



January 2014

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

AN ISKCON COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATION
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

What We Can Learn From Nelson Mandela

by Radha devi dasi



Nelson Mandela 1918 – 2013

In the aftermath of Nelson Mandela's death, ISKCON's official statement highlights his appreciation for the *Bhagavad-gita* and his support for ISKCON's activities in South Africa. Mandela openly credited the *Bhagavad-gita* with helping him form effective strategies for bringing democracy to South Africa after decades of apartheid. Mandela made multiple visits to various ISKCON venues and was deeply impressed with Srila Prabhupada's accomplishments in spreading *Vaishnava* culture around the world. As servants of Srila Prabhupada, we appreciate anyone who learns from and admires our Founder-*Acarya*. Just as Mandela learned from Srila Prabhupada, *Vaishnavas* can also learn some important lessons from Mandela's life. Mandela's political activism came with great personal cost. As a family man with a law degree and burgeoning legal practice, Mandela faced repeated arrests and imprisonment for his political activities. This culminated in a life sentence for attempting to overthrow the apartheid government in 1962. He served over 27 years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement.

On his release from prison in 1990, Mandela joined negotiations with then South African President F.W. de Klerk to abolish apartheid and establish multiracial elections. In 1994, he led the African National Congress to electoral victory and became South Africa's first black

president. Having attained power, he created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, thus institutionalizing forgiveness and community building over retribution as the South African response to past abuses. One of the most striking lessons from Mandela's life is his dedication to working for the good of the many at the expense of his own personal well being. As a university educated attorney, Mandela could have accepted financial prosperity and social status for himself and his family. Instead, he was willing to sacrifice everything for a cause greater than his own limited self interest. When he was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1962, he made his famed "Speech from the Dock" in which he stated:

"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Mandela's life reminds us that there are ideals for which we should sacrifice temporary comfort and security. If material freedom is worth dying for, then what about transcendental knowledge? Can we forgo the possibility of a promotion at work or risk some social disapproval in order to support Lord Chaitanya's mission? Mandela's example tells us that we can and should.

In an interview less than a year after he had stepped down as the country's first black president, Mandela shared reflections of how prison changed him. Prison gave him time for introspection and helped him to realize that behind every seemingly ordinary person lay the potential of greatness.

Mandela said that at the height of the struggle against apartheid, he and other leaders were understandably angry at the humiliation and loss of dignity of those who suffered under the unjust policy. It meant their actions were driven by anger and emotion rather than by reflection and consultation. "But in jail — especially for those who stayed in single cells — you had enough opportunity to sit down and think," he said. This ability to objectively review his life is one of the factors in Mandela's greatness.

Finally, Mandela spoke increasingly about the importance of changing oneself. "One of the most difficult things is not to change society — but to change yourself,"

Continued on page 2

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Mukunda Goswami

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Hari-kirtan das

EDITORS
Mukunda Goswami
Radha devi dasi

PROOFREADING & EDITING
Haridasa das
Padma malini devi dasi

GENERAL CONSULTANT
Devaprastha das

DESIGN AND LAYOUT
Raj Dutia

Articles published in this newsletter are not necessarily the opinion of *Spiritual Perspectives* or ISKCON.

Mandela said in 1999 at a tribute to billionaire businessman Douw Steyn. He gave similar advice to his second wife in a letter written in 1981, noting that there are qualities “in each one of us” that form the basis of our spiritual life and that we can change ourselves by observing our reactions to the unfolding of life. This was the essence of Mandela’s greatness – not perfection, but the willingness to change himself for the better even if those who wronged him neither changed themselves nor recognized his change. These lessons from Mandela’s life are powerful tools when applied to our spiritual lives. Continually asking ourselves if we can make

a further sacrifice for our own spiritual growth, or to assist in the spiritual growth of others, is a means to fight spiritual complacency. Learning introspection and reviewing our lives from a neutral viewpoint will aid us in developing detachment. We need not be at the mercy of our own minds and material impulses.

Finally, a life dedicated to our own spiritual growth is, by definition, a successful life. And in Mandela’s life we see the significant power of personal transformation – by changing ourselves we have a real and meaningful opportunity to change the world.

Pope Francis is *Time’s* Person of the Year

By David Bauder, *Deseret News*, December 11, 2013
<http://bit.ly/14Xlx1S>

NEW YORK — *Time* magazine selected Pope Francis as its Person of the Year on Wednesday, saying the Catholic Church’s new leader has changed the perception of the 2,000-year-old institution in an extraordinary way in a short time.

The pope beat out NSA leaker Edward Snowden for the distinction, which the news magazine has been giving each year since 1927.

The former Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected in March as the first pope from Latin America and the first Jesuit. Since taking over at the Vatican, he has urged the Catholic Church not to be obsessed with “small-minded rules” and to emphasize compassion over condemnation in dealing with touchy topics like abortion, gays and contraception.

He has denounced the world’s “idolatry of money” and the “global scandal” that nearly one billion people today go hungry, and has charmed the masses with his simple style and wry sense of

humor. His appearances draw tens of thousands of people and his @Pontifex Twitter account recently topped 10 million followers.

“He really stood out to us as someone who has changed the tone and the perception and the focus of one of the world’s largest institutions in an extraordinary way,” said Nancy Gibbs, the magazine’s managing editor.

The Vatican said the honor wasn’t surprising given the resonance in the general public that Francis has had, but it nevertheless said the choice was a “positive” recognition of spiritual values in the international media.

“The Holy Father is not looking to become famous or to receive honors,” said the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi. “But if the choice of Person of the Year helps spread the message of the Gospel — a message of God’s love for everyone — he will certainly be happy about that.”

It was the third time a Catholic pope had been *Time’s* selection. John Paul II was selected in 1994 and John XXIII was chosen in 1962.

In Argentina on Wednesday, Padre Toto, one of the many “slum priests” the pope supported for years as archbishop of Buenos Aires, praised *Time* magazine’s selection.

“I think the recognition of *Time* magazine is good news, because Pope Francis embodies one of the values of a church that’s more missionary, closer to the people, more austere, more in keeping with the gospel,” Toto said. “He had the genius of knowing how to express this sense of the church and hopefully his way of being will catch on with other political leaders, business executives, and sports figures. His leadership is inspiring.”



Time magazine person of the year — Pope Francis

Researchers Say They Found Oldest Buddhist Shrine

By Binaj Gurubacharya, *Deseret News*, November 26, 2013
<http://bit.ly/1jLZpOT>

KATMANDU, Nepal — Archeologists in Nepal say they have discovered traces of a wooden structure dating from the sixth century B.C. that they believe is the world's oldest Buddhist shrine.

Kosh Prasad Acharya, who teamed with archeologists from Britain's Durham University, said that the structure was unearthed inside the sacred Mayadevi Temple in Lumbini. Buddha, also known as Siddhartha Gautama, is generally thought to have been born in about the sixth century B.C. at the temple site.

The findings were published in the December issue of the journal *Antiquity*.

Acharya said the traces were tested using radiocarbon and luminescence techniques, which found they dated from the sixth century B.C.

The archaeological team dug underneath previously known brick structures inside the temple, and experts from Scotland's University of Stirling examined and collected the samples, he said.

The team has been working on the site for the past three years.

Previously, a pillar installed by Indian Emperor Ashok with inscriptions dating to the third century B.C. was considered to be the oldest Buddhist structure, Acharya said.

"This finding further strengthens the chronology of Buddha's life and is major news for the millions of Buddhists around the world," Acharya said in an interview.

"Very little is known about the life of the Buddha, except through textual sources and oral tradition," Durham University archaeologist Robin Coningham said in a statement. "Now, for the first time, we have an archaeological sequence at Lumbini that shows a building there as early as the sixth century B.C."

Each year, tens of thousands of Buddhists visit Lumbini, 280 kilometers (175 miles) southwest of Kathmandu.

Followers believe Siddhartha, a prince, left his family and kingdom and meditated in the jungles of Nepal and India before achieving enlightenment.



<http://bit.ly/1jLZpOT>

Britain's Durham University archaeologist, Robin Coningham, and Nepalese archaeologist, Kosh Prasad Acharya, direct excavations within the Mayadevi Temple, uncovering a series of ancient temples contemporary with the Buddha as Thai monks meditate in the background

ISKCON Joins the World in Mourning the Death of Nelson Mandela

By ISKCON Communications Ministry, *ISKCON News* on December 6, 2013
<http://bit.ly/1cTY9jI>

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) joins the world in mourning and paying tribute to the foremost human rights icon of current times, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. We offer our condolences to the Mandela family and to the entire South African nation.

In 1990 at the age of 72, after 27 years of being imprisoned by the apartheid government, he reached out to his oppressors and chartered a peaceful transformation to democracy in a country where the minority was gripped with fear for what the future might hold. As a result of the forgiveness that he displayed and kindness that he extended, followers of the African National Congress (ANC) which he led, heeded his call for peace and reconciliation to prevail amongst all the people of South Africa. From the impoverished townships to sport fields to religious communities to parliament, Madiba (as he affectionately became known) worked his own special Madiba magic across the nation.

ISKCON was privileged to have Mr. Mandela visit their temple in Chatsworth, South Africa, in 1992 and discuss the teachings of the ancient scripture, *Bhagavad-gita*, over a meal at their Govinda's restaurant. During this visit Mr. Mandela with dignity but humility bowed before ISKCON Founder-*Acarya* His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and then asked "How did he do it?", meaning how did Srila Prabhupada spread Krishna consciousness all over the world. A discussion ensued about how Srila Prabhupada gave Krishna consciousness to all nationalities and types of people, without discrimination, and Mr. Mandela was deeply struck by this, and was very appreciative of Srila Prabhupada. He also very much appreciated the

teachings of the *Bhagavad-gita* which emphasises the equality of all living beings; as children of God we all deserve to share in God's gifts and to be treated with respect and dignity.

After becoming the country's first democratically elected President in 1994, President Mandela, once again visited the Hare Krishna temple. It was from this venue that he addressed the 10,000 strong Hindu community, as well as the nation, on the occasion of Diwali, the Festival of Lights and New Year. Diwali celebrates the return of the famed Lord Rama from fourteen years of exile and his coronation as King of Ayodhya. The community recognized the significant similarities between Lord Rama's struggle and His ultimate victory and that of President Mandela.

Mr. Mandela was much more than a champion of human rights, State President or Nobel Peace Prize recipient. He touched the lives of every single South African and made them feel safe and genuinely cared for. He was indeed the father of the nation, in the true sense of the term, genuinely striving for a better future for all his people. He was a leader, teacher and example for the whole world. He is, and will continue to be, a symbol of hope, faith and forbearance.

May the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna bless this great soul.



President Mandela with Bhakti Caitanya Swami

Continued on page 5



Nelson Mandela addressing the crowd (with Indradyumna Swami and late Bhakti Tirtha Swami)

Medical Students Take to *Gita* for ‘Cure’

By: Jamal Ayub, *The Times of India* on November 29, 2013

<http://bit.ly/1c8WLZk>

BHOPAL: Patients turn to them for healing but these medical students at the Gandhi Medical College (GMC) have found a balm in *Bhagavad-gita*. In a novel experiment, a group of students at the GMC have turned to the *Gita* for peace of mind and soul and to overcome stress. They attend weekly *Gita* classes organized by the Hare Krishna movement. *Gita* classes have turned out to be novocaine (a drug given to numb away pain) for the group of medical students.

“Sacred verses of the *Gita* could help these medical students to be fresh and humble,” said P. C. Das of the Hare Krishna Movement,

based out of Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. Das visits the GMC weekly to attend the classes that are held in the boys’ hostel.

“*Gita* sessions have done a world of good to me,” said Lincoln Verma, an intern doctor. “I always wanted to understand the *Gita*. After attending ten sessions, I feel I am a changed person mentally and at work too.”

Das told the *Times of India* that students, such as Lincoln, are in search of proper guidance because of their disenchantment with the system. “Anxiety and stress are taking a toll on this generation and teachings from the scared book have never been more relevant,” he said.

Four Ways to Embrace and Understand Your ‘Spiritual-But-Not-Religious’ Family Members

By Robert V. Taylor, *FoxNews.com*, December 16, 2012

<http://fxn.ws/19rhRb9>



<http://fxn.ws/19rhRb9>

Joining hands in prayer before a meal

Across the country, parents and grandparents constantly ask me, “How do I deal with family members who don’t share my faith yet tell me that they’re spiritual (just not religious)?” I respond by telling them that holiday gatherings present an opportunity to engage and embrace them.

I often hear, “My religious faith is so important to me that I don’t understand how people talk about being ‘spiritual.’” Or else they dismiss their kids or grandkids with, “Spiritual-but-not-religious just sounds like a cop-out; it’s wishy-washy to me.” Beneath such responses lie a gulf of misunderstanding that can be bridged.

The Pew Research Organization reveals that the “Nones” – those who self-identify as having no religious affiliation – now represent twenty percent of the population. For those under 30, it is thirty percent. Pew data consistently shows an upward curve in the number of people in the United States who are None. It is time to engage with them.

Among these 46 million Americans, two-thirds believe in God or a Higher Power, and half report that their spirituality is affected by

a connection to nature and the earth. The Nones are shaped by their rejection of organized religion’s focus on what they describe as money, power, rules, and an over abundance of politics.

Engage and embrace them with simple steps that require two things of you: the capacity to listen attentively and remaining compassionate in your conversation. Rigid posturing or anything perceived as proselytizing will serve to only deepen the divide. Your authentic curiosity offers the possibility of new connection between you. Here are four practical steps to engage and embrace your family members:

1. Ask about a spiritual experience that has shaped their life. You are likely to hear about the importance of yoga or meditation, the experience of awe revealed in nature, or the search for leading a life in which spirituality and authenticity co-exist. The responses will reveal a life that has been expanded and transformed by participating in something bigger than them. Be willing to reflect on an experience from your own life that speaks to similar truth or revelation about your experi-

ences of awe or a surprising experience that placed your life in the context of the sacred.

2. Engage in conversation about the importance of love and compassion. Avoid the language of religious dogma or rules unless you wish to end the conversation.

Many of the Nones view religious organizations as sidelining the central importance of compassion and love, ceding it to doctrinal purity or judgment. They place great importance on aligning acts and words about love and compassion. Most Nones are not looking for institutional based experiences but those that reveal a capacity to be generous, forgiving and responsive. As you talk with one another, allow yourself to be present to the conversation; in your attentiveness be willing to share your own stories of experiencing love and compassion.

3. Express your own doubts or questions about religion. Not because you intend to abandon your religion or faith but because doubt is a commonly shared human experience. Talking about your doubt reveals your authenticity and invites conversation. As you describe the new insights and faith practices that doubt has led you to, a new landscape of connection becomes possible. Be prepared for your spiritual—but not religious — family member to draw on spiritual wisdom and practices from a variety of traditions. Be aware of how they might connect with a practice from your own religious faith.

4. Invite a conversation about how spiritual values shape your respective lives. Defensive rigidity will not enhance the conversation! The spiritual-but-not-religious, and particularly those under 35, tend to have close non-sexual friendships with persons of the opposite gen-

der, friends from diverse religious, racial and cultural heritages and those of sexual orientations that differ from theirs.

Their spiritual values are typically inclusive and expansive. It is an enlivening way of being human to them. While they don't necessarily expect you to fully embrace their spiritual values they will be drawn to your authentic stories of how you integrate your spiritual values with the choices you make.

In each of these four steps, be willing to engage in stories that have shaped or changed you; those that have presented an invitation to see beyond an assumed belief or view. In your stories and those of your family member a shared connecting ground will be discovered. Approach each conversation with curiosity and a willingness to engage.

These four steps are usually not reserved for just one conversation, but are an opening to understanding and embracing one another. Beyond dismissing, judging or writing off the spiritual-but-not-religious each conversation will reveal a new appreciation for the depth and joy of your respective experiences of spirituality and religious faith.

In the spirit of the four steps a new tenderness, compassion and love will be discovered in your embrace of one another.

Robert V. Taylor is president of the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation in New York City which works to democratize peacemaking for a new generation of young leaders. He is the author of *A New Way to Be Human: 7 Spiritual Pathways to Becoming Fully Alive* (New Page Books 2012). He lives in Seattle and on a farm in rural Eastern Washington.



**Please send your
Thoughts, Opinions, Questions,
Comments, Concerns to:
feedback@mukundagoswami.org**

Personal Message...



Dear Friends,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

This is a Srila Prabhupada story. This was told by a Srila Prabhupada disciple. I can't vouch for its veracity, but it's probably a reasonable facsimile of what really happened.

Jayananda Prabhu was building the Ratha-yatra cart in San Francisco. He was invited to a darshan being given by Srila Prabhupada. At first he refused to come, saying that his clothes and skin were too covered with grease and grime and that these factors coupled with his lack of sleep would render him unfit to be in Srila Prabhupada's presence. After some time, however, because the devotee inviting him was extremely insistent, Jayananda Prabhu consented to come. Jayananda Prabhu sat in Srila Prabhupada's room along with several other devotees. They all sat on the floor with their backs resting against the wall.

Owing to lack of sleep, the wall support, and the warm room Jayananda Prabhu started to fall asleep. However, the devotee sitting next to him nudged him sharply with his right arm such that Jayananda immediately opened his eyes and sat erect looking alert and attentive. This happened three times.

The devotee doing the nudging thought Srila Prabhupada hadn't noticed his not-so-gentle prodding of Jayananda prabhu's ribs.

But on the third elbowing, Srila Prabhupada looked directly at the devotee sitting on Jayananda prabhu's immediate left, pointed his right forefinger at him, and said, "You leave him alone. He's doing more work than all of you put together."

I beg to remain,

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami
Mukunda Goswami

For lectures go to: <http://mukundagoswami.org/lectures>

