



CITY OF SYDNEY

BELIEF

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Name: Tony Kaye

Date: 28 April 2011

Place: Darlinghurst

Interviewer: Sue Andersen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SA:** This is Sue Anderson interviewing Tony Kaye on the 28th of April 2011 for the City of Sydney Oral History Project, Belief.

O.K, thanks, Tony, for doing the interview today. I'm wondering whether we could first begin by you saying your full name and when and where you were born.

TK: Tony Kaye, born in *****, Victoria on the ***** 194*.

SA: Right, so you're a southern Australian person. So tell me a little bit about your early life. You were whereabouts in Victoria?

TK: *****

SA: *****

TK: Yes.

SA: Right.

TK: I left there when I was seventeen to go to Melbourne University and I did a law economics degree there, seven years, and then I practised in Melbourne for about three years, I had my own practice and that took me to 1974 and in 1974 I joined the Hare Krishna movement.

SA: Right, O.K. Can I just go back a little bit and ask you some of your early sort of spiritual kind of influences? Did you grow up in a family where your parents were particularly religious?

TK: With the church on Sundays, Anglican background; not particularly religious but, just a normal kind of '50s style, Anglican-type lifestyle, so not particularly religious though.

SA: Yep. So it was 1974, did you say that you became - - -

2.05 TK: Yes, I was practising law in Melbourne, I had my own practice, and I was becoming more and more interested in spirituality and less and less interested in material pursuits so to speak and so I was losing interest in practising law and becoming more interested in Eastern philosophy, meditation, spiritual subject matters, so I guess you could say I was beginning to take a different path to the path of my childhood and education.

SA: And did you sort of dabble in a lot of different kinds of Eastern religion?

TK: I read a lot about different more Eastern-type philosophical avenues. I wasn't so interested in Christianity because, I don't know, just I guess my upbringing, I didn't really think the answers were there. But I had a strong conviction that the truth was there in India in the ancient, Indian teachings. I just had an inherent belief that if I was going to take this path then I'd have to go east into India and that's basically the beginning and so that gradually led me to taking it more seriously gradually and then dedicating my life to it ultimately.

SA: So were you involved with the Krishna movement before you went to India?

4.01 TK: Oh, yes. When I say "going East", it really was a philosophical journey rather than a physical journey at that point, although I did spend many years in India after I became a devotee but at the point I was becoming, before joining the movement it was more of a philosophical search rather than, a - - -

SA: Physical.

TK: - - - physical experience.

SA: And why the Hare Krishnas? I mean, there would have been a lot of Eastern kind of things around in the '70s.

TK: I just thought they were really genuine because they seemed to me that they were living the life whereas other groups they were adapting or adopting different spiritual practices in their life but I thought with the Hare Krishnas here were people that were actually putting their money where their mouth was and were actually living, genuinely living the life, wearing the robes, shaved heads, thongs, completely giving up, the material aspects of life and fully absorbed in, Eastern spirituality, so I just felt that they were the real thing. And so I did dabble with other groups to begin with because it was a bit shock/horror for me, especially as a lawyer and coming from that background with, university training and all and just my peers and my parents and my whole world was very much a traditional-type professional world. And so it was quite a dramatic change so to speak, so I didn't immediately do it, it was more of a gradual evolution towards it. (phone rings) [break in recording]

6.16 Ultimately I came to the realisation that, well, if I was going to go this way then I'd better go that way and get on with it so to speak.

SA: What was the hardest bit? Shaving your head or - - -

TK: Not really.

SA: No?

TK: It was a very austere way of life, getting up at three thirty in the morning, having a cold shower, no possessions, living a very Spartan material lifestyle and it was an ashram-style lifestyle.

SA: So you moved into an ashram?

TK: Yes, I moved into the community, into the ashram, and the ashram rules are quite strict and the principles are also very strict. There's no illicit sex and no intoxication of any form, so you can't have any form of alcohol or drugs or any kind of mind altering substances, you had to be a pure vegetarian and no gambling. So they're what they call the "four regulative principles of purity", so everyone within the ashram follows those rules strictly. And then getting up, as they say, between three thirty and four, taking a cold shower, getting into traditional robes for the spiritual programme which began at four thirty and goes to eight thirty every morning and that's meditation, prayer, chanting of mantras, satsang, all kind of devotional, spiritual activities for four hours in the morning before breakfast and then a nice, hearty breakfast, then off we go, performing all kinds of activities, work

throughout the day which is related to basically promoting or helping with the movement.

8.13 And then in the evening coming back and once again another couple of hours of spiritual activities in the evening and then usually early to bed, early to rise, so around about nine o'clock we'd all take rest and away we go. So it was a complete absorption and a complete turnabout, really, from my previous lifestyle which was quite hedonistic and quite dramatically the opposite so to speak. It was really the opposite. I kind of did an about turn; it was a U-turn and went the other way.

SA: Was it a hard point to actually finally make that decision to go into the community?

TK: I got to the point that when I began to chant the Hare Krishna mantra at another group – another group were chanting it and in a satsang situation which is a devotional, spiritual gathering of people who are, chanting mantras to music – when I chanted the mantra, the Hare Krishna mantra, it had such an amazing, profound effect on me that that was it: five days later I rang my friend up – because I had a practice – I rang my friend up and said “Hey, come and get the keys. I’m out of here”. And so I just walked out because I realised that if I tried to disentangle myself from all my attachments and responsibilities, obligations, associations, it could take me years and years and years to become disentangled from that labyrinthian network of entanglement.

10.06 So I figured “I’m just going to have to walk away basically, a bit like ‘Paris, Texas’ [movie], when he shut the door and walked away from his life into the desert; it was a little similar like that, I just had to shut the door. So I rang my friend up and said “Hey, I’m out of here. Come and get the keys. If you like my practice, here it is, you can have it” and basically he came ‘round, got the keys and took my practice and I hit the road so to speak, the high road.

SA: What did your parents think or were you really that concerned about them?

TK: Well, that was a difficult thing because, they were traditional parents and had no exposure to any form of, Krishna Consciousness or Eastern belief systems or whatever, they lived in a country town, so I knew that was going to be fairly a dramatic experience for them, so I didn’t tell them ultimately but they did find out. So then they were pretty upset so to speak, because my father in particular was very proud of his son being a downtown Melbourne lawyer and it was something that he could boast to his friends about. And that generation also were very much focused on educating their children because they themselves didn’t have it coming through the war generation, through the recession, so they were much focused on

careers and professions and to them that was like the greatest gift they could give and the most important thing was to give their children that opportunity so then after seven years and becoming established as a lawyer to walk away it is a little difficult for somebody in that mindset to understand.

12.11

So it did take some years for them to come to terms with it but ultimately they both became very favourable and very supportive when they saw actually what kind of person you have become. And at this time I had a relative who had also joined the movement and it was a time when they had "deprogrammers" so to speak for parents who didn't like their children joining a so-called cult and they hired a deprogrammer who had kidnapped the child and imprisoned them somewhere isolated and then work on them and what they called deprogramming them. I mean, how they got away with it back then I don't know. You couldn't do that kind of thing today; it'd be called kidnapping, whatever. But anyhow, so my cousin was kidnapped by - her mother had one of these deprogrammers kidnap her and they deprogrammed her by all kinds of misinformation and psychological trauma and torture and all kinds of horrible things they used to do; so they really kind of emotionally and mentally scar the person. So her mother who did that to her, she wrote an article in the local paper which was a very damning kind of article full of misinformation but from her perspective, basically that the Hare Krishna movement was a cult and an article like that. So my father was very upset when he saw the article and so he demanded that they give equal time, which was like virtually a full page, for the other side and he wrote this amazing story about the Hare Krishna movement which was just glorifying the movement and how wonderful it was and the effect that it had on his child.

14.13

And so although in the beginning he was kind of horrified, in the end he really became really supportive and became, yes, a great supporter of the movement and he was very proud, actually, in the end. Because it's all, especially in the '70s there was very little information, it was a whole new thing; it was like we were from the moon, it's like what were we, and it just terrified people because it was just so far out of their experience, there was fear, "What is it?" And it was like it kind of challenged everyone's belief systems, everyone's lifestyle somewhat that there was something here that was completely radically different, so people don't like their belief systems or their lifestyles to be challenged by something like this and especially something that was really growing quickly in amongst the youth in the west. It was like a spiritual revolution and it was really gaining momentum and it was very attractive to, especially the people that were either hippies or coming out of the hippy movement who were looking for some answers, who were not really satisfied just to adopt the lifestyle and the belief system of the former generations. They wanted something else, they were looking for something more, something different and they were looking for answers and so that, of

course, led to the counterculture and the hippy revolution and that's really where the Hare Krishna movement began, although it began when my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, came to New York city in 1965 and he really brought this whole philosophy with him.

16.14 He arrived with seven dollars in his pocket, he didn't have any friends or anywhere to go so to speak and, he had a packet of cereal and a few books on the ancient Vedic philosophy and he landed in New York in the middle of winter and so it all began from there. And so it took hold in New York and then after a year or two it began to build and then it spread to San Francisco, into the hippy communities basically, into the alternate communities, the cultural revolution-type communities, and it became very big very quickly. Within a few years, by 1969, 1970 it was spreading right throughout the world.

SA: How many members would there have been at that point in time?

TK: Well, it started with one, with Prabhupada in 1965 and then in 1966 there was no members after a year and he would just go to the park with a pair of cymbals and chant the Hare Krishna mantra and then interested onlookers would crowd around him. There's quite interesting films of this period where people are just looking at him and then gradually the young kind of hippies and alternate people began to come to him and so the movement began. And then it began to gather momentum and within a year or two it had spread throughout America. It was in San Francisco at the Haight-Ashbury, right in the middle of the hippy movement there, it took hold and it grew very quickly. And then it spread to Europe, the Beatles became interested and we set up - the first devotees that went from America to England, they stayed with John Lennon and George Harrison and George Harrison, of course, became a Hare Krishna devotee.

18.16 **SA: Did he really?**

TK: Yes, he did. And John Lennon was very interested also. Actually, he stayed in John Lennon's house there - that was in the beginnings in England. So that was back in the time that the Beatles were just beginning to go their own ways, etcetera; Yoko Ono had appeared on the scene. And so that was quite an exciting period and then it spread throughout England and by 1969 the movement had really gathered. It was like a revolution at this stage; it had really taken hold and was spreading throughout the world like wildfire so to speak. And in 1969 Prabhupada wanted devotees to come to Australia to start the movement down here, so it was in 1970 when the first devotees arrived from New York, from America to begin the movement down here.

SA: And that was in Melbourne?

TK: That was in Sydney.

SA: Right. So it was 1970 that the movement started here in Sydney?

TK: Yes.

SA: And whereabouts did they practice from?

TK: Well, initially I got this ... there was eleven temples in Sydney during the 1970s through the '80s. The temples would be established in one place and for a year or two or three, four, whatever, and for one reason or another, whether it was councils or whether it was individuals selling properties or whatever, we kept on the move. So I've got here: 1970 the first temple was in Potts Point, just down here.

20.03 **SA: Just down ... the address?**

TK: Yes. It was 26 Horderns Place in Potts Point [Street name and suburb appear not to concur]

SA: Right, O.K. And was it a big temple?

TK: No, just a small kind of, it was just like two devotees came from America and they got a place down here and they had a little house and they set up a little temple room and so away it went from there, that's where it began. So we haven't moved far; where we are now, to where it began in 1970.

SA: Goodness. That's quite amazing.

TK: Yes.

SA: And it was the time for it.

TK: The time was right because, as I say, the whole of the '60s, especially, with the advent of the Beatles and the whole countercultural revolution that happened where basically the youth en masse were breaking away from the traditions of the past and they were looking for some higher meaning in life, many of them. Some of them, of course, were just into it for the drugs and the sex and the rock and roll but amongst that community there were a lot of alternate people that were actually looking for some answers and some higher meaning to life, some higher purpose, they were searching for happiness and they were rejecting the notions of the past. And so that's when this Krishna Consciousness came into the western world in this environment, so it was perfect timing because if Prabhupada had come perhaps ten years earlier in the middle of the '50s where you had, maybe some breakaways, James Dean and Marlon Brando and things but it wasn't like a counterrevolution, they were just kind of rebels without a cause, they didn't have a cause, whereas in the '60s

the causes came in and the rebels increased dramatically and then you get this huge countercultural revolution that sweeps the world and that's when the Hare Krishna took root in the western world and grew very, very quickly.

22.24

And today it's got tens of millions of members and when you look at, say, historically you say the growth of Christianity and the growth of Krishna Consciousness, it's dramatic, it's such a dramatic kind of explosion.

SA: So, given that, if you join a Krishna movement there is, no drugs and alcohol and that kind of stuff, I mean how was that in the '60s? I mean, were they a little bit lenient?

TK: No, you'd think so, when you think it'd be contradictory because the whole of the '60s alternate kind of hippy experience was really based around drugs and sex and rock and roll, in particular those things, vegetarianism was beginning to take root through that movement, countermovement, and gambling I don't think was a problem because I don't think it was a gambling community. But, no, the sex and the drugs were certainly the centrepiece of the hippy movement in particular. So, yes, it was a hard sell from that side but in the beginning Prabhupada for the first year or so didn't tell people about that. It was only when they became interested and they wanted to take to the form of life that one day they were living in the ashram and the devotees who had joined from the hippy community, they still had their long hair and everything but they were chanting the mantras and they were getting into the whole kind of spiritual thing and then one day they woke up and there was a proclamation that was pinned to the wall of their bedroom and that proclamation, a bit like Luther's proclamation on the church.

24.21

And that listed all the "don'ts" and so by that time I think those early devotees were so hooked on the process of Krishna Consciousness that they swallowed the pill. So, yes, initially for the first year or so Prabhupada didn't tell, didn't mention those restrictions so to speak, he just basically gave people the positives so to speak.

SA: Yes, I've got lots of different questions that I want to ask you all at once. When you actually join the movement is there like an initiation kind of ceremony or is there some kind of -?

TK: When you first join basically you lead the same lifestyle as somebody who's been there, for years, it's the same lifestyle. It's not like, you've got the novices that are doing something different from those that have been there; right from, from word go you're fully, engaged in the same spiritual practices as the senior people within the society.

SA: So walk me through when you first joined like, the whole robing and the head shaving.

TK: Yes. O.K, so the first day I became a devotee I shaved my head.

26.01 **SA: You shaved your head?**

TK: No, somebody shaved my head for me and I put on the monk's robes, I think I had a pair of thongs at the time so I probably just wore those and, hey, that's it. What else do you want?

SA: That's it?

TK: Well, you don't have possessions, you don't have money.

SA: Do you take a spiritual name?

TK: You do on initiation. So after you've been following the practices for around about a year or so and you have been – which we call basically you're fully dedicated and you want to devote your life, you're given like a year or you're given however much time you like to make that decision but then there comes a point when, you make that commitment and then you become eligible for initiation by the spiritual master. At that time you get a spiritual name and then you make vows, spiritual vows. So even though you've been following all those vows up until that time, at initiation you make those vows in a formalised form. It's more like a spiritual contract where the spiritual master from his side he agrees that he will take you back to the spiritual world and the disciple from his part agrees to follow those four regulative principles which we discussed earlier and to chant on his meditation, be it a certain amount of mantras each day and to engage fully in devotional, spiritual activities. So there's that kind of formal commitment and at that time you get a spiritual name.

SA: And - ?

27.57 TK: My spiritual name is Tapratapa Lassa Pratapana. So I was initiated in 1975 and I became a devotee in '74, so about no, just under a year after I became a devotee, then I took the formal vows and the initiation. And then after that there's another initiation after you reach a certain level of spiritual evolution. It's called Brahmin initiation, Brahmin, and this is where you get the sacred thread; it's called the Sacred Thread Ceremony where you get special mantras that are silent mantras that only that you recite. And Brahmins then are able to do other things that the devotees that aren't Brahmins don't do. For instance the worship within the temple, to actually go onto the altar and to do the worship on the altar with the DTs one has to be Brahmin initiated to do that, to cook for the DTs one has to be a Brahmin; even to cook for a restaurant one is supposed to be a Brahmin to cook for the restaurant. So basically a Brahmin initiation is initiation for somebody who has for maybe three, four years at least strictly followed the principles and has come to a certain level of

purity and spiritual practices in their life that then they're able to actually do those higher aspects of the worship side of things.

SA: Look, I think we should really get onto actually what are the beliefs of the movement because we haven't even – we've kind of touched on it around but could you explain that?

TK: Well, basically the Hare Krishna movement is based on the ancient Vedic texts of India which were compiled five thousand years ago, and that's 3000BC. Now, this is a great body of work which is – it's called the Vedas, Veda means "knowledge".

30.05 Now, this great body of texts, this knowledge, this body of works, has both material and spiritual knowledge. In the Hare Krishna movement we're more concerned with the spiritual teachings of the Vedas which centrepieces are of course the Bhagavad Gita and anyhow there's a great body of spiritual works called the Vedanta – that's spiritual teachings of the Vedism – and so the fundamental teachings of the Vedas is that there is a personal god, we are eternal persons also, and we have an eternal, perfect, loving relationship with a personal god and that the purpose of life is to revive and reawaken our personal relationship with god. Now, whether you call god Jehovah or Allah or Krishna, they're the same person, there is only one god, the supreme, divine person; everything is coming from him. And so we sometimes get caught up with "my god, my religion" etcetera, but actually there is only one god and on the highest level of spiritual philosophy there is no designations like "I am Christian, I am Muslim, I am Hindu". No, the designation on the highest level is that "I am a pure servant of god or lover of god". Now, whether you're a Christian, Hindu, it doesn't matter, it's beyond designations. So the purpose of the Hare Krishna, really, it's a movement based on developing love of god and so the whole philosophy revolves around that principle.

32.06 And when you look at the teachings of Christ for instance you'll see the teachings are non-different but where the differences come is when, they start dabbling and they add things, and everybody wants to put in, their two-bob's worth and then you'll see that, man made differences and then you get all these schisms and fractions and all of a sudden Christianity has thousands of different sects and that everyone has a slightly different take on it. But if you go back just to the purer original teachings of the master himself and forget about Paul and the rest of them then you see the teachings are the same. But the teachings that Christ gave as recorded are very simple teachings; they're not very advanced in terms of the way they were presented. They were never presented as a systematic, philosophical kind of treatise, he just threw out truths and go around, kicking butt and saying a few things and that's what was recorded. So we don't have a complete philosophical system and the knowledge he was giving also was fairly basic information whereas

the Vedas, what we see in the Vedas is the most highly sophisticated spiritual knowledge which is completely systematic and presents the whole philosophy of spiritual, knowledge in a very profound and very organised, intelligent, rational, systematic way. The way we look at it is that the teachings of Christ, although they are completely basically compatible or the same as the teachings of Krishna Consciousness it's really the sophistication and the depth of the teachings. So we see the teachings of Christ being like, the ABCs, like the primary school kind of teachings. Now, the teaching, one plus one does equal two but there's also E equals MC^2 .

34.01

So one plus one equals two is *in* E equals MC^2 but it's just the difference in complexity is vast. So similarly the teachings of Christ is ABC, one plus one equals two, but Vedic teachings E equals MC^2 , it's just vastly far beyond the teachings of Christ in the presentation and the amount of knowledge that's given and in the formulas in that respect. So therefore one of the problems with Christianity I found when I was practising, because they couldn't answer questions, there were so many questions that are not answered whereas in the Vedic texts all the questions are answered, there's not one question that you can ask that's not answered perfectly, it's a perfect philosophical system. And so when you come in contact with the Vedic texts you really become really just like overwhelmed at how wonderful these teachings are and then when you delve into them and begin to study them seriously it's a beautiful journey and it's all there.

SA: This might be a completely stupid question but so do you believe in like a real – like was God a person?

TK: Yes, God is a person. He's not like – we kind of project from our own experience and think "I'm a person. How can God be a person?" Of course he's not a person like you or I with a material body like that but God is a person, purely spiritual and infinite and, there is nothing that he cannot do.

36.03

An example is given in the Vedic texts which is quite interesting. They take the example of the sun and the sunshine. The sun planet has the same qualities as the particle of sunshine which is heat and light but the particle of sunshine is infinitesimal in comparison to the sun planet which has those same qualities to an infinite degree. So similarly in our pure state of consciousness we have the same qualities as God but we're like those particles, to an infinitesimal degree we have the same qualities as God. Because we are like particles coming from the sun planet we also come from God but God has them to an infinite degree like the sun planet, to the sun, a particle.

SA: So is the purpose to actually get to understand that we are all particles?

TK: Well, that's only one part of it.

SA: Yes.

TK: That's one part of it, that's the beginning. No, the purpose is to develop pure love of God and to once again reawaken our divine spiritual consciousness and revive our original relationship with God and enter into that relationship and basically to attain perfection in spiritual realisation, to become fully God conscious and to actually return to the spiritual world from whence we came. So the purpose of life is really to become lovers of God, become God conscious and to return home to the spiritual world – we call that back home, back to God head - we came from the spiritual world, we're now living in the material world but the purpose of life is to actually go back home where we really belong in the spiritual world. And so the whole process of Krishna Consciousness and the Hare Krishna movement is a process, really, which is a devotional lifestyle where you perform all activities for the pleasure of God.

38.04 And so everything we do in the day, it's done for the pleasure of God but it's done out of devotion and love - it's called bahti - so you don't act out of some kind of fear or some kind of obligation or duty so much but you're acting out of devotion and love because you really enjoy what you're doing because when you connect with God then the experience is wonderful and therefore it's very joyful and blissful and so therefore you see with the Hare Krishnas you'll see that they're famous for singing and dancing and feasting; it's a very pleasurable experience; even though you get up early in the morning it's blissful to get up early because, your whole day is blissful. So it's a wonderful way of life, so it's not like it's, a very austere and cold and kind of, you're kind of gritting your teeth as you're trying to get through the day, it's very blissful because you're connecting with Krishna, with God. Krishna's a name for God which means "the most beautiful, all attractive personality", that's what that name means. So I say it's like God is unlimited, he has unlimited names but Krishna in the Vedas is the most prominent name we find in the Vedas and Govinda's also another very prominent name we find for God in the Vedas and Govinda means the source and the reservoir of all pleasure and love and happiness – that's what "Govinda" means; so God is the source of the reservoir, the fountainhead of all love and pleasure and happiness. So these are spiritual names designating the supreme, divine being but at the same time, as I say, Jehovah is also a name and Allah, the Muslims call God Allah, so, hey, if you're a Muslim then Allah – it's not so important and it's the same person.

40.00 Krishna Consciousness is non-denominational and it's non-sectarian, it's non-sectarian which means that it's beyond all kinds of material designations according to caste, creed, religion, it's beyond that, seeing that everybody is a pure servant of God and the purpose of life is to develop that beautiful relationship we have with God and

that's what the whole philosophy revolves around that – it's very personal - so therefore, having a personal, loving or devotional relationship with God and the internal person. And the Vedas, they explain who he is, where he lives, what his phone number is, what he does, there's a huge amount of information about the spiritual world that you don't see in the bible or the other texts. You'll see the word "God" and some of his powers, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, they mention like that, but how is he all these things that the Vedas explain and what does God do, what's he look like? , Leonardo da Vinci said "Oh, he must be pretty old. Give him a beard and make him look like an old man and, stick him on the Sistine Chapel" but that's just a speculation; where's the information coming from the bible as to what God looks like? But the Vedas, it's there. God is eternally youthful, he's beyond time. You see, we project according to our conditioning within time and space but the spiritual is beyond time and space; time and space does not exist on the spiritual platform; there's no such thing as age on the spiritual plane, it's only on the material plane. So therefore all that information is given there in the Vedas and so it's a lifelong – it's not just an armchair philosophy, though, it's living, it's a living philosophy, you're living it at every moment in your life. So there's no real discrepancy between what your belief system is and your life; your life is your belief system and your belief system is your life, you are living.

42.07

And that was the first thing that really attracted me to the Hare Krishna movement is here these people were living whatever. And I didn't know what their belief system was back then but I was impressed that these people really are putting their money where their mouth is, they are living their beliefs whereas others I saw were kind of value adding, but they were going on with their normal lifestyles but they were just adding something – which is nice, value adding, improving your life, nothing wrong with that, that's nice – but I wanted to really go that extra step and really get the real thing and I could see that these people had the – this was the real thing, so I didn't want to have something that wasn't the real thing, I was interested in getting the genuine article.

SA: So to really – , because you can kind of believe something and you can really believe it, like to really embody it, I mean was that a long process for you to really get to that point where you really believed?

TK: No, it's when you first become a devotee it's instantaneous. When you make that surrender to God then instantaneously in that moment that you make that surrender then immediately you're filled with transcendental knowledge, your whole life becomes illuminous, like the lights go off instantly and that's coming from revelation. So you've got knowledge that is external in forms of the Vedic texts which you will read but were then it's being revealed – this is the Christians call this "revelation" – that knowledge is actually you're

illuminated from within with that knowledge so that it becomes a realised knowledge, not only just a philosophical concept or book knowledge, you actually experience it from within.

44.01

And that is instantaneous when you make that step, goes that the lights go on immediately, it not like there's a gap, it's immediately you become illuminated with knowledge. And the other thing is that immediately you become detached from the world because it looks like a huge – , it's just such a big change coming from my previous lifestyle into something which was completely the opposite but as soon as you make that choice, at that moment you become completely detached, you have no attachment to the material at all; it's just like pfft, it's gone. And Krishna explains in the Vedas as what happens when you firstly make that step and you surrender, and you make that commitment and immediately he helps you like that, he just fills you with knowledge from within so that you experience it and you understand it from within. It's not just a mental thing and you no longer have any problem with all your attachments because they've disappeared. And so seemingly from an external point of view it looks like a huge, really difficult thing but at the moment you make the choice it's just the simplest thing you've ever done. And so, yes, externally extremely difficult but internally it was just so easy and ever since it's just never been - - -

SA: Never been a question?

TK: No.

SA: So it's based on Hinduism, is that right?

TK: No.

SA: No, it's not?

TK: Hindus are a bit like the modern day Christians. , they base their belief system on the bible and the bible is– the teachings of Christ only form a small part of the bible; mainly there's more teachings coming from Paul than there is of Christ in the latter day saints.

46.13

So what's happened in Christianity is that – like we spoke before – the teachings have been interpreted through time by personalities who were not on the same level as Jesus was. He was a fully self God-conscious person and he spoke perfect truth but a lot of the successors to Jesus weren't on that same platform, so what you've got is you've got a lot of changes and additions and speculations and it's become a mess. And as we were looking before, there's so many different belief systems and so many different ideas are now formalised in the form of hundred, if not thousands, of different Christian sects, problem. So the Hindus have done the same thing with the teachings of the Vedas. They have taken the pure teachings

of the Vedas and they've through time speculated, added, changed it so much, so now you see what the Hindu belief system is is quite different from what the actual original pure teachings are. So the Krishna Consciousness movement is a fundamentalist movement in a way, that it goes back to the original pure teachings of the Vedas without all the additions, alterations and without all the speculation back to the original pure teachings. And so the Hindus, as they say, they've interpreted so many things in so many different ways – we're not Hindus.

48.02 Hindus are basing their belief system on the same philosophical texts, the Vedic texts, Bhagavad Gita, right, but they've made so many different changes and alterations and primarily what they're doing is they're just trying to fit things into their lifestyle so that they can go on and feel happy about themselves. And also the Hindus have read polytheism into it, they've read impersonalism into it, they've read so many different philosophical concepts that aren't there in the Vedas, so many changes. So we don't like to kind of associate so much with the Hindus; same text but different world.

SA: Yes, O.K. But you use kind of like the Brahmin ideas, you use a lot of or some of the structure – is that right or not?

TK: Some of the Hindu structures?

SA: The Hindu structures.

TK: Look, you'll see a lot of the externals are still in place. if you go to the temples, Hindu temples, you'll see that the worship is very similar, you'll see a lot of the belief systems are very similar, a lot of it, but there have been changes and they're important changes and so even though a lot of the externals appear to be the same and you look at - perhaps you go to India and see what the Hindus are doing and then you can look at what the Hare Krishna movement is doing to see that a lot of it is the same externally. You'll see that a lot of the worship in particular is very much the same and, as I say, a lot of the philosophy is very much the same but it's those fundamental differences that we know that you wouldn't know if you're looking at it from an external point of view, you wouldn't know that there was fundamental differences.

50.04 Similarly with Christianity, it looks all the same but actually you wouldn't know unless you really study the different, groups and traditions and what were the differences because it seems like you go to a church and, O.K, there may be a little difference here and there but it seems like it's all pretty much the same anyhow but when you talk to those that are conversant in their tradition and in their, belief systems then they'll tell you that there are quite fundamental differences in so many ways, similarly with us and say the Hindu movement as such.

SA: And what about the idea of salvation? I mean, does that come into the Krishna teachings or philosophy?

TK: Yes, salvation is there in terms of that once you become absorbed on the spiritual platform you are saved from the material, you're no longer really under the influence of the material energy so to speak, you're under the influence of the divine energy, under there. So you're under God's special protection so to speak because you become his mate, you're his dear friend because your whole life is devoted. It's just like what we see in the interrelationships between one another is there between us and also God but obviously on a pure level and on a purely spiritual level. But just like, it's like you have friends, dear friends and you're friends because, they've done so much for you and they're such lovely people and they care for you and so therefore you have an emotional attachment to them and you call them friends and you enjoy one another's company. It's exactly the same as with Krishna; you're friends and you're having a reciprocal relationship of exchange of emotions and feeling, so it's on that level. It's a very personal thing, it's like he's your best mate, it's like he's your best friend and it's not like some distant concept of some god, sitting on a throne somewhere in the sky, it's a very personal relationship where you're reciprocating all the time with this person and so it's a beautiful exchange.

52.12

And so we're not so concerned with salvation because we're already saved in a way. You know what I mean, salvation is saved, we call it liberation, in Sanskrit it's called muhti, muhti, liberated, you're automatically liberated. So we're not that caught up in salvation; it's something that's just a byproduct of the process that we're not really concerned, it's just something that's there anyhow. But, yes, no, that salvation is still there but it's just that for us it's not important.

SA: And so what about marriage then?

TK: Yes. Well, I got married to my wife of thirty one years now back in 1981 in an arranged marriage, so I never spoke to my wife before the marriage ceremony; the first word I think I said to her was "I do" at the wedding. So that was back in – and we're very happily married after thirty one years and so that was an arranged marriage.

SA: So who chooses your partner or a partner?

TK: Well, we have a dartboard and we take turns. No, actually, in an arranged marriage situation you consult with your peers and those that are perhaps your senior God brothers and God sisters and then they all discuss amongst themselves and make suggestions, knowing the parties involved, their qualities, characteristics, personalities, their strengths, weaknesses and the whole gambit of a person's

personality and then they make a suggestion and say “Well, I think that this person would be really good for you”.

54.06 Because I was a monk; I came down, I was a celibate monk for eight years. Now, I wouldn't have had a clue, I would have just gone for the prettiest girl. But what would I know, if you've been celibate for eight years, you don't know much about this kind of subject matter. And so I didn't really want to choose my wife and so I asked my friends and said “Can you choose her for me, please?” and so they did. That's called an arranged marriage but that was a personal thing and it's still a personal thing today; most people don't do that to tell you the truth. Most people, probably out of a hundred marriages now with say the Hare Krishna movement, ninety nine would not be like that but it's there if you want to take advantage of it, if you want to have a marriage where you're – but that's the same in society. For instance, say you want to get married again and you don't know anybody, you've heard of somebody and he's over in Timbuktu and so you ask people and friends and like that and then you kind of “Well, let's see how it goes”, so a similar thing. But in the movement most marriages are made between people just like normally. They just get to know one another and then they feel that they should get married and arranged marriages are very rare. Even when I got married arranged marriages were fairly rare, they weren't the normal procedure but it was always there if you wanted to, you can take advantage of that. And I'm glad I did because I got a beautiful wife, we're really happily married and I'm really glad that I actually took advantage of that rather than just kind of relied on my own senses and what I wanted at the time.

56.00 **SA: So when you said you came down from somewhere after being eight years' celibate, where did you come down from?**

TK: Well, I came down from the Himalayan mountains actually at that time I was twenty thousand feet up in a place called Bahdric Ashram, a very ancient, sacred place which is under snow for like eight months of the year. And this is back in 1981 when I came to Australia because I was overseas for seven years and so, yes, I was up in the Himalayan Mountains in an ashram, and then when it got too cold with the snow then we came down the mountains and then somebody invited me to come to Australia. So when I arrived in Australia I was like I had come down, I'd come down about twenty thousand feet.

SA: Literally.

TK: Literally.

SA: So did someone sort of suggest that you should get married or was it that you were feeling like it would be good for you to get married?

TK: Well, I was asked if I wanted to become the temple president in Sydney and they said "Of course, if you become the temple president then you will need to be married because you're dealing with women" because there's fifty/fifty men and women living in the temple so the temple president has to be able to deal with both sexes whereas a renounced monk doesn't deal with the female species so to speak, it's like his ashram is protected because if there's too much close contact with women then he's in jeopardy of falling down from that ashram which is called Brahmacharya Ashram which is celibacy. So therefore for the celibate monks there are protections in place, there's a fairly strict separation between the men and the women in ashram, so similarly the women also are protected against the men somewhat.

58.07 So therefore there are kind of barriers there that are helping those ashrams. As long as the individuals in the ashrams want to remain as celibates then there's some protection given to them so that they can actually try and maintain that, those vows. But if you're a temple president then you really need to be able to work with both ashrams equally because there's, as I said, fifty/fifty and therefore for a temple president he has to be married. And so I wasn't adverse to the idea. I mean, I had been a celibate monk for seven, eight years and so, yes, I was at the time, I remember I was feeling like I wouldn't mind changing my ashram and so when it was offered to me it didn't take too much convincing for me to do it.

SA: And what about women, can women be monks?

TK: Yes, they are monks.

SA: They are monks?

TK: Yes. They're called Brahmacharinis, the celibate monks. They live the same lifestyle as the men basically. They live in the temple and instead of robes, though, they wear beautiful saris and jewellery. , it's not like it's so harsh in terms of the austerities. So for the women, that live in ashrams, they have beautiful saris, they wear jewellery, they have a little makeup, so there is that feminine aspect that is kind of taken care of at the same time but at the same time the girls that are in the ashram are wanting to lead that lifestyle. For both ashrams it's totally voluntary and it's only the individuals they make the decisions, no one tells anybody which ashram they should be in. If you're living as a monk, a celibate monk in an ashram and you want to get married then you get married; it's up to the individual to make the choice.

60.05 **SA: So is there something about the act of sex that kind of disrupts the spiritual kind of concentration?**

TK: Yes, yes. It's called lust. So the principle is that one should be absorbed in devotion and love in service to God. So that's a selfless devotion, the principle is selfless where you're not really concerned – you're concerned to please God, you're performing actions to please God in a pure state of consciousness, right, and so it's a selfless form of service where there's no real self interest and the principle is pure spiritual love. So when it comes to sex, the principle somewhat gets compromised and so material desires and lusty desires enter into the consciousness and you kind of lose your focus somewhat and it's kind of the purity of thought is no longer there and it becomes somewhat contaminated so to speak by lusty material desires. So therefore if you can remain as a celibate, that is – while it's recommended if you can – but it can't be artificial at the same time, it's not something that you can just artificially be celibate when within you're thinking about women. So internally if you have a desire that you want to get married, you want to have sex or you want to have a relationship with a woman, then better to do it than to be an artificial renunciant.

62.05 Renunciation is something that's natural that you really want to do and you're not disturbed by these other thoughts and you're able to focus like that so you really have to be honest with yourself, you have to be true to yourself and you actually have to see where you're at personally and what your desires are. Celibacy over a long period of time is a rare thing, there's not many people that genuinely can do it, so therefore in ninety nine per cent of cases the celibate monks do get married and similarly with the females, at least ninety nine per cent of them do get married. But when they get married that's up to them to make that decision but the advice that is given is "Look, once the desires arise in you and you really feel strong urges and you want to have a relationship with the opposite sex and you want to get married, then do it" – , there's no stigma attached or anything, you just change your ashram from a celibacy ashram into a rehasta ashram - it's called rehasta household ashram – but Krishna's still the same throughout everything like that but then you have a family and like me, I've got two kids, I live in an apartment, I have a whole normal - from an external point of view you wouldn't know that I was any different from Joe Schmo down there on the street, you wouldn't know there's a difference externally - I've got the same things going on. My children are educated in normal, traditional schools. My daughter went to SCEGGS, my son went to Joey's and then to Cranbrook and so they went to Christian schools and they're educated. My daughter now she wants to be a teacher so she's at the University of Sydney, fourth year, doing an arts education degree and she's just totally into learning and being a teacher but at the same time purely spiritually focused, doesn't want to get married, doesn't want to have anything to do with boys at this stage.

64.06 She will, but at this stage she just wants to focus on her education and she is a beautiful singer and she's just fully absorbed in the spiritual life at the same time.

SA: So she's a devotee as well?

TK: Yes, yes, she's a full time Krishna devotee and if you come here to the programmes you'll see her singing. She has an angelic voice, beautiful singer, plays beautiful musical instruments and she's an amazing person. But it's a choice, it all comes down to freedom of choice, what you want, you can't force anyone. Even with our children, we don't isolate them and both of them like from the age of four - actually, my daughter went to SCEGGS preschool, her whole schooling was through SCEGGS - and my son, as I say, he went to, Joey's and Cranbrook, Christian schools and so they're completely exposed to the world and they're completely integrated within the world, they're not isolated, they're integrated. But at the same time they're completely absorbed in wanting to be in their spiritual life but at the same time, like my son, he's a bookkeeper/accountant so he works for a company but he's a devotee. So it's all individual and it's all up to the individual person as to where their spiritual life is at and what they want to do.

SA: Well, it's quite different from your experience then though, sort of being in a community, like actually living in the community and working on the land and so I guess that's just a modern day - - -

TK: No, it's not. What it is, it's a personal choice, it's what I wanted to do, isn't it? It's up to the individual how they want to input and what they want to do.

66.03 Some people, most people, probably ninety nine per cent of people in the Krishna movement value add to their lives. They have a job, maybe they're a doctor or whatever they are but then they add Krishna Conscious elements to their lifestyle; they don't join ashrams. That's 99.9 per cent of the Krishna devotees are like that. When George wanted to – George Harrison wanted to join the ashram in England in 1979 and give everything up, including his wife, his wealth and everything and move in and become a Hare Krishna monk in the ashram Prabhupada said “No, George”. He said “You stay out there and you, write your music and you live in your world out there and then just because as a monk in an ashram what can you do? There's so much you can do but one of the four Beatles, the most famous people in the world, your music, you can access the whole planet with your lyrics and with your music”. So he said “Go out there and make music”, so he went out there and you'll see since '79 his lyrics have been very spiritual. In fact, a lot of it you think he's singing to his girlfriend. Actually, he's not, he's singing to Krishna but it doesn't say

Krishna. So right until the end of his life he was a very focused and dedicated Krishna devotee.

SA: Now, we should get back to talking about - - -

TK: Australia.

SA: - - - Australia, yes. And so you started off in Potts Point in the '70s, in the early '70s and then where did you move to?

TK: Right. After Potts Point – because this is before my time in Sydney - - -

SA: Yes.

67.52 TK: - - - at this point I was still at Sydney University, smoking dope, chasing the girls, going to the races and eating hamburgers but at that time I was doing all this stuff, Potts Point they were from February to May 1970 at Potts Point. In May 1970 to October 1970 they went to Bondi, Bondi Beach, it's Birrell Street in Bondi Beach. Once again it was only for a few months and then after Bondi Beach in October 1970 for about a year or so until late 1971 they moved into Paddington at 118 Oxford Street. There's a lot of footage of actually that temple in Paddington.

SA: It was a house?

TK: It's a shop now.

SA: Right.

TK: Yes, it's on Paddington, it's a shopfront with above so it was a pretty good location not too far from where we are here again. And then in '71, late '71, after Paddington up until September 1973 they moved to Glebe at 83 Hereford Street, Glebe.

SA: I think everyone in Sydney's lived in Hereford Street.

TK: Including the Hare Krishnas. In September '73 through to August 1974 they went to Double Bay. Now, we know that the residents in Double Bay didn't really appreciate the Hare Krishnas coming into their neighbourhood, they were horrified by it all so they brought some pressure to bear to the council at the time and so we were somewhat forced to move premises from there.

70.03 So, yes, up until August '74. By this time I was a devotee, the temple was at Double Bay. From August '74 to November '74 – like three months – the temple went to Bellevue Hill, so it's on the move here every few months, they're packing up the temple. What it's like

packing up a house, even like that, but can you imagine packing up a whole temple and community every few months and moving?

SA: So the devotees were living in temple?

TK: Yes, yes. Well, they were living either in the temple premises or next door, whatever, in ashrams, because this is the time when the ashrams were very strong. So a temple like in '74 say at Double Bay would have up to sixty to seventy monks and monkettes living there. So it was a kind of impact on the community so if I was living at Double Bay at the same time I probably would have thrown in my lot with the residents. All of a sudden you wake up for breakfast one day; you look out "Oh, my God, George, there's sixty Hare Krishnas on our lawn!" "Oh, stop exaggerating". So, yes, so bounced around a bit. So, yes, over to Victoria Street, Bellevue Hill for just three or four months and then in November '74 to May '75 we went to Wrights Road in Drummoyne. Drummoyne, this was a beautiful temple. It was the first one actually that I came to in Sydney because I became a devotee in Melbourne but I travelled up to Sydney and stayed at this temple in Drummoyne and it was a beautiful, ancient old kind of house; it was a huge building and it was right on the waterfront.

72.00 There were beautiful gardens. You walked down to the gardens onto your jetty where your boat was and it was in Drummoyne. It was just such a fabulous place just on the bay and it was like wonderful but the owners decided to sell it and bulldoze it and stick up some apartments or something and so I remember at the time there was a lot of media around throwing the Hare Krishnas out on the street because we had nowhere to go at this stage. It was like we'd all moved in again and once again the whole community in this amazing place and then the bulldozers come in. So there's pictures of Hare Krishnas standing in front of bulldozers and then there's pictures of like forty Hare Krishnas sitting on the side of the road with their suitcases: "Where are they going to go now?" and it was like a whole thing; the media really took up the cause over a period of many weeks, if not months, and there was all these amazing articles about the devotees and this Drummoyne temple. So there we were, stuck on the side of the road in Drummoyne with our suitcases, bulldozers coming in, bulldozing the building – this is May 1975. So we did have in Alexandria at the same time we had an incense factory, Spiritual Sky Incense, which was the largest manufacturer of incense in Australia at that time and around the world. So temporarily then – we had nowhere to go after Drummoyne - and so we all got on buses and we went to live in the factory, the incense factory, and so we set up a temple in the incense factory in Drummoyne [Alexandria?] and there we stayed and I was there for some time in this one as well.

SA: So by that stage you'd already moved to Sydney?

TK: I hadn't moved, I was travelling through, I was just travelling through. We were distributing books and so we travelled around Australia and I spent some time in Sydney and we would do some, because we'd sell books on the streets and things like that back in those days. And so I came through to Sydney and was in both those temples during that period.

74.13 Now, that was from November '74 to May '75. Now, May '75 to early '76 we went to Alexandria and set up at 98 Wyndham Street, Alexandria. So that's May '75 to early '76, once again eight or nine months, set this whole temple up, all the devotee community move in, get established, fifty, sixty, seventy devotees, all the worship, the whole thing, and then early '76 we're out again, we're on the road. That's why they used to call us the Aboriginal Hare Krishnas: we were always on the road and we're going walkabout, we're off on walkabout again. So we didn't walk so far this time. Early '76 to mid '79 - so we're looking at three and a half years now – we finally got a place for three and a half years where we kind of settled in in Surry Hills in 50 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills; that's just near Devonshire Street, comes off Devonshire Street so it's on this side. And so then we set up there. I was there for that temple for quite some time. Like it was a three storey terrace house and so, yes, that's where we set up shop and the temple and the ashrams, all moved in there up until the mid '79 period. And then in '79, et voilà, we came here to Darlinghurst and set up the temple here. This was an old squat, really. So we bought this temple for around about two hundred and eighty thousand dollars in 1979 as when we firstly got this place and bought it for about two hundred and eighty thousand dollars and we renovated it according to our requirements.

76.21 And in 1980 the guys next door here offered to sell us their property for three hundred and forty thousand dollars and we said "You must be kidding. Three hundred and forty thousand dollars, get real" - today it's worth six million but we all make mistakes. So here we are in Darlinghurst now since 1979 through till 1992. During that period I came back from my overseas travels in 1981 and became the temple president in this temple here for about ten years during this time and we acquired a lot of property around the area for the ashrams and for the devotee community and so, yes, we kind of put our roots down here and we were accepted within the community.

SA: Why here?

TK: Well, we were sick of moving, It's like it was either Arnhem Land or Kings Cross. We'd had so much kind of – we were on the road so much and everybody just wanted to go somewhere where they were accepted as a community where we could just put down our roots and stay, .

SA: Where you wouldn't get complaints from the neighbours?

TK: Yes, where the neighbours wouldn't complain, where the councils wouldn't complain, where we would just kind of be left alone and peaceful and do our thing and, hey, Darlinghurst at that you could do whatever you want, just like you can today. It's like a very forgiving neighbourhood, it's a very generous neighbourhood and I love Darlinghurst in terms of living; I think it's a wonderful place because people don't have attitude, people can be who you are and without any trips being laid; everybody can just be themselves in Darlinghurst so it's got that character to it, Darlinghurst, it's all-forgiving and all-accepting, it's part of the culture of Darlinghurst.

78.20 And so when we came to Darlinghurst we've never had one slightest bit of, no ripples at all. We just totally moved in here, become a part of the scene and here we are like thirty three years later we're still a part of the scene here now and established.

SA: Gee, it must have been a really different Darlinghurst in those days though, or Kings Cross.

TK: Yes, the basics were here. I mean, it's not – , it's at 'Darlinghurst Heights' if you don't mind; but it has changed, the area has changed and it's come up a lot, there's been so many good changes that are made in Darlinghurst now it's become like a really vibrant night scene here, it's the café scene, the restaurant scene, the club scene, it's become a really vibrant community and even the last few years it's just changed its character so much.

SA: So what was around here when you first came here then?

TK: There was kind of a lot of dilapidated places; there was a lot of vacant lots. Like that medical centre was just a car park, there was a few hotels, pretty kind of downbeat ones, a few kind of older places, backpackers, it was kind of a pretty run down, grungy area and then just gradually it's just come up, as the buildings have been renovated, improved or rebuilt and as the businesses have changed and as the area has changed. Now it's like it's become a very kind of, funky area, really. A lot of the younger people, more and more young people are coming into the area and a lot of the older folk who lived here, they've either moved out or a lot of them now have just passed away, because that's the nature of being old, you just don't hang around for too long.

80.12 And so, what's happened is the younger generations, the younger people have come in and the whole area has become, the demographic has become quite radically different. Now it's kind of young, it's street, it's kind of cool and it's very busy. It just like it's so much busier now than it used to be; it's become a very vibrant neighbourhood and so, yes, now we're situated in a location that's a really fantastic location.

SA: So when you first set this place up was it just a temple? Because now it's a restaurant and you show movies as well. So was it just temple and residence?

TK: Yes. Well, firstly when we came in here in '79 we renovated the building and this restaurant [Govinda's] was opened in 1980. So we renovated, we turned it into a restaurant. Upstairs was accommodation, downstairs where the meditation space is now, that was the temple and out the back where we now have a fashion store, that was a free food outlet called 'Mukunda's', so where we used to feed the out there back in the late '70s and '80s, through the '80s a lot of our finest politicians used to regularly eat there out the back at Mukunda's. So that's what the building was and then we had residential here as well but most of the devotees lived in houses and apartments around, scattered around this building. So like over in the Palisades I think we had six apartments over there and Royston Place across the road we had three or four apartments over there.

82.00 **SA: So you had your own apartments?**

TK: Yes. So we had our own apartments. So we built quite a big community. During the '80s there was somewhat like eighty, about eighty celibate monks and monkettes operating out of this centre, so it was a very big centre in terms of ashrams.

SA: So where did you get the money from to do this? Was this through book sales and - - -

TK: Krishna sends the money. You don't have to worry about anything; Krishna says "Surrender to me and I'll take care of everything" and he does. It comes from here and there and everywhere; we never had any money problems; somehow or another we never had to worry about money, it's just there. It's just like we just go about our daily activities and it seems to just fall from the trees.

SA: So you started the restaurant here in 1980 and why did you start, why did you want to start a commercial enterprise?

TK: It really wasn't a commercial enterprise and it really isn't a commercial enterprise now because we still lose as much money now, except probably more than we did in the beginning. But it's a fundamental part of our philosophy to – well, first of all, the fundamental part of our philosophy is to give this knowledge to others. It's based on a compassionate principle that we go to the cities and into populated areas for the purpose of giving other people the opportunity to come in contact with this philosophy, this way of life if they want to. So it's based on that compassionate principle and a part of the principle is that this food is not – it's called Prashadam, it's

not normal food. It's cooked with love and devotion by the Brahmans, offered to Krishna, so it's become what the Christians would call blessed or sanctified food – we call it spiritualised.

84.10

So the nature of the food becomes spiritual, the quality of it becomes spiritualised so that when you eat this food you become purified and spiritualised just by the eating process, so it's an important part of our philosophy. It's called Prashadam: Prashadam means "the mercy of God", so it's an important aspect of our philosophy to have restaurants and to give out free food or whatever because when people eat it they become spiritualised by just the process of eating and they don't know it, so it's happy food. It's a bit like that film – I don't know if you saw it – called 'Like Water for Chocolate'. Did you ever see that film? And she was cooking with such great love and devotion and it was like that consciousness permeated the food that when people ate it they would all start crying and feel great love and emotions themselves. So you are what you eat. So the food itself is of a spiritual nature, that when you eat it you feel really light and happy and blissful and that's why Govinda's is a very famous place not only because of the amazing cinema we have up there where you lie down on cushions and beds but because people for some reason or another they just think "Oh, yes, Govinda's, that's great and the food's great" and it is a special place and people feel that. They don't maybe analyse it but they just go "Yes, I love Govinda's"; they light up because they've been touched spiritually by the experience, really, even though they don't analyse it as such. So therefore, as I say, it's a part of our compassionate principle that we open up our centres and make them available to everybody and to take advantage. So very few people will come to a temple apart from Indians – they all go to the temples – but westerners are not inclined to go to temples and churches as such, they're much more inclined to, other kinds of avenues for their spiritual kind of evolvment and so we're kind of fairly dynamic the way we see things.

86.18

So that we just like to give everyone the opportunity, to connect with Krishna, whether that be through buying the latest outfit down at Lotus Pod, our fashion store, or whether it's just to go to a movie and watch a movie. They come to the movies and then they get to experience some part of the philosophy in terms of the books or just the ambiance, the atmosphere, the food, the pictures, the music, they connect; even if they're just going to go to the movie they're someone touched anyhow spiritually by that experience. So to us it's just like you open it up to everyone and make it attractive to everyone so that everyone can take advantage, not just a few. It's like we look at everyone a hundred per cent, everybody, and whatever they are and to make arrangements where everybody can connect. Now, we have downstairs like, purely spiritual programmes like our meditation evenings, our kirtan evenings which is the sacred chants with music or our personal meditation evenings. We do classes and seminars and courses on the philosophy, Bhagavad Gita, we do all kinds of

things that are purely kind of spiritual in terms of the way people would think spiritual is. So that's there but at the same time, how many people are going to do that or want to do that? That's a select few that ever want to go to that point but everybody wants to go to the movies. So, hey, instead of going out to a multiplex come to Govinda's and catch a movie, right, and at least that you come through and you are somewhat touched even though you don't know it, by Krishna, see if you're spiritually touched and that will be to your eternal benefit.

88.07 **SA:** **So when did you start the movies as well?**

TK: '85.

SA: **Right.**

TK: Yes. So the restaurant we started in 1980 and then in '85 we decided to put in a theatre for the purposes of doing plays and dramas and having kind of concerts and showing spiritual films and that's where it started. And then after then it kind of evolved in "Well, why don't we just open it up and make it more accessible to the general public?" So we then began to screen classic films and art house films, the foreign masters, the black and whites. Like for the first two or three or four years like that we were an art house cinema and so we got the art house crowd would come to that. But then gradually the interest in an art house was fading, TV was taking – you have all these influences coming into effect, so the interest was becoming, decreasing interest in that type of genre. And so we decided "Well, anyhow", then we connected it with – then the restaurant and the cinema were separate. You either came to the restaurant or you went to the movies, it's like they weren't together and then we thought "Well, why don't we combine it and make a package", go to the movies, come and have something in the restaurant if you wanted to or you can do either/or. And so when we did that we decided "Well, if we're going to do that we have to be much more general in our programming because we have to make that accessible to everything, we have to put films on that everybody will want to see". So therefore when I programme now I always make sure that there's some art house in there, there's quality mainstream and that there's one or two films there that just the masses that go to multiplexes, they'd be interested in seeing. So it's kind of a general programme and it enables everybody to basically find something there that is of interest, so it's not too narrow, although I have a personal, narrow interest in film, but just the principle is to make it accessible to everyone.

90.04 And so that way everybody – see, even our spiritual programmes down there, most of the people that are coming to them are coming from just going onto our website to check out what movies are on and then they see "Oh, that looks cool. They do meditation down there. Man, I wouldn't mind meditating" and so they come and do meditating.

“Oh, they’ve got a concert down there. Oh, that looks like an interesting concert; I’ll go to the concert”. So it kind of exposes the core to the masses, to everybody through making a broad programme so everybody will connect and then they can go wherever they want, it’s like a kind of a wish fulfilling tree here: you can get whatever you want here. It’s like Alice’s Restaurant, whatever you want you can get it here. And so if you want perfection in spiritual realisation, yes, that’s there or, as I say, if you just want the latest dress off the catwalk in Paris it’s there as well, so it’s whatever you want.

SA: So when did you start the shop?

TK: Started the shop six years ago, Lotus Pod, and we now have six of those throughout Sydney and they're the engine room that kind of make it all work because the other aspects of this world are not really that financially viable - they don't operate at a profit in other words – and so we subsidise all our other programmes and all our other initiatives are subsidised by the profits that we make from the fashion stores.

SA: Right. Now, the Hare Krishnas definitely to me look like you’ve toned down your whole image, the whole, the robes, and it doesn’t look quite – your presence just looks different to what it used to look.

92.05 TK: Yes. Now, well, if you have a look at the early ‘70s when the devotees, Krishna Consciousness began in Australia and when you have a look and say from the mid ‘60s on in America you’re looking at Krishna Consciousness taking root in the hippy community amongst the teenagers, really, and the very early twenties, it was a very youthful movement and so all those that were joining were coming from the youth movement. So the movement grew very quickly but there was thousands and thousands of young people, they were all young; there was no old people in the movement apart from Prabhupada, the spiritual master, everybody was young. And when I say “young” they’re either teenagers or they were very early twenties – like twenty five was like an old man. So you’ve got a very youthful movement which is a revolutionary movement at this stage because it’s like all of a sudden it’s out there and it’s just a revolution. And that’s also very attractive to young people, to join a revolution: “There’s a revolution happening here and this is a really amazing revolution”. And so you get thousands of people pouring into this revolution which has taken on the establishment so to speak in a peaceful way but it’s just an exciting thing so they spill out into the streets, chanting parties and all youthful, big, blissful smiles with their thongs on, dancing in their robes up and down the streets and people are just like, “There’s a whole revolution here, it’s a whole thing that’s just exploded on the scene in the western world”. And it’s very much an ashram based society, there’s no married people in it virtually, it’s

all celibate monks. And celibacy, when you're a celibate monk you get great energy and power and you just become like superman, actually, with when you don't dilute all that energy and spill it out.

94.14

So you have all these enthusiastic young people and spilling out into the streets and so you've got a revolution happening, the world, they're going to take over the world, right. And so this is what spills out into the streets in the '70s and that's why you get this huge – and this is also going on in the '80s. But by the mid '80s a lot of those kids are now in their mid thirties and heading towards forty. A lot of them have got married and have families and now to maintain the families other realities have come into their life like maybe you have to get a job and make some money to pay the rent and etcetera, etcetera. The dynamics are changing and although still young people are always coming in and joining the movement still the movement demographic is getting older, much older. And so you're getting a shift from an ashram based society which it began with a hundred per cent an ashram based society, now you're getting a society that is no longer ashram centred, it's centred on the individuals within their homes so to speak and the realities of their life. So the whole equation is changing a lot and we see this just gradually more and more and more. Now, those devotees that joined in the '60s and '70s are now in their sixties and seventies, they're sixties to seventies but not in the '60s, that's how old they are, they're in their sixties and seventies now and they're growing older, some of them, and now approaching eighty. So now you're getting a whole society which has just completely changed its character.

96.00

And it's also because of the change in demographic like that and just in time having to put into place all the structures, to put all that into place has meant that it's just not like a bunch of guys in a flat now with paying a little bit of rent and then just no cars or anything, just getting out there on the streets, it's just there's all of a sudden life has become somewhat complex again, it becomes more institutionalised in a way because you have to have structures, you have to have business, then you have to have finance and then you have lawyers then you have to have accountants and then all of a sudden you have this whole world that is created which you didn't really sign up for back in the '70s.

SA: So you still manage to – you were saying that detachment, just all your attachments just dissolved - - -

TK: Material attachments.

SA: Material, yes. So have you managed to maintain that, given the complexity of your movement?

TK: Yes. You're still detached from it all but there's a difference between also material attachments and spiritual attachments because you do

become attached to spiritual things; it's just you switch. You have to be attached to one or the other. I mean you just can't work through like floating around like a cloud, you've got to put your roots down and become attached to something. But you become detached from material things and then become attached to spiritual things but that attachment to spiritual things is quite different to the experience of being attached to material things, it's a blissful attachment. But there are other practical aspects of management, you have to manage things. I mean, you are living in the world, we have to interact with the world and we have all the responsibilities but at the same time you're always happy and you feel very light and blissful and whatever you're doing you're always connecting it to Krishna and so it's purely spiritual; it's just externally it looks different, .

98.14 **SA: And so your devotees, is it a growing number, is it static?**

TK: In terms of numbers it's just quite dramatically increasing all the time but it's in terms of the ashrams are not like that any more. It used to – as I say, it was an ashram focused movement in the beginning, now it's not an ashram focused movement, it's more of a congregational focused movement so that you have now in Sydney maybe, I don't know, tens of thousands of devotees living in the community out there in jobs, working; you would not even know that they were a devotee perhaps unless they told you. And so in terms of that it's increased dramatically. In terms of ashrams, the ashrams are no longer as vibrant as they used to be, there's not so many people who live in the ashrams.

SA: So what do you do then if you're saying it's more congregational? Like you've got particular ceremonies and spiritual practice that people gather for?

TK: It's more, you see the focuses are switched more from even the temple focus to an individual focus within the home, so what's happening is that the individuals are setting up temples within their own homes. It's a lot to do with just the realities of travel as well. You've got a temple situated say North Sydney and you may live over here, it's like travelling in peak hour. So the trend has been that each of the devotees have set up a temple in their own home so to speak and so therefore it's become much more home based, individually home based than temple centred and that's just the realities of the way things, I think, had to go, yes.

100.28 **SA: Now one thing we haven't – I mean, we touched on it earlier - was the 'Food for Life' programme. And I know you were saying that the shop used to be a free thing.**

TK: Yes, it was a free. We used to get a lot of complaints from the neighbours because as the area was coming up, the cafés and the restaurants, it was becoming a problem for them because there

Mukunda's was a very popular destination for the down and outs and so we used to have lines way down the street to get in and they'd be blocking other people, so the neighbours were starting to get a little bit agitated by it all. And we always wanted to keep kind of good relationships with our neighbours and so what we decided to do was to let the church do it a bit further down here at Rough Edges, so we would supply the food to the church at Rough Edges. And so that's what's happened for many years now, that Rough Edges comes and takes the food from here and serves it out down there and it's a bit further away from this area here.

SA: But also too you have food vans as well.

TK: Yes, we do have food vans working out of the North Sydney temple because the temple moved to North Sydney in 1992 and where it is today. So from '92 to now, the temple's at North Sydney. After the temple moved out of here, we continued to run this as a centre, as a restaurant and as a theatre and then, we have added the meditation space and the spiritual space downstairs where the temple used to be and then we've established a fashion store to basically fund all our programmes out the back.

102.27 **SA: Yes, I'm over in Newtown there so there's a food van that feeds a lot of people every night, I think.**

TK: Yes. Yes, every night they have a food van that goes out. Well, that was a decision we made also: rather than, agitate the neighbours we would become mobile and just take the food vans out and that way you could stop where places weren't so congested and there were open spaces where you weren't going to interfere with the local businesses. And so what we were doing there – we're doing as much now in terms of that - actually more, because we've got Rough Edges and our food van that goes out, plus we do the university also, University of Sydney. We supply them from here and the North Sydney temple at New South Wales University, at Sydney University at their vegetarian clubs. We supply them at cost really, the food like that, so we've got a fairly active food distribution programme still going and it's much bigger, actually, than it was previously. So every day, I guess we're feeding two, three, four hundred people a day out of our different centres.

SA: Pretty amazing.

TK: Yes, so that's still going on.

SA: Look, I think I've kind of run out of questions. So is there anything that you think that we should be talking or you'd like to add?

TK: I think we've pretty much covered the history through Sydney.

104.03 **SA:** **Maybe where to now?**

TK: Now? Well, now Sydney has got this centre here, we have the North Sydney temple since 1972, we have a centre which is a retreat centre at Otford which is just south of the national forest there which is twenty five acres of a beautiful retreat centre where we hold – we've made it available to the health and community and to the yoga community to run retreats, so that's fully booked out all year basically - it's a very vibrant centre. We have a community of twenty five devotees down there that run that centre and it's a very beautiful centre called Govinda Valley. So that's something, that's another initiative that we started seven years ago to really expand our penetration into the yoga fraternity and into the alternate community and making a facility which was really a facility for them to take advantage of in terms of doing their retreats and their workshops and things like that. We have an initiative which we're going to begin soon out west, to build a big temple out west for the Hindu community out there. We're just not quite sure exactly where at the moment but there's a burgeoning Indian community and it's making it difficult for our temple over in North Sydney to cope with the numbers that come; some festivals you might have five, six thousand people coming through and it's just becoming quite unmanageable to cope with those numbers.

106.00 So we have on the drawing board the idea to build a very big temple out west which will basically be for the Indian community. We already have a farm, the Sydney Farm, which is a little distance from Sydney but it's called the Sydney Farm out at the Hunter Valley, which is about a thousand acre farm where we're setting up, well, we have eighty cows up there that we're milking by hand but the whole project is basically a project, it's an environmental project, really, with organic agriculture where we don't use machinery, everything is done by hand. And there we're working with the refugees from Uganda and Africa that go up there and we give them a part of our land and irrigate it for them and then they grow their yams and things that they like growing. And so we're working with the Christian nuns up there; there's a monastery up there where the nuns take care of, hundreds and hundreds of these refugees that are just hanging around. They're just vegetating, nothing to do so they came to us and asked whether we could help with their programme and so we said "Sure". So that's a fairly recent development over the last six, nine months but that's working nicely where the refugees are coming in. Like, ten, twenty, thirty refugees come in and then they're down there, doing their agriculture, they milk the cows and so working with them. So I think that will develop further as well, so that's a big project. So there's a lot going on in Sydney in terms of different initiatives and structures and programmes and each one is quite different in its own way. It's all individually managed although we have a central governing body but each of the centres is quite autonomous in the

way they operate managerially and the way they develop programmes is all up to the individual management team of each centre.

108.08 **SA:** **So you still manage this place here?**

TK: Yes, yes, since 1981 but now it's not so much as a temple president but I just manage with my wife all the different initiatives that come out of this centre. And so that way each of the individuals create their own flavour and their own style of Krishna Consciousness and that way variety's the spice of life, it's not too institutional and it's not too kind of all one, it's like every place has its own variety of styles, so it makes life more interesting that way.

SA: **Well, that's great; I think that's a great place to finish the interview. So, Tony, thanks very much for your time today. That's wonderful, thank you.**

TK: Pleasure.

Interview ends