



February 2015

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

*Seeing the World through Spiritual Eyes
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami*

Charlie Hebdo – Protecting Religion

By Radha devi dasi

At least 12 people died in Paris in January after masked gunmen opened fire in the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*, a provocative satirical newspaper. The masked attackers, armed with automatic rifles, were heard shouting “Allahu Akbar” - God is great - as they stormed the office. Footage showed them shouting in French “we have killed *Charlie Hebdo* - we have avenged the Prophet Muhammed,” in an apparent reference to the magazine’s publication of controversial cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet.

One journalist who was in the magazine’s office during the shooting texted a friend to say he was alive, according to *The Daily Mail*. “There is death all around me.” Witnesses said the gunmen asked for cartoonists by name before murdering them. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has claimed responsibility for this assault.

Many people around the world have defended the right of *Charlie Hebdo* to publish inflammatory cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed in the wake of the massacre by Islamic extremists at its Paris offices and the subsequent attack on a kosher supermarket in which three gunmen killed 17 people.

Others, though, have noted that in virtually all societies, freedom of speech has its limits, from laws against Holocaust denial to racially motivated hate speech. Recently the Vatican and four prominent French imams issued a joint declaration that, while denouncing the Paris attacks, urged the media to treat religions with respect.

Pope Francis, who has called on Muslim leaders in particular to speak out against Islamic extremism, went a step further Thursday when asked by a French journalist about whether there were limits when freedom of expression meets freedom of religion.

“There are so many people who speak badly about religions, who make fun of them, who make a game out of the religions of others,” he said.

“They are provocateurs. And what happens to them is what would happen to (a man) if he says a curse word against my mother. There is a limit.”

As Vaisnavas, we may wonder how to respond to those who mock the Almighty. After all, *Srimad Bhagavatam* is full of examples where violence was used against those who opposed the Lord. While no one suggests that we slaughter atheists or execute the irreverent, do we take some satisfaction at seeing “instant karma” visited on those who are offensive?

Compassion, one of the twenty-six qualities of a Vaisnava, would indicate that we ought not to take pleasure in the suffering of anyone, no matter how offensive we may find them. Tolerance, another quality we are enjoined to develop, indicates that perhaps we should not take offense at other’s wrong doing. On the other hand, we are also told that one acceptable response to blasphemy is to kill the blasphemer.

One potent example of compassion and tolerance in the face of religious persecution is that of Haridasa Thakur. As punishment for his practice of *harinam sankirtan*, Haridasa was caned in 26 market places. Because of his spiritual potency, the beatings did not have the expected result of ending his life. However, when informed that the soldiers who were beating him would be killed for their failure to kill him, Haridasa arranged for his apparent death in order to protect those soldiers.

This history is significant in that Haridasa’s concern

for his tormentors extended to their material well-being and was not conditioned upon any change in their behavior or the public policy that condemned him to death for practicing his religion. While we do what we can to discourage those who mock religion and God, perhaps we do that best if we keep the example of Haridasa Thakur close to our hearts.



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Prabhupada's Books Sold Through Russian Bookstore Chain

By Olessia Podtserob, *ISKCON News* on January 9, 2015
<http://bit.ly/1EhAEAq>



The Russian language Bhagavad-gita

Moscow Vaisnavas have prepared a gift for all the Russian readers. Now A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's books are available in one of the leading bookstore chains in the country. All Bhaktivedanta Book Trust books can be bought in 204 stores of the chain in eighty Russian cities.

Bhaktivedanta Book Trust's participation in the Moscow International Book Fair, where the representatives of the "Chitai-gorod" store approached the book trust's managers and made a suggestion about presenting the books in their stores.

The books can also be bought in their internet-store. To find a shop in their city, customers need to visit the following link. (in Russian) <http://www.chitai-gorod.ru/shops/>

The bestselling BBT book is, naturally, the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Up to 75 of Srila Prabhupada's *Gitas* are sold monthly through this bookstore chain. This achievement was made possible due to the

Meet India's First Cow Minister Otaram Devasi

By Akshay Deshmane, *The Times of India* on January 9, 2015
<http://bit.ly/1woVnwa>



Otaram Devasi

NEW DELHI: His community—Rabaris, a livestock-dependent tribe traditionally—addresses him as "Bhopajj" or priest. He dresses up like a cowherd himself: a long white cloth wrapped around his bare torso, red turban, dangling earrings, etc. With a bamboo stick in tow, he walks into everywhere, even the chief minister's office in Rajasthan.

Otaram Devasi, 48, happens to be Rajasthan's minister in charge of cow affairs. As for himself, India's first-ever minister for the 'divine' bovine likes to address himself as "*gaupalan mantri*".

Bharatiya Janata Party and Vasundhara Raje had promised a separate ministry for cows in its poll manifesto. And when the party came to power with Raje as Chief Minister in December 2013, she promptly announced a ministry for the protection of cows, which was later

transformed to a "department" after the move struck a constitutional hurdle since states can't set up new ministries.

In October 2014, Devasi was made minister of dairy and *devasthan*—administration of temples that get government funds—with the extra charge of the "*gaupalan* department". His responsibility also includes overseeing Rajasthan's *Gau Seva* Commission and Cow Conservation Directorate.

Three months into his tenure, Devasi says he is proud of what he has done with securing the future of cows in this desert state. And he believes he has set up a department for the rest of India to emulate should any other state want to follow this "Rajasthan Model."

Devasi, who himself owns "20-25 cows," wants the canvas for cow protection to be bigger. "I have sought an appointment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the Union budget

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so that I can impress upon him the urgent need to set up a cow ministry at the Center,” Devasi said.

“I believe if cows have to be saved then every state in India must have separate ministries for cows,” he says, insisting that he’s not being just rhetorical. So what about buffalos, goats, even the state’s official animal, the camel? Devasi dismisses the question, almost chiding you for being naive.

“Cows have a spiritual importance unlike other livestock animals. They must be protected at any cost. I would request Modiji to ban cow

slaughter and, if need be, introduce strong legislation for that,” he says.

For Rajasthan, there are three things high on his agenda: clamping down on rampant cattle smuggling, introduction of a helpline number on the lines of 108 ambulance services to help cattle in distress, and starting a one-of-its-kind “sanctuary” for cows near Bikaner or Jaisalmer.

By sanctuary, he means a protected area full of green grass not far from the desert so that the cows, especially those of the indigenous breed, can eat and live in peace.



Newly appointed Cow Minister Otaram Devasi (left) and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (right)

Finding India’s Spiritual Culture in America

By Isvara Puri Dasa, for *Dandavats.com* on December 26, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1zwKMq3>

I am Indian by origin, but I came to the U.S.A. as a graduate student in January of 1964. I was part of the first wave of immigrants from my country, and we all found this place very different. So many colors of people and so many types of landscape. Above all, there were so many opportunities. In America, even a janitor could own a car!

Of course, more opportunities meant more ways to engage in sinful activity as well. Although I was raised as a vegetarian and even attended a strictly vegetarian college in India, I never really knew the reason. So when I got my graduate student visa to attend the University of Arizona,

some of my relatives in India decided to give me practice in eating mutton and chicken before I left. They kept telling me to get used to it, because meat was all that was available in the U.S.

After graduation, I stayed in New York for five years, from 1967 to 1972. There I was told about a place that looked like a Hindu temple you might find in Bombay but full of white Americans. Since there was no other place to worship nearby, I decided to check it out.

One weekend, I went to Henry Street in Brooklyn and discovered the Hare Krishna Sunday Love Feast. I didn’t recognize most of the mantras

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being chanted, but when I heard the last phrase of the prayer to Lord Narsimha *jaya jagadisa hare* I thought I must be in the right place.

I was used to visiting temples and seeing holy people, but I was amazed at how dedicated and happy these Western devotees were. That first visit would not be my last.

As one of the “senior” Indians in New York (and as one of the few owners of a car), I used to take newly arrived friends and relatives around to interesting places in the city. The Henry Street Hare Krishna temple quickly became one of the standard attractions on my tours, especially since my guests could get free Indian food.

One day, however, was especially memorable. As I entered the temple, I was surprised to see an Indian sadhu sitting at the front of the room, being fanned by two devotees. Although I had seen many such persons before, he looked especially serious and focused. Still, the first thought that came to my mind was, “Here is another Indian who has come to America to make dollars, just like me.” Nevertheless, as I heard from Srila Prabhupada on this and a few other occasions, his speaking was so powerful, and the chanting he led so joyful, that I started to realize there was a difference between the two of us after all.

Marriage to a Pious Hindu

After working for a few years in New York and other cities, I returned to India to get married. I was keen on finding a pious girl interested in religion. Not only had my visits to the ISKCON

temple impressed me, but I had also been reciting the *Hanuman Chalisa* every Tuesday and Saturday for many years, ever since my mother had recommended it as a cure for depression. Among the several girls I met, one came from a family of faithful Durga worshipers. She had also been raised vegetarian, and she would fast every Tuesday, since that is Durga’s day. (At that point, I wasn’t

so particular about whom she worshiped, as long as she worshiped.) I expressed my interest, and things moved quickly after that: I met Pushpa my first Tuesday in India, the following Tuesday we were engaged, and the next Tuesday we were married. When she joined me in America, we bought a house in Cleveland, Ohio. I chose a place near the local ISKCON temple, and even though we did not follow the regulative principles so rigidly, I made sure we attended the Sunday feast every weekend.

Over the years, one of the most appealing things to me about the Hare Krishna movement has been how everything that the devotees do is rooted in the same Hindu tradition I grew up with, but somehow they make everything clearer and more meaningful. Whereas I used to attend *pujas* only on special occasions, devotees go to the temple to chant and worship everyday, or even several times a day. What is more, they have a clear purpose in mind to please the Supreme Lord Krishna and grow closer to Him whereas I used to do religious things mostly out of tradition and habit. Now, I truly relish my daily chanting and reading, through which I feel God’s presence with me always.

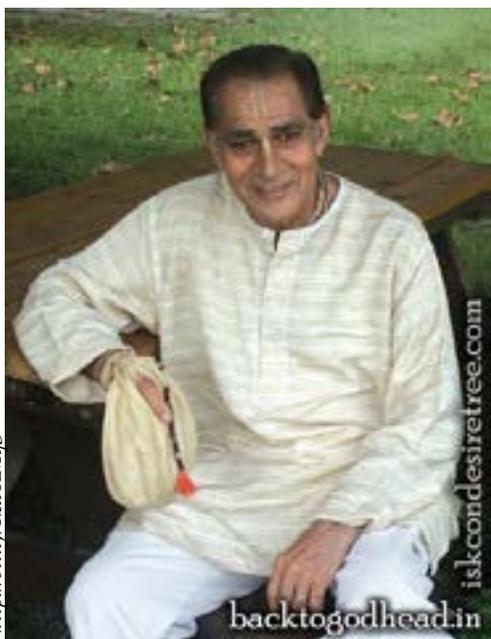
Another difference is the lectures. In every other Hindu temple I’ve ever been to, the featured speaker gives a discourse usually with jokes and popular songs interjected and then everyone leaves. But in ISKCON, hearing is serious business. After every class, the speaker will ask for questions. This caught me off guard the first few times: Was I supposed to really be listening? I thought just being there was enough. Now, I really enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to learn, and I am a regular inquirer.

Learning About Personalism

The biggest difference between the Hinduism I was familiar with and Srila Prabhupada’s Krishna consciousness has to do with the issue of personalism. Only in ISKCON did I learn the truth behind the different devas and the actual nature of God; everywhere else these topics just got waved away with a quick “Everything is one.” I have even developed a “Mayavadi Diagnostic Test,” which I use to help my relatives and other Indians understand the difference between personalism and impersonalism.

For these reasons and more (like prasadam!), I continued to regularly attend feasts and festivals at my local Hare Krishna temple through both the birth of my two children and our family’s eventual move to Irvine, California. Here, the closest

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An Indian immigrant to America discovers the true substance of the religion of his youth

temple is in Laguna Beach and is presided over by Sri Panca Tattva (Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His four main associates). The president at the time, Bada Haridasa, and his wife, Kosarupa, eventually convinced my family to become vegetarian and to enroll as ISKCON Life Members. We then made further spiritual progress when we started attending the Nama Hatta programs of Nirantara Dasa every weekend, held in homes throughout southern California.

Meeting My Guru

The final step in my capture by Krishna was when I met my spiritual master. I've always been interested in shooting home videos, so when we hosted His Holiness Bhakti Caru Swami for a home program in 2000, I asked how I could participate in his film biography of Srila Prabhupada, *Abhay Charan*. I thought he would let me be part of the camera crew, or even perform, but instead he said he was looking for a mature person to drive around the main actor, Somayajulu. I decided to take the assignment, and somehow being in the association of devotees day and night for three weeks inspired me to maintain the regulative principles and chant sixteen rounds on my beads like everybody else.

Over this same time period, I felt inspired by Bhakti Caru Swami, and in June of 2003 my wife and I took initiation from him at the New Dwarka temple in Los Angeles. Since that time, my devotional life has become much more active. I've found a novel and interesting way to learn *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* in the

form of Nirantara Dasa's home-study program. He has created open-book tests based on the English translations for each chapter in these scriptures, and he sends and grades them via e-mail.

I also try to share Krishna consciousness with those I meet. When I go for my daily japa walk, people often initiate a conversation with me when they see my bead bag. Usually they think I've broken my hand, but then I explain the chanting to them and give them an invitation to the Laguna Beach temple. Once, the manager of a local supermarket asked about my neck beads. I told him they were made from a special plant called Tulasi, which grows in India and is spiritually powerful. He wanted to know where he could buy some for himself, because he was going through a divorce and was feeling very stressed. I brought him a spare set the next day, and when we met several weeks later, he thanked me. He has even started chanting.

As for the future, I am currently working toward getting second (*brahminical*) initiation, and I'm also trying to plan the *vanaprastha* (retired) stage of my life. My wife and I got so much out of participating in the thirty-day *Vraja Mandala Parikrama* that His Holiness Lokanath Swami organizes every year that we're thinking of moving back to India. Although it is tempting to live in either Vrindavan or in my spiritual master's home base of Ujjain, thanks to Srila Prabhupada I know I will be able to make spiritual progress wherever I go. And I'll never forget that it wasn't until I left India to come to America that I learned what my native culture was really all about.

UN to Declare June 21 As World Yoga Day: Sushma Swaraj

By PTI, *The Times of India* on December 12, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1wlyppL>

NEW DELHI: The United Nations will soon declare June 21 as World Yoga Day following a proposal by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said on Sunday.

"Three months ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had appealed to the world community that India's yoga should be celebrated as World Yoga Day. I am happy to inform you that we have received support of 170 nations and four days from today, the United Nations will declare June 21 as the World Yoga Day," Swaraj said at a function in the presence of yoga guru Ramdev.



Narendra Modi addressing the UN in New York

ISKCON Launches Official Website on Prabhupada

By ISKCON News Staff, *ISKCON News* on January 9, 2015
<http://bit.ly/17YB0S6>

ISKCON now has an official website on its founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. The website is full of information on Prabhupada's accomplishments and teachings, and it includes a graphic timeline of Prabhupada's life, photos, videos, and links to Srila Prabhupada's books.

The website is intended to be a place for people (especially those unfamiliar or just getting to know about Krishna consciousness and ISKCON) to learn about Srila Prabhupada.

The website is available at www.prabhupada.net



<http://bit.ly/17YB0S6>

*The Founding Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness,
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

Moral Madness

By Krishna Dharma Dasa, krishnadharmadharma.com on January 15, 2015
<http://bit.ly/1GACvFC>

Krishna Dharma Dasa lives in England.

Every autumn for the last few years I have been subjected to a sad and harrowing experience. Living close to a livestock farm I have had to listen to the plaintive wails of distressed cows separated from their calves. Where the calves were taken does not bear mentioning, and the poor cattle respond by crying piteously day and night, exactly as any human mother would if she were to lose a child.

It must be a strange quirk of modern morality that our society finds no difficulty treating cows in this way. The same can be said for the whole slaughterhouse industry. How do we brook it so lightly? Especially as our society becomes increasingly sensitive to animal cruelty, with charities such as the RSPCA bringing many successful cases to court that have seen some people receive custodial sentences. Recently a man was jailed for hunting badgers with a dog, and another was fined for shooting a seagull. But when it comes to the

meat industry it seems that any amount of cruelty is acceptable.

It is fairly common knowledge that animals are individuals like us; they have their own personalities, as any pet owner will testify. The other day I was out for a walk when a huge hound bounded over to me and began to snarl and bark loudly. As I backed away, trying to remember if my life insurance premiums were up to date, the owner thankfully appeared. "Don't worry about her," he reassured me, "she just wants to talk." He told me that she was a "bit cranky in the mornings." That's all right then, no problem if she takes a lump out of my leg. But the point of course is that the dog, like every one of us, has personal characteristics. The body is different, but the soul within is the same. In the *Bhagavad-gita* Krishna tells us that every living being is an equal part of himself, the supreme whole.

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Our culture has always personalised animals in so many ways. How can I forget my funny childhood friends, Yogi Bear, Top Cat and Huckleberry Hound? They may have made way for Spongebob Squarepants and Sonic the Hedgehog, but the same idea is there – animals can be just like us. It is not at all uncommon for children to want to become vegetarians as they realize that Larry the Lamb is the joint of meat on their plate. I remember years ago my sister arguing with my mum and dad. “How can we eat animals? Isn’t it cruel?” Don’t be silly, she was told; they are meant to be our food. What else is the point of their existence?

The Vedas tell a different story. Like any human, animals are living beings in this world trying to enjoy. Just our bodies differ, but our basic desires are the same. We all want happiness. Sometimes, due to the nature of our desires, we may be obliged to accept an animal body. In fact the word used in the Vedas for meat is *mamsa*, which means, “you shall be me (if you eat me).”

All creatures are beloved to God as his parts or progeny, and we should not abuse any of them just because we can. Would any father be pleased if his stronger and more capable sons abused and killed another child who was weak and helpless? Even

if that other child was dumb and entirely foolish, would it be right to kill him?

There is a terrible unseen price to be paid when we slaughter helpless creatures. Apart from the fact that we run the risk of taking birth in the animal species ourselves, to receive similar treatment, Vedic wisdom also directly links war and similar catastrophes to animal killing. Srila Prabhupada writes in *Srimad Bhagavatam*:

“In this age of Kali the propensity for mercy is almost nil. Consequently there is always fighting and wars between men and nations. Men do not understand that because they unrestrictedly kill so many animals, they also must be slaughtered like animals in big wars. This is very much evident in the Western countries. In the West, slaughterhouses are maintained without restriction, and therefore there are big wars in which countless people are slaughtered even more cruelly than the animals. These are reactions brought about by unrestricted animal-killing in the slaughterhouse and by hunters in the forest.”

Perhaps as we wonder how to end so many deadly conflicts all over the world, and as other wars always seem to loom on the horizon, we should ponder our treatment of poor animals. There is so much food we can eat other than meat.



**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.

It's interesting that even over 40 years later revisions to Srila Prabhupada's books are still taking place. When I read the purport to *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* 8.16, I got confused at the passage (translated from Sridhara Swami) that read, "When there is devastation of this material universe, Brahma and his devotees, who are constantly engaged in Krishna consciousness, are all transferred to the spiritual universe and to specific spiritual planets according to their desires." So finally I wrote to Dravida Prabhu (who is closely connected with the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) because this passage seemed to conflict with the verse ("From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to My abode, O son of Kunti, never takes birth again.")

It seemed like all the residents of Brahmaloaka were constantly engaged in Krishna consciousness, and that they all automatically went to the spiritual universe at the time of devastation.

Dravida Prabhu eventually wrote back that the placement of commas was what caused the confusion; that the commas would be removed in future versions. Abbreviated correspondence appears below:

MG: Do ALL the residents of Brahmaloaka (BL) go Back to Godhead automatically or to "spiritual planets according to their desires at a time of devastation?" That is what BGAI (copyright 1989, 8.16/purport) seems to indicate. An encyclopaedic selection would support this, i.e.:

Restrictive example:

The officer helped the civilians who had been shot.

or

The officer helped those civilians who had been shot.

In this example, there is no comma before "who." Therefore, what follows is a restrictive clause (not all of the civilians had been shot).

Non-restrictive example:

The officer helped the civilians, who had been shot.

DP: Thank you. You've caught a significant error in the *Bhagavad-gita*, and as is often the case, the error can be traced back to an editing mistake...Yes, and the absence of commas is essential, as you've pointed out.

The passage in question now reads (in the VedaBase and all subsequent printings, both English and foreign-language):

"When there is devastation of this material universe, Brahma and the devotees who are constantly engaged in Krishna consciousness are all transferred to the spiritual universe and to specific spiritual planets according to their desires."

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

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

