last century. The same problem of values, the same problem of how people should live, how we can have a human society were being addressed. A huge protest against industrialization, against the destruction of the old style of human life was also going on in the nineteenth century. I was amazed. These problems that everybody's facing today were already recognized over a century ago. And still, nothing had happened. Still nothing has happened.

One of things that I learned was a whole different view of the so-called Renaissance. This primarily came from a nineteenth century British writer and social critic named John Ruskin, who called the Renaissance "a second fall." This loss of faith, this destruction of religious traditions — and, subsequently, the rise of science and, after that, the rise of industrialization—was a tragedy for humanity. Ruskin wrote a book about Gothic art called *The Nature of Gothic*. It did not change things. All it did was start the nineteenth century Gothic revival. Now we have all these pseudo-Gothic buildings all over the place. But Ruskin's idea was that Gothic cathedrals were made by men doing their own work. They weren't

turned out by machines; they were created by communities. So some of the ideas that are just coming up, the latest New Age ideas, are all old stuff; they've been around for a long time.

Then I discovered that Shakespeare was also dealing with the same problem. William Shakespeare was a Renaissance man. That was the time in which he flourished. He died in 1616. But actually, Shakespeare did not like the Renaissance. Shakespeare was actually very, very conservative and quite unappreciative of the Renaissance ideals that were coming up. In fact, in Shakespeare's plays, the philosophy of the villains is all Renaissance philosophy. That's why people today have a hard time understanding a lot of Shakespeare, because they believe in what all the villains say. For example, in *Othello*, the villain is Iago. At one point in the play, Iago is talking to a character named Roderigo. Iago wants Roderigo to do something, and Roderigo says,

*What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond,
but it is not in my virtue to amend it.*

When Roderigo uses the word "virtue," he means "nature." Roderigo is saying that it is not in his nature to change. And Iago says,

*Virtue! A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.
Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners...*

He is saying that you can make yourself into anything you want to be. To think that you have a certain nature, or a certain character, is wrong; you can just turn yourself into anything that you want. This is Renaissance philosophy.

In Krishna consciousness, we understand that we do best to find our own nature and to serve Krishna according to that nature. That's also medieval philosophy — everybody has their place, they fulfill their duty in God's scheme of things, and they don't worry about it. But Iago is saying, "No, make yourself into whatever you want to be. Don't think you can't do this or can't do that." That's the whole self-help movement; all that stuff is right there in Iago's speech. So Shakespeare was not very happy with the Renaissance worldview.

In Shakespeare's view, God is gone from the world of the Renaissance, and the whole thing crashes; this is exactly what the Renaissance is about. So I saw this in Shakespeare, and I became very, very fond of Shakespeare. Then I decided to study religion.

To make a long story short, I ended up being a devotee of Krishna. And then I picked up *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and began to realize how much Krishna consciousness was there in Shakespeare. There's a lot that's not Krishna conscious, too. Shakespeare is not by any means a pure devotee, but at least he was reflecting and trying in some ways to defend much more of a God-centered civilization than we have today.

So we will look at two of Shakespeare's sonnets. What they express was taken almost without question to be a normal part of life in the Middle Ages. Today, the ideas contained in these sonnets seem very strange. If we are successful in Krishna consciousness, we will recreate a medieval condition.

I was just reading a book by a medieval historian who, to my understanding, is predicting a return of the Middle Ages, for many reasons. By the way, the Middle Ages are coming much back in fashion. For example, many kids grew up reading J. J. R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis (Tolkien wrote *Lord of the Rings* cycle). They're all medieval stories recast in a different form. You get a big dose of medieval stuff in there. So it's coming back.

In 1974, during the first energy crisis, for the first time it occurred to people that there might be a limit to growth, that the earth might be finite, and that because of finite resources, growth has to be limited. There was a group of thinkers who called themselves *The Club of Rome*; they published a book about limited growth. I remember seeing an attack on that book in the *New York Times*. Essentially, the *Times* article said, "If there are limits to growth, then it will be medieval civilization all over again. As far as economics and the standard of living go, the world will be economically stagnate. You'll be born in a certain place and you'll stay there the rest of your life. Who wants that?" So they saw that as being one consequence of limited growth — there will be medieval civilization all over again, because modern civilization is based on growth and increase. More, more, more, don't stay in your place, don't take what's yours as that which is given, but increase. This is like the Renaissance ideal, but today, people are again talking about limits to growth; this time the conversation concerns not only natural resources but also the pollution of the earth is considered to be a limit to growth.

What are people going to do if they find themselves trapped economically? Well, it's not the fate worse than death. Actually, everybody wants to increase. Everybody wants to say that, somehow or other, "this year I was better than I was last year. You have to have some notion of progress somewhere. You have to have something to live for. You want to see your children better off than you. I think that's natural. But the natural place for that impetus is in spiritual life, and because that impetus has been transferred into the material world and you're trying to get that out of matter, you're running against a brick wall. In medieval civilization there was growth. Everybody's aspiration was to get out of the material world and to go to the kingdom of God. Now we want to make the kingdom of God on Earth, and in the process, we're turning the Earth into hell. That's what's happened. So the Middle Ages are going to come back one way or another. If people don't accept it voluntarily, it's going to be crammed down their throats. Look at what's happening. The industrial West has one fourth of the world's population and about three fourths of all the energy and natural resources. One fourth of the people are using three fourths of the resources. Now, the other three fourths are busy industrializing and wanting to come to the same standard as the one fourth. So do the mathematics. Not everybody's going to be able to make it; there's only another one quarter of resources available. Something is going to happen. What? What's

going to happen? People will actually be forced to come to terms with the fact that the Renaissance vision of unlimited growth and aspiration toward higher and higher material things is going to come to an end.

Since we're in the Middle Ages, we'll give you some Shakespeare. Shakespeare's sonnets are very, very interesting. There's about 154 of them, and they seem to be autobiographical. Nobody knows how long a span of time they lasted. Of course, nobody really knows much about Shakespeare; there's still a debate going on about whether Shakespeare or Stratford was really the author of this literature, or somebody else. But the sonnets seem to be autobiographical, and in fact, there's a progression in them.

Now, this notion that there is a progression to the sonnets has been denied by some critics; some people think they're very random. When I was at the University of Massachusetts, I was writing a masters thesis on these sonnets; I say there is a progression. That progression is about going to higher and higher levels of spiritual realization. If the sonnets have one theme running through all of them, it is immortality.

The first group of poems are addressed to a young man, who is being told, "You're very young, you're handsome, you're a good-looking, you're full of energy. Now, you shouldn't let that go to waste. Make yourself immortal by begetting children." It sounds almost as if Shakespeare had been paid by somebody to write these poems to convince this guy to get married and have children. So the very first group of sonnets say that you can't let yourself be conquered by time and that you should therefore propagate.

The next group of sonnets are also addressed to a young man, maybe the same young man. This group of sonnets talks about time and destruction: "Nothing can outlast time. Time destroys everything. It makes those who are young and beautiful old. It tears down continents. It wrecks everything. But because I am writing about you in this verse, you'll live forever." Critics call this the eternizing theme. This will save you from time and from death. For example, here is a famous sonnet:

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
What more lovely and temperate;
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
and summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade...*

He's saying you're better than regular summer because your summer is eternal; it will not fade.

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

meaning that which belongs to you, the beauty that you own.

*Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

You see, this is another way to conquer death — through poetry. Then this claim at the end — *So long as men can live and breathe, this gives life* — this gets weaker, a little less confident.

Another stage in the sonnets is marked by another poem in which he says that it's love itself that transcends time:

*Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bended sickles' compass come*

In other words, everything else will be decayed, but love itself will not change, even though everything else changes.

Then the subject of the sonnet shifts. He starts writing about a relationship with a woman, called the Dark Lady of the sonnet. He says,

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

There was a convention, you know, "Her eyes are like the sun; her hair is blonde like gold..." But in this sonnet, she's dark, she has black eyes, black hair. This relationship apparently was a very heavy relationship and extremely full of lust and degradation of some kind for the poet — at least that's the way he presents it in his poems. And it leads him to the point of rejecting the material world all together. That's the sequence that you see.

I now want to look at sonnet #129. This is in the middle of these sonnets to the Dark Lady. In these sonnets, he praises her, and at the same time, he starts to condemn his lust. Sonnet 129 is one of the first sonnets in which this comes out.

A sonnet has fourteen lines, and there's a rhyming pattern. The sonnet consists of three groups of four lines each, and then there's a final two lines — a couplet — which in this sonnet ends in *well* and *hell*. So this is called Shakespearean sonnet. Generally there's the meter, there's five strong beats to a line.

*The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action: and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,*

*Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad.
Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have extreme;
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind a dream.
All this, the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.*

The first line is very tricky. Most of the editors don't really say what it means. I don't know whether it's because of some Victorian reticence or whether they don't understand it, because it's a little odd.

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action.

So this is about lust. The editors say it means that lust, when put into action, spins the spirit in a shameful waste. But there's a pun here, a very serious pun, and maybe a little delicate. To expend also means to expel or to discharge, and spirit here refers to seminal fluid. Spirit is fluid, it has the seeds of living entities in it, so *expense of spirit* is discharge of semen. Maybe the editors don't want to say this. So what he's talking about is just crude, gross, sex: *the expense of spirit in a waste of shame*. It's not just a shameful waste; think of a wasteland that's just made of shameful things, like a toxic dump of sin.

Lust is a kind of a desire; *in action* refers to lust in its accomplishing of its purpose. That is, as we would say, illicit sex. So this is a poem against illicit sex. People in the modern world will not understand this since they do not understand the concept of illicit sex, but this is what Shakespeare is describing, *the expense of spirit*.

There's a sense of spiritual cost. This unnecessary expenditure of semen also has its toll on your spiritual life, and it's a shameful waste. It puts you in a wasteland, or a desolation, or a desert of shame; it's lust in action. And only *till in action*, that is to say, until lust has reached its end and the deed is done, is lust is perjured. That is to say, you lie about it. That's when men say to women, "No, no, trust me, trust me." It's perjured; you deny that's what you're really after. Perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude (rude here means primitive, unrefined, unfinished. Extreme means violent.) cruel, and not to trust. So this is just his characterization of lust as it is experienced. I think the nature of lust is still the same today. Untruthful, murderous... because you know that quite often (and this is what it says in the *Bhagavatam*), when lust is unsatisfied or thwarted, then immediately there's anger. So lust involves all of those things. So the first four lines form a complete thought.

Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight.

As soon as you enjoy lust, then immediately you hate it. You hate yourself, or you hate the person you had sex with, or whatever.

Past reason hunted;

Sex is sought past reason. People who are otherwise normally sane, when conducted by lust, hunt like crazy, and nothing can stop them.

*and no sooner had,
Past reason hated,*

And then he makes a comparison:

*as a swallowed bait,
on purpose laid to make the taker mad.*

Just like rat poison—when you take it, you go crazy; it's just like that. Guaranteed to make you insane. He continues with this word "mad" (meaning insane):

Mad in pursuit and in possession so;

When you're trying to get it, it's crazy, and when you have it, it's crazy (*and in possession so*). So trying to get it — mad. And having it — mad. So then,

Had, having, and in quest to have extreme;

Extreme here means violent. Had — in the past. Having — in the present. In the quest to have — in the future. Extreme. It leads to violence.

A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;

Proof means experience. When you prove something, there's an experience that shows it's true. An actual experience — well, okay, it feels good. A bliss in proof, and proved (that is, once it's been experienced), a very woe. Nothing but trouble comes out of it.

Before, a joy proposed;

That is, when it's in the future, oh, it's like heaven's coming: "I've gotta date with an angel," and you know things are going to happen.

behind a dream.

It's gone, and what do I have left to show for it? So this is Shakespeare's characterization of lust., He ends with this couplet:

All this, the world well knows;

So he says everybody knows this.

*yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.*

So this is saying this is everybody's experience, everybody knows it, but still this is going on and on and on. So I think Krishna conscious devotees will understand this poem and can relate to it, because devotees of Krishna consciousness who are not free from lust at least recognize that lust is the enemy. Lust, as Krishna says, is one of the three gates that leads to hell. When Arjuna asked Krishna, "What is it that makes a man commit sinful activities even if he knows better?" What does Krishna say? "It is lust only, Arjuna, born with contact of the mode of passion, which is the all devouring sinful enemy of the world." So here Shakespeare says, "All this the world well knows..." Not any more.

This is a very unfashionable view. It's considered to be even mentally unhealthy to have this kind of view. It's thought that if we don't satisfy our lust, then actually that will lead to mental problems. There used to be a slogan during the 60's, "Make love, not war." The idea was that there was war because people's lust was unsatisfied, and therefore, because their lust was unsatisfied, they were angry all the time, and therefore shot off bombs and guns and everything like that. And if people would just have enough sex, then there would be peace on Earth. There's a notion that there's a certain amount of lust in everybody. It's kind of a boiler metaphor. There's a fire in a boiler in a confined space, and if you don't let the steam out, it's going to blow up. So because of sexual frustration, we have all these hang-ups in society, and if everyone can just become fully sexually satisfied, then so many social problems will go away. So the solution to the problem is complete sexual satisfaction for everybody.

There are several problems with this. One is that complete sexual satisfaction is simply not available. Certainly after some sexual satisfaction, the desire goes away for a little while, but then it comes back stronger and stronger and stronger. In fact, people who embark on careers of simply finding sexual satisfaction find themselves getting further and further and further into stranger and stranger things. It just grows and grows; it simply doesn't go away. That's what happens. So actually, you'll see that as lust increases, violence will increase, because, as Krishna says, lust burns like fire and is never satisfied. It cannot be satisfied. It will increase, and it will not be satisfied. Because it is never satisfied, people keep taking birth again and again in the material world. Then you think, What's the alternative? If we just repress, that will also not work. And people

think that our spiritual solution to the problem is repression of lust, or suppression, as if we are saying, "Just keep it down. Keep it under cover." But Prabhupada explains where lust comes from, where it originates. The origin of everything is in the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and actually, in its original form, lust is Krishna *prema*. Every spirit soul has love for Krishna. When the soul, with this Krishna *prema*, or love for Krishna, turns away from Krishna and comes to the material world, that love for Krishna comes into the contact with the mode of passion and turns into lust. That's where it comes from.

Prabhupada uses the example of curdling milk. If you take milk and bring it into contact with an acidic substance, it will curdle. That curd is a transformation of milk. So lust is actually a transformation of love for Krishna. The process of Krishna consciousness is actually to take this lust and turn it back into what it originally is, which is called Krishna *prema*, or love of Krishna. If this process is actually successful, then lust is not suppressed or repressed, it's not sitting around bothering you; it's gone; it's become Krishna *prema*. In psychological literature, this is called sublimation. Like just what we see here in Shakespeare's sonnets — the idea is that you start with sex and you go to something higher and higher, something ideal, like art. You sublimate your desires, you go to something higher.

The materialistic position is that this sublimation is a little unnatural. Freud approved of lust; he saw that without it there wouldn't be anything like civilization. He and people like him were thinking, "You're taking something that's originally lust and you're rechanneling it into something else." Freud argued that when you do that, you lose intensity. For example, let us consider lust as being a desire for immortality. This is a fact; lust is a kind of religion. As Shakespeare says, people beget children in order to make little replicas of themselves. These replicas can then go on forever and ever; I may be old, but there's some little kid who looks just like me, and he's young and fresh, and so I get a sense of immortality. People turn to sex to escape death. This is reflected in Shakespeare's eternizing theme. Is anybody really saved from time and death? Where's the young man whom Shakespeare was immortalizing? Where's Shakespeare? Both of them are a handful of dust in Westminster Abbey; neither he nor the young man he wrote about is alive. Every year people read Shakespeare, but it doesn't purchase immortality.

Freud says you can sublimate your desires — you can get into art or mathematics or some other thing. These things are not as gross; they last longer. The pleasures that you derive from art and literature last longer, but they lose an intensity. There's nothing quite as intense as the satisfaction of gross animal appetites. When people want intensity, it's very, very gross. When people are listening to Bach cantatas, they may feel some feelings, but the experience doesn't have the intensity of a rape or something.

Krishna consciousness says that sublimated desires are actually the original form. Here's where the materialists are wrong. Lust originally is sublimated. This Krishna *prema* is where it actually belongs. The perverted form, the unnatural form, is lust. When we're sublimating it, or engaging our desires in Krishna's

service, those desires become purified. We're not trying to wipe out our desires; they can't be wiped out, but they're becoming purified. When they become purified, they're fulfilled. They're natural and real, and because they're completely spiritual, there's no loss in intensity. In fact, they're more intense than anything in this material world. You can get an idea from reading the description of Lord Caitanya's ecstasies in *Caitanya-caritamrita*. Of course, if any human being had ecstasies like Lord Caitanya, they would just die, they would leave their body right away. He's on another level all together, but still, it is a fact that in Krishna consciousness, there's no loss in intensity. In fact, there's a gain in intensity over anything you can have in the material world, because that's the natural place. Krishna consciousness is the solution to the problem of lust. Otherwise, there's always going to be difficulty. To think that by satisfying one's material desires and lust one can become happy is wrong; it's miserable. Here Shakespeare lets us know about that in his sonnet.

The next sonnet we will look at appears fairly close to the end of the sequence.

*Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Fooled by these rebel powers that be array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shall thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then*

So this is a pretty famous sonnet. *Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth*. There it is, the soul and the body. The body here is referred to as *sinful earth*. Notice the soul is in the middle; the body, the sinful earth, is all around. Now, there's a problem with the text. In the original form of this text, there seems to have been a mistake, and the words *poor soul* were repeated at the beginning of the second line of the sonnet. This is obviously a printer's error. Some scholars have changed the second line to read, *fooled by these rebel powers*. Others have amended the line to read, *lord of these rebel powers* and *controlled by these rebel powers*.

Rebel powers here refers to the senses. The soul is in the middle, and the senses — the mind or material desires — are like rebel powers. The soul is like the king of a kingdom, and around him are the lords, who are his powers and who discharge the orders of the king. But unfortunately, there's a revolt going on;

they're rebels, they're against him. The soul wants one thing, but he's being held captive for ransom by his rebel powers. It's like he's enclosed within a prison. As originally written, *fooled by* or *hld by* or *captured by* or some other similar words were there. No one's sure what the original was.

*Fooled by these rebel powers that be array,
Why dost thou pine within*

Pine means to waste away.

and suffer dearth,

Dearth means lack; to suffer dearth means to undergo lack.

Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?

So here, the soul is referred to as something inside the body that's dying. But still, *painting thy outward walls* — the outside of the body — *costly gay*. Spending money on clothes and fashions and all those other things. This is a description of the embodied soul's situation: while you yourself are dying and fading away, why are you still taking care of all the external things so nicely? This is a nice thought (and one that Prabhupada also related).

*Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?*

Here the body is described as being a fading mansion. It's an old, decrepit building that's falling apart. Because you have a short lease, why are you spending so much money fixing it up? Prabhupada has spoken of how you're in an apartment, but you know that you have to get out very soon; your lease is up in one month. Is that when you decide to paint the whole thing and fix it up? People in the material world know that we have to get out of this body soon, very soon, yet we're spending all of our money and all of our effort on this body. We're going to be out on the streets very quickly, yet we're not thinking about where we're going to go or what we're going to do about it. This is the point that Shakespeare is making in these lines.

Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,

We're spending so much money, and who's going to get it? The worms. All I will have done was make expensive worm food.

Eat up thy charge?

Charge means expense. The worms will eat up all the money we've spent. You're spending so much money, and who's going to get it? It will all become food for worms. There's a nice sense of mortality here. These lines refer to the worms; the first line refers to the body as sinful earth. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, earth to earth. There's a nice sense of mortality in Shakespeare, which was very medieval. He has another sonnet that begins,

*No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:*

There's a nice sense of the brevity of life. Nowadays, if one were to say this, people would say, "Oh, don't be morbid. Don't think about such things." But you're supposed to remember this at all times. *Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,/ eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?* It that what it's all for?

So now, in the last lines, he turns the opposite idea.

Then soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,

The servant's loss is the loss of the body, or the rebel powers. You live on their loss.

And let that pine to aggravate thy store;

He is saying that the soul has been pining within. Now he's saying, "Let the body pine." Don't feed the senses. Don't gratify the senses. Let that pine. Let the senses go without their gratification to *aggravate*, that is, to increase, *thy store*, your worth; what you have. The focus should be on the soul, not the body.

The first part of the sonnet has been about taking care of the body and letting the soul die. Prabhupada gives the image of polishing the cage while the bird dies within. Now, the admonition is to take care of the soul. Spend your time on yourself, the soul, and nevermind the body. *Let that pine to aggravate thy store.*

Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;

Notice the business imagery. The word *terms* refers to a business. You buy a business by terms. It is like buying stock. Shares in a company are also called terms. *Buy terms divine* (spiritual) *in selling hours of dross*. Dross means worthless things. In other words, just like a businessman, you sell one thing, and with the money you receive, you buy something else. Give up spending your time on

material things (selling hours of dross), and instead, use the time to buy terms divine. Get rid of one and increase the other.

Within be fed, without out be rich no more:

Within means the soul.

*So shall thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then*

So *feed on Death* means that from looking at what happens to your material body and seeing what the material world is like, you can gain something valuable from it. You learn the lesson of death. You feed on death by letting the world go. Don't hang onto mortal passing and temporary things. You feed on death. You sell your hours of dross. You buy terms divine.

This is where Shakespeare takes the ultimate turn away from the material world. But this is a very typical kind of medieval sentiment. It's not like these ideas were unique to Shakespeare; he just gave better expression than anyone else to fairly common ideas of that time.

You can see that the philosophy of Krishna consciousness is not so strange. People just don't know that it was very common and well understood. Prabhupada tells us all the time that we should always be preparing for the time of death, that we should always remember that the time of death is coming. He repeatedly spoke of how the time of death is a final examination. This is alien to modern culture. Death is something that's not supposed to happen to people, but when it does happen, it's shoved aside into some little room somewhere. There's not even a notion of having a good death or of how to die, whereas in Shakespeare's time, people understood this. It was common in those days to have what was called a memento mori, a reminder of death — a skull, for example. People would keep a human skull. In medieval engravings of saints, the saints have a skull on their table. What's it for? So they can look. There's meditation on death. There's a famous scene in Hamlet where Hamlet picks up this skull, and the gravedigger says, "Oh, that was Yorick the Clown." Hamlet then looks at this skull and says, "Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him well... Here hung those lips that so oft I kissed"; he looked at the skull and thought about what it means. People don't do that anymore. A little after Shakespeare's time there lived another poet, John Donne. He was also a priest; he was the Dean of St. Pauls — sort of like a bishop. He had an official portrait of himself hanging in the entranceway of his house. He had his winding sheet made — the cloth that his corpse was to be wrapped up in — and he used to keep this winding sheet draped over his portrait. Every time he would come in and out, he would look and remember. So although he was an important man with a big position, he put his winding sheet over his portrait just so that he would remember what the score really was. This was the way people normally lived and thought. They just understood that the material world was temporary

and there wasn't a whole lot to be gained from spending time in it. We see this in William Shakespeare.

So what we are doing, really, in Krishna consciousness, in a somewhat different form, is bringing back a lost spiritual culture that's fallen apart in the West. It's going to somewhat be revived from the outside (from Lord Caitanya's movement), but a lot of it is actually a part of the Western heritage; it's just that people don't know about it anymore, nor do they understand it.

In the nineteenth century other things began to happen. There you had people like Wordsworth expressing the view that the world is too much filled with this getting and spending spirit; they were trying to go back to something earlier. There's a famous statement by Prabhupada that Krishna consciousness is characterized by "plain living and high thinking." That's a quotation from a Wordsworth sonnet, in which Wordsworth says, "Plain living and high thinking are no more."

There was this notion then that the artificial ways of civilization were turning people into something they really were not, and that some kind of originalness or naturalness had been covered over. And it's quite true. You can find here and there and everywhere poets who have said various things that are true. Unfortunately, most of them have no idea how to get out. There's some marvelous things by the poet William Butler Yeats. For example, in *Sailing to Byzantium*, he writes,

*O sages standing in God's holy fire ...
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.*

But then, at the same time, Yeats, in his old age, started writing really dirty poems. And when people complained about it — because he was Irish, naturally they complained — he wrote,

*You think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?*

So people may be very good sometimes at seeing something of the truth, but they don't seem to be very good in finding their way out of the material world. Even if they know about it and know about something higher, which Yeats certainly did, in the end, it is lust and rage. That's Yeats' own confession. So that's the problem.

Originally we're all Krishna conscious, and originally every living entity is Krishna conscious, but the conditioning goes very, very, deep. Yet, Krishna

consciousness is our natural life. Prabhupada describes Krishna consciousness as going back home, back to Godhead; it's home. When we arrive in the spiritual sky, or even as we approach, we recognize. It's not that Krishna's somebody we've never seen before. When you meet Krishna, you recognize Krishna. There He is. He's my oldest friend; my best friend; my long-lost friend. There's recognition. And Vrindavana, this is my home town. This is where I always wanted to go back to. I never knew it. I thought it was Reading, Pennsylvania, but it's actually here. People in the material world want to go back to their hometown, and they find it's all paved over, it's become one gigantic parking lot or something, it's gone, it's lost. The actual home is Goloka Vrindavana. When you go there, you say, "This is it. This is the place." We actually come from the same hometown, and it's nice to know that. And although it's a little village, it can hold all of us, and we'll know everybody. That's where we all want to be. We've forgotten. In Krishna consciousness, there should be that sense of going back to what we really are and what we have forgotten, because it is a process of recovery. We are recovering our actual selves. It's not something artificial stuck on the outside; it's bringing out what's actually there. But there's layers and layers of superficiality that have been cemented over us through this life and previous lives, and we have to get back to what we originally are. It'll be recognized.

Prabhupada said, "Don't wait until your old age before you think about death." People usually don't think about it until they get old. Prabhupada said, "Old age means just before you die." So is there anyone here who can say, "I'm not old"? Do any of us know for sure that I'm not old (if old age means just before you die)? We should think that this is my last day on earth or my last minute on earth. What would I do? We should feel that urgency about Krishna consciousness. To live like that is not morbid, because at least we know what to do. The unfortunate thing about the materialists is they think that death is the big exception. When they find out, when the doctor tells them, "You have inoperable cancer. You're going to die." You know what the person thinks? His first thought is, "Why me?" Every single living entity on earth dies, and yet the guy thinks, "I've been unfairly singled out. Why me?" Death happens to all of us. The mortality rate is a 100% in this place. Sometimes, in the time of war, it speeds up a little bit and it becomes a little more open, but basically there's a 100% mortality rate, and one has to be aware of that.

Death is the final examination to see how well we have lived our lives, and at that time we'll be tested. We should know how to die. Plato said, "A philosopher is a person who knows how to die." Who knows how to die? I had a course in college on death and dying, but nobody taught you how to die; they just read a bunch of stuff about it... There's hospices for the dying, and people talk about those who are dying, they counsel them, hold their hands, but no one tells them what they're really supposed to be doing. That's an important thing that we have to offer. People don't know what's going on. They die just like a cat or a dog. Most people just want to die intoxicated out of their minds. This is really a very,

very bad way to go. A very bad way to go. You should try to die fully conscious so you know what you're doing.

None of that's morbid. We're all going to die anyway, and so we should do a good job of it; we should do it right. If we're completely successful, we won't come back to the material world. If we're not completely successful, we'll start up on a much higher level, in Krishna consciousness.

Maharaja Pariksit knew that in seven days he was going to die, and so he sat and fasted. The sages came, and he asked the question, "What is a person's duty at the time of death?" Sukadeva Goswami answered that one's duty at the time of death is the same as his duty during life — to hear and to chant about Krishna. The activities of Krishna consciousness are the activities that prepare one for the time of death.

A person who is fully Krishna conscious has gotten death out of the way already. He's already died. People think that to surrender to Krishna is some terrible thing. They see devotees in the temple who bow down before the Deity and who have given up everything. A materialist will say, "I'll never do like that. I'll never bow down before anybody, and I don't want to give up all of these things." We preach to people, "Surrender to Krishna." They say, "No." But it would be more accurate to tell people that they have no choice but to surrender to Krishna. For a devotee, it is an act of surrender to give up all material attachments and bow down before Krishna. But it's a universal. At the time of death, what happens with the materialist? In life he's proud, defiant, won't bow down to anybody, and yet at the time of death, he offers his dandavats. He falls down flat before Krishna — before a higher power — and he gives up everything. He has to. There's no choice because it's constitutional. We are naturally servants of Krishna. For one who refuses the service of Krishna, his surrendering process is different; it's an unfavorable surrendering process. He meets Krishna as the form of death. He bows down before Him and gives up everything. That's what happens.

When you become a devotee, you go through the process of surrender, but it's in a different form. When you come to Krishna consciousness, gradually you give up all of your material attachments. In one sense you're not giving up anything because you don't have anything. It's really just this artificial bill of sale that you've got in your mind; it's a mental artifact. You think, "This is mine. That is mine," but you give up all of those material relationships, all those possessions, and you surrender to Krishna. In the process, you've already accomplished your dying. Now you form other relationships in Krishna consciousness and form other activities based on Krishna consciousness. In Krishna consciousness I have a relationship with Krishna, with my spiritual master, and with other devotees. They're all serving Krishna. Prabhupada said there's another ISKCON in the spiritual world. We are eternal associates. Those relationships will not come to an end at the time of death.

I once read in an astrology book that death is the ultimate failure to perpetuate relationships. If you have relationships in Krishna consciousness, with Krishna and the devotees, those relationships will not be disturbed. A devotee

who's actually fully surrendered to Krishna — who's engaged in Krishna's service, relating with the devotees — has already entered into his eternal life; he has already accomplished the process of death. The leaving of this physical body is not a big thing. It's a transfer of location, but he's already involved in his spiritual life. He feels the so-called pangs of death differently. Prabhupada compared it to the way the jaws of a cat can be felt differently. With his mouth, the cat picks up the rat, or the cat picks up its kitten; both acts provide the same feeling — you feel those little spiky teeth in the scruff of your neck. The mouse thinks, "Oh, this is my death." When the devotee feels those pangs, he says, "Oh, here's Krishna, mother love." He doesn't experience it in the same way as the materialist.

So the more we're absorbed and involved in Krishna consciousness, and the more we give up all our material attachments, then that business is already finished. So buy terms divine in selling hours of dross. Spend your time in Krishna consciousness. Don't waste time in material things. Then death is finished.