



# SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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

## Can Atheists Have “Good Qualities?”

By Radha devi dasi

“All the demigods and their exalted qualities, such as religion, knowledge and renunciation, become manifest in the body of one who has developed unalloyed devotion for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vasudeva. On the other hand a person devoid of devotional service and engaged in material activities has no good qualities. Even if he is adept at the practice of mystic yoga or the honest endeavor of maintaining his family and relatives, he must be driven by his own mental speculations and must engage in the service of the Lord’s external energy. How can there be any good qualities in such a man?”  
*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.18.12

And yet research leads us to believe that atheists have some good qualities. More and more western households are rejecting religion and raising their children with secular values. The numbers keep growing. 23% of American adults reject religion and that rises to 30% among younger adults. Such a phenomenon is not surprising in light of the breakdown of the traditional family. In fact, Krishna predicts in *Bhagavad-gita* that a break down in family ties will lead to a loss of religious principles.

What is surprising is the finding that children raised in such households seem to function well in society. Far from being dysfunctional, nihilistic and rudderless without religion, secular households provide a sound and solid foundation for children, according to Vern Bengston, a USC professor of gerontology and sociology.

For nearly 40 years, Bengston has overseen the Longitudinal Study of Generations, the largest study of religion and family life in the United States. When Bengston noticed the growth of nonreligious Americans becoming increasingly pronounced, he decided in 2013 to add secular



<http://evm.nr11EAcuUx>

families in an attempt to understand how family life and inter-generational influences play out among those lacking religion.

He was surprised by what he found: High levels of family solidarity and emotional closeness between parents and nonreligious youth, and strong ethical standards and moral values that had been clearly articulated as they were imparted to the next generation.

Other findings bear out Bengston’s conclusions. Studies have found that secular teenagers are far less likely to care what the

“cool kids” think. When these teens mature into “godless” adults, they exhibit less racism than their religious counterparts, according to a 2010 Duke University study. Many psychological studies show that secular grownups tend to be less vengeful, less nationalistic, less militaristic, less authoritarian and more tolerant, on average, than religious adults.

One telling fact from the criminology field: the unaffiliated and the nonreligious engage in far fewer crimes. Another meaningful related fact: Democratic countries with the lowest levels of religious faith and participation today — such as Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Belgium and New Zealand — have among the lowest violent crime rates in the world and enjoy remarkably high levels of societal well-being. If secular people couldn’t raise well-functioning, moral children, then a preponderance of them in a given society would spell societal disaster. Yet quite the opposite is the case.

Yet the Vedic literatures are chockfull of examples of pious kings and saintly leaders who espouse principles of religion in order to protect society from sinful behavior. Krishna appeared, in part, because the Earth was burdened by the sinful acts of her impious kings. The fratricidal war between the Pandavas and the Kurus was fought to put the saintly King Yudhisthira on the throne instead of his atheist cousin. Why all of this effort if religion is not needed for moral behavior?

A little thought reveals, however, that the discrepancy does not necessarily stem from the idea of a “moral athe-



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## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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ist.” Our own Vaisnava history includes examples of mundane piety from those opposed to the worship of God. In the *Chaitanya Bhagavat*, Vrindavan dasa Thakura’s descriptions of the materialistic citizens of Navadvipa make clear that a failure to believe in the Supreme Personality need not go hand in hand with criminal behavior.

A more likely reason for the surprising comparison between the secular and the religious is simply that so many of us label ourselves as “religious” without truly living the life that such a label would demand. In this modern age of celebrity

journalism and out of control consumer advertising, it is the image that matters rather than the substance. We call ourselves Vaisnavas, Christians, Muslims, etc. and think the job ends there.

In fact, religious life is a challenge to purify our activities and desires. If we are not engaged in that work, then we are “religious” in name only. As Vaisnavas, we have the moral roadmap of the 26 qualities of a devotee to guide our actions. It is not enough to wear the tilak and the *harinam* chaddar. We have to be sure that our actions are in line with the values that go with those decorations.

## Indian Scriptures Mention Gravity 1500 Years Before Isaac Newton: Former ISRO Chief G. Madhavan Nair

By *All India Press Trust of India*, on February 21, 2015

<http://bit.ly/1AYMr2O>

NEW DELHI: One of the country’s leading scientists and former ISRO chairman, G. Madhavan Nair, today propounded the theory that some shlokas in the Vedas mention the presence of water on the moon, and that astronomy experts like Aryabhata knew about gravitational force much before Isaac Newton.

The 71-year-old Padma Vibhushan awardee said the Indian Vedas and ancient scriptures also had information on metallurgy, algebra, astronomy, maths, architecture and astrology way before the western world knew about them. Speaking at an international conference on the Vedas, he added that the information in the Vedas was in a “condensed format,” which made it difficult for modern science to accept.

“Some shlokas in one of the Vedas say that there is water on the moon but no one believed it. Through our Chandrayaan mission, we could establish that and we were the first ones to find that out,” Mr. Nair said, adding that everything in the Vedas could not be understood because of the difficulty encountered in understanding the Sanskrit.

He also talked very highly about fifth century astronomer-mathematician Aryabhata, saying, “We are really proud that Aryabhata and Bhaskara



*Former ISRO Chairman G. Madhavan Nair*

have done extensive work on planetary work (sic) and exploration of outer planets. It was one of the challenging fields,” said Mr. Nair.

“Even for Chandrayaan, the equation of Aryabhata was used. Even the (knowledge of) gravitational field . . . Newton found it some 1500 years later . . . the knowledge existing (in our scriptures),” he added.

Mr. Nair, who was ISRO chairman from 2003 to 2009, also claimed geometry was used to make calculations for building cities during the Harappan civilization and that the Pythagorean theorem also existed since the Vedic period.

Mr. Nair’s comments come against the backdrop of many BJP leaders talking about ancient Indian scriptures having scientific informa-

*Continued on page 3*

tion, including sections on plastic surgery and aerodynamics.

“The Vedas had a lot of information in the field of space and atomic energy. We were fine until 600 B.C. Then came the time of invasions till Independence. Since then, we are growing. We deciphered the atoms for peaceful use,” Mr. Nair said.

While serving in ISRO, Mr. Nair had made significant contributions to the development of multi-stage satellite launch vehicles. “As a scientist,

I would say that the computations evolved during those days were really fantastic. The *Vedanga Jyotisa* (one of the earliest books on astronomy) is one of the texts which evolved in approximately 1400 B.C., and is all recorded,” he said. “These are the fundamental findings which the Western world did not have any knowledge of. The only drawback was this information was condensed to bullet form and modern science does not accept this. And to read the Vedas, one must also know Sanskrit,” Mr. Nair added.

## Mummified Monk in Mongolia ‘Not Dead,’ Say Buddhists

By Contributor *BBC News*, on February 5, 2015  
<http://bit.ly/1GoaGfi>

A mummified monk found preserved in Mongolia last week has been baffling and astounding those who uncovered him. Senior Buddhists say the monk, found sitting in the lotus position, is in a deep meditative trance and not dead.

Forensic examinations are under way on the remains, found wrapped in cattle skins in north-central Mongolia.

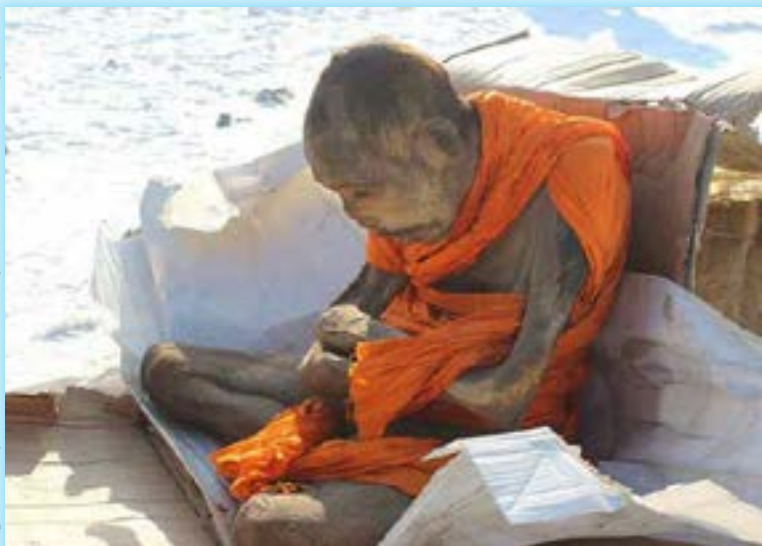
Scientists have yet to determine how the monk is so well-preserved, though some think Mongolia’s cold weather could be the reason.

But Dr. Barry Kerzin, a physician to Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, told the *Siberian Times* that the monk was in a rare state of meditation called “tukdam.” “If the meditator can continue to stay in this meditative state, he can become a Buddha,” Dr. Kerzin said.



*The monk was found wrapped in traditional Buddhist robes*

<http://theadaily meditation.com/200-year-old-buddhist-monk-found-turkdem-state/>



*Senior Buddhists say the monk, found sitting in the lotus position, is in a deep meditative trance and not dead*



# The Swastika, an Ancient Symbol of Prosperity, Struggles to Overcome Nazi Connections

By Antonia Blumberg, *The Huffington Post*, on February 2, 2015  
<http://huff.to/1MNM3Lb>

For many around the world, the swastika is a sign of genocide and hatred, reviled for its association to the Nazi party. But for centuries before the Holocaust, and to this day, the swastika represented something very different for millions of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains across the globe.

## An 'auspicious' symbol

The symbol bears special significance for one 18-year-old born and raised in India. She is a poet, student, and interfaith activist, and her name is Swastika Jajoo. The name is not uncommon in India, where the swastika is a revered symbol in many of its faith traditions. Though the symbol has always played a central role in Jajoo's life, the meaning of the swastika to her has begun to shift as she mulls the prospect of studying abroad.

Jajoo, who was featured in a *Huffington Post* article in November after winning a teen writers' award from online magazine "KidSpirit," is considering using a shortened nickname when she pursues academic studies in Europe or the United States -- a bittersweet reality for a teenager born and raised in a Hindu family in India, where the swastika is revered.

"The swastika is emblematic of prosperity that extends beyond the individual to all four directions of the world," Jajoo told *The Huffington Post* by email. "My parents wanted a daughter with infectious goodness, enthusiasm and love for life [...] and so they decided to give me the name Swastika."

The word "swastika" translates to "well-being" from its original Sanskrit, and it has long been

considered an auspicious symbol by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, as well as in Mesopotamian, Mayan and other indigenous civilizations around the globe.

"[The swastika is] 3,000 years old and maybe more," Devdutt Pattanaik, an Indian mythology researcher and author, told *HuffPost* by email.

In India, the swastika is "as common as the cross is in Europe and America," he said. It's often featured in Hindu homes, on temples and in artwork. Many draw the swastika on accounting books and in their offices to affirm prosperity, as Manav Lalwani, a Hindu American young professional, does and his father and grandfather did before him. Lalwani is the director of product development at a manufacturing company in New Jersey, which his father owns with three Jewish business partners.

The hooked cross occupies four corners of a square, Lalwani said, which can indicate that "God pervades all directions."

Pattanaik said he doubted many in India were aware of the swastika's association to Nazi Germany, though some, like Jajoo, may understand the negative connotations but still appreciate it as a religious symbol.

"It somehow makes me feel like a carrier of benevolence, of harmony, of peace," Jajoo told *HuffPost*.

But many in the U.S., where Jajoo intends to study, will not share her feelings about the name.

"Some names just don't fly — at least in some social, geographic or cultural contexts,"



<http://bit.ly/1BbVtU0>

Variations of swastikas from cultures around the world

Continued on page 5



*Architectural detail of the Laxminarayan Temple in New Delhi, India.*

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, president of CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, told *HuffPost* in an email. “They are not inherently evil or morally wrong ... but they may be contextually wrong.”

This context, Hirschfield continued, is one in which Holocaust survivors still bear tattoos from concentration camps. For them, the swastika likely communicates all the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust.

“The swastika is a symbol of more than oppression,” the rabbi said. “It is a symbol of genocidal hatred, and hopefully not only for Jews, but for all decent people.”

#### **‘A legacy of misappropriation’**

Although some groups in Europe and the Americas have undertaken campaigns to “reclaim” the swastika as a symbol of peace, Hindu Americans have largely opted out of these efforts.

“It’s not at the top of the list right now,” said Khyati Joshi, a professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University who specializes in immigrant religious communities and multicultural education.

The main concern for Hindu Americans, Joshi continued, is securing a place for Hinduism in American public life and “transmitting the culture to the next generation.” That said, Joshi and Lalwani both said they have images of the swastika displayed throughout their homes. The symbol can also be found in Lalwani’s office, which has long featured the swastika on its safe and balance sheets.

When he was a child, Lalwani said, his father placed the swastika out of sight behind a TV monitor in deference to his Jewish business partners.

“It was an interesting way for him to negotiate tradition and sensitivity in an inherently diverse environment,” Lalwani said. He said his father has been in business with some of his partners for decades, and so over time, the swastikas in his office have become less of an issue, and he takes care to explain its significance in Hinduism to any new employees.

For Joshi it’s less a question of negotiating tradition and more about picking her battles.

“Sometimes we have to fight these ideological fights, and sometimes practicality must reign,” she said. When her grandfather gave her a piece of jewelry decorated with swastikas in high school, she had to explain to him why he would never find her wearing it in the U.S.

“There’s so much pain it causes people, that . . . do I need to wear it and inadvertently hurt someone?” Joshi said. “No.”

Joshi’s reluctance to make a public demonstration of adoration for the swastika and Hirschfield’s caution against doing so are indicative of what Lalwani called a “legacy of misappropriation.” Adolf Hitler and his ilk managed to turn an ancient auspicious symbol into one of vile racism and oppression — perhaps irrevocably. “Nazis used it for but 20 years, yet they seem have to appropriated [the] swastika totally, like cultural

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colonizers,” Pattanaik argued. “The global village seems to have legitimized their appropriation.”

### **Nazis use of the symbol**

The swastika was well-known in Europe and the U.S. prior to the Holocaust. Over a century ago archaeologists encountered it in the cultural remains of the Ancient Greeks, Celts and Anglo-Saxons, as well as across Eastern Europe. The symbol also found a place in modern Western architecture and design before the Nazi party made it taboo.

In his book, *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?* Steven Heller writes of the swastika’s use in Masonic imagery, the Theosophical movement, on several countries’ flags and even as the chosen symbol of peace for the League of Nations’ Vilna Commission in the 1920s.

Things changed when shoddy scholarship and archaeological analysis led the Nazis to mistakenly conclude they were direct descendants of an ancient Indian tribe — the so-called “Aryans” — who lived circa the second millennium B.C.

### **BBC writes:**

The Nazi use of the swastika stems from the work of 19<sup>th</sup> Century German scholars translating old Indian texts, who noticed similarities between their own language and Sanskrit. They concluded that Indians and Germans must have had a shared ancestry and imagined a race of white god-like warriors they called Aryans.

This idea was seized upon by anti-Semitic nationalist groups who appropriated the swastika as an Aryan symbol to boost a sense of ancient lineage for the Germanic people.

Poet and Austrian-German nationalist Guido von List first suggested the swastika’s use as a symbol for anti-Semitic organizations in 1910, and the National Socialist Party adopted it roughly a decade later. It wasn’t until Hitler placed the black swastika on a white circle with a red background in 1935 that it became the national flag of Germany and the official icon of anti-Semitism. Even this narrative may be flawed, however, said Rev. Dr. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, who serves as the president of the Buddhist Council of New York and wrote his dissertation on the swastika’s complex connotations. A Buddhist priest and researcher, Nakagaki has studied the history of Hitler’s appropriation of the symbol and argues that there is a linguistic error at play. “‘Swastika’ shouldn’t have been the word to describe the Nazi symbol,” Nakagaki told *HuffPost* over the phone. “It should be ‘hakenkreuz.’”

Using his own translations of Mein Kampf, the priest argued that Hitler in fact never used the term “swastika” but instead referred to the symbol as “hakenkreuz” — the German word for a hooked cross.

“It was a cross for Hitler,” Nakagaki said. “By saying ‘swastika’ people don’t see the cross anymore.”

What this suggests, he continued, is that people who view the swastika as forever-tarnished by the Holocaust may actually be thinking of an entirely different symbol than the one beloved by Hindus, Buddhists and many others. “People think of it as a universal symbol of evil, but it’s not really universal at all,” Nakagaki said.

### **Bridging the divide**

For those eager to shift the narrative, dialogue can go a long way to begin bridging the divide. Today these conversations are more feasible than they may have been several decades ago, said Joyce Dubensky, CEO of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

“There has been education,” Dubensky told *HuffPost* over the phone, “[and] I think we can move on beyond a monolithic perspective of what the symbol means -- and a Western-centric one.”

Pattanaik argued it is “for the West to accept” the swastika’s older significance, but Lalwani would disagree.

“It has beautiful meaning,” he said, “and I think it’s up to those who use it to talk about it and explain why, in a way that broadens its perception en masse.”

The goal should be education, not conversion to a particular belief system, he added.

Lalwani argued that it isn’t “up to the Hindus or necessarily in their interest to change what the swastika means to the Jews.”

“They should be allowed to be repulsed by it just like Hindus should be allowed to be bolstered by its auspiciousness,” he said. The symbol may never find a place in the hearts of those who came to know it as a symbol of oppression. But through dialogue, Dubensky suggested, people across the spectrum can come to better understand the swastika’s manifestations and the symbol may even become “a bridge for respect.”

“I don’t know if [the swastika] will ever be one that’s comfortable for some of those who identify as among the people who were victimized by Hitler,” Dubensky said. “[But] I think this conversation can be one of the doorways to our living with one another with greater respect and understanding.”

# Union Theological Seminary Hosts Faith Orientation for Members of 114<sup>th</sup> Congress

By Antonia Blumberg, *The Huffington Post*, on January 27, 2015

<http://huff.to/1H27rxL>

Is there room for faith in politics, even with the separation of church and state?

New York-based Union Theological Seminary hosted a day-long “Congressional Orientation on Faith and Governing” in Washington, D.C. recently, aiming to address this very question.

The orientation allowed “members to explore how their spirituality intersects with their service to our country,” Serene Jones, President of Union Theological Seminary, said in a statement.

“Just as King Solomon knew that you couldn’t cut a baby in half and expect it to live, we know that you can’t separate faith, values, and politics and expect our democracy to thrive.”

Timed to coincide with the convening of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, the orientation included three closed sessions led by Union faculty members — “Faith & Politics vs. Church & State,” “How to Talk About Your Own Faith” and “How Policy and Faith Interact” — as well as a session open to the public in which members of Congress shared the ways in which faith plays a role in their lives and policy decisions.

Other panelists included President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation, Jim Forbes; Harvard University Humanist Chaplain, Greg Epstein; Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Melissa Rogers; and Robert Jones, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute.

Congress members joining the event included Democrats Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, Representatives James Clyburn of South Carolina, Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas and David Price of North Carolina. Coons, who identifies as a Progressive Christian and attended Yale Divinity School at the same time as Jones, said he was “thrilled” to participate

in the “Faith and Values Matter in Congress” public session.

“I think it’s important for elected leaders to work from their faith traditions and for those of us who are progressive or who are Democrats . . . to not be hesitant about speaking about how our faith experience leads us to act,” Coons told *The Huffington Post*.

In his own Christian tradition, the senator said he looks to the *Bible’s* Matthew 25 and its iconic words, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.”

“It is a simple, clear agenda for how we should engage with our neighbors and who we should be concerned about,” Coons said. “To me the message of the *Torah* and the *New Testament* focuses on justice, to see our neighbors as broadly as possible.”

The Republican-majority 114<sup>th</sup> Congress is expected to tackle issues ranging from the Keystone XL pipeline to immigration reform and national security. Many say dismantling the Affordable Care Act is also high on the agenda. A recent Pew survey found that the incoming Congress carried a 92 percent Christian majority, while less than two percent reported “Unaffiliated” or refused to answer about their faith.

Some of the issues the Congress faces may be more impacted by faith values than others, but Jones argued that all of us “have moral convictions that inform the work we do.”

“It is impossible not to be formed by our values,” Jones said in the statement. “Moreover, for people of faith, it is impossible not to be formed by our faith.”

**Please send us your feedback**

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# Personal Message...



Dear Friends,

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

Introspection? Quality time with myself? Do I need it?

What is mental speculation? Once Srila Prabhupada wrote a letter to a devotee who was a student at Oxford University. The student had written Srila Prabhupada about the Oxford professors encouraging the use of the mind to pore over deep questions, to see the truth from different perspectives, and to make out-of-the-box approaches, seeing all sides of an issue. Srila Prabhupada wrote back that perfect mental speculation was to ponder how Krsna is the taste of water, not simply to read robot-like and to memorize that “I am the taste of water” (*Bhagavad-gita*.7.8).

On a similar note, the late Dr. Albert Einstein was once quoted as saying, “I want to know how God created the universe. All else is detail.”

In a lecture on July 20, 1971 in Los Angeles, Srila Prabhupada cited a case in which an accused murderer entered the insanity plea. An “expert civil servant” psychiatrist was called into the courtroom to act as an expert witness. In his testimony he said he had examined many patients, and he concluded that they are all more or less crazy.

Krishna says that one’s very mind can be one’s “greatest enemy” (*Bhagavad-gita* 6.6).

Some assert that we should incessantly associate with those who chant the *maha-mantra* so that it will not be possible to “mental out.” Such people believe that this is the best way to advance in Krishna consciousness. However others say that it is also necessary to be alone sometimes, to think things over. Opponents of this behavior say that introspection invariably leads to unending mental speculation and that alone-ness should be avoided.

The notion exists that ISKCON is a tiny organization and that chanting continuously lulls us into a false sense of security. This opposes the idea that Krishna consciousness, by its power, can be effective. Srila Prabhupada compared the system of book distribution of the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx. Marx was thought to be an insignificant alternative, but 400 million people followed his political philosophy for 70 years.

So it seems that both occasional introspection along with chanting in the association of devotees is the formula for success for the living entities in the age of *kali-yuga*.

Your servant,

*Mukunda Goswami*  
Mukunda Goswami



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