



Spiritual Perspectives ^{May 2016}

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

When Tradition Is Not Enough

By Radha devi dasi

Authorities of a Hindu shrine in India's western Maharashtra state have decided to allow female worshippers to enter the inner sanctum, the BBC News Service reported in April 2016, reversing centuries of "tradition" that barred the shrine to women. The temple had been the site of protests after a group of women led by activist Trupti Desai were denied entry.

The Bhumata Brigade led weeks of protests demanding entry to the Shani Shingnapur temple. The temple has for centuries been open only to men. In March 2016, the Bombay High court affirmed the right of women to enter and pray inside all temples. However, antiwoman protesters continued to prevent women from entering the shrine. Last year, priests at the Shani Singhnapur temple carried out an elaborate ritual cleansing after a woman managed to gain entry inside and offer prayers.

Leaders at the Shani Shingnapur temple and at other temples with similar policies have argued that centuries of tradition prevent them from allowing women to worship. But these temples are not the only places where the public role of women is under scrutiny. Our ISKCON institution

has an uneven policy regarding women's roles. In some communities, women are barred from leadership and forbidden to lead kirtan, worship temple deities, or give public lectures. In other areas, Vaisnavas and Vaisnavis share the same services.

In resolving these tensions, we often look to tradition as a guide. For many western devotees, everything from India can seem especially blessed. There is no doubt that Indian culture is much closer to the Vaisnava model than western culture. It is tempting to adopt Indian customs wholesale.

However, many customs in India do not go back to Vedic times and are not supported by scripture or Vaisnava principles. The Shani Shingnapur temple's traditions, for instance, go back only 400 years and are in conflict with those of other, similar temples. Moreover, Srila Prabhupada himself condemned certain Indian "traditions" such as the misuse of the caste system to oppress an entire class of people. Tradition keeps western Vaisnavas out of Lord Jagannatha's temple in Puri no matter how spiritually advanced they might be.

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<http://bit.ly/24H7RX9>

Shani Shingnapur temple recently lifted a 400 year-old ban on entry of women into the core area of the temple

Our scriptures teach that the soul is beyond mundane categories; that an enlightened sage should see all beings as equal. Srila Prabhupada instructed us that religious participation should depend on consciousness and not on the particular type of body someone inhabits. When asked whether his female disciples could give *Srimad Bhagavatam* class, for example, he wrote to Malati devi in 1974: "... the qualification for leading class is how much one understands about Krishna and surrendering to the process. Not whether one is male or female."

It is critical that we thoroughly consider Srila Prabhupada's desires for ISKCON when setting policies. While tradition can be a starting point for discussion, it is not enough to simply institutionalize tradition and call it "vedic culture." When Srila Prabhupada changed tradition by engaging women as pujaris and starting the brahmacharini ashram, he did so for a good reason. It is up to us to be sure that our policies preserve the goals Srila Prabhupada desired.



<http://bit.ly/1T7iLNI>

Hladini Devi Dasi holding Lord Jagannatha. She was a disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. January 16, 1949 - October 3, 1990

Embrace Spirituality to Fight Cancer

By IANS, *Times of India*, August 10, 2015

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

The three-part analysis found a strong association between spirituality and cancer patients' health.

In the first part, a team of US researchers focused on physical health. Patients reporting greater overall religiousness and spirituality also reported better physical health, greater ability to perform daily tasks, and fewer physical symptoms of cancer and treatment.

"These relationships were particularly strong in patients who experienced greater emotional aspects of religion and spirituality, including a sense of meaning and purpose in life as well as a connection to a source larger than oneself," explained lead study author Heather Jim from the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida.

Dr. Jim noted that patients who reported greater cognitive aspects of religion and spirituality, such as the ability to integrate the cancer into their religious or spiritual beliefs, also reported better physical health.

In the second analysis, the researchers examined patients' mental health. The team discovered that the emotional aspects of religion and spiritu-

ality were more strongly associated with positive mental health than behavioral or cognitive aspects of religion and spirituality.

"Spiritual well being was associated with less anxiety, depression or distress," noted lead study author John Salsman from Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago in the paper published in a peer-reviewed journal *CANCER*.

The third analysis pertained to social health, or patients' capacity to retain social roles and relationships in the face of illness. "We found that patients with stronger spiritual well being reported better social health," said another lead author Allen Sherman from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

"In contrast, those who struggled with their faith fared more poorly," he noted.

The research provides invaluable insight into the rapidly growing area of psychosocial oncology - the role of religion and spirituality for patients and survivors managing the experience of cancer, the authors concluded.

An Indian Spiritual Guru Tried to Start Peace Talks With ISIS. This is How It Responded.

By Ishaan Tharoor, *Washington Post*, April 22, 2016
<http://wapo.st/1U8HskW>



<http://wapo.st/1U8HskW>

Indian spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar looks to the crowd through a heart formed with his hands before leading a meditation with thousands of participants in Buenos Aires in 2012. (Natacha Pisarenko/AP)

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, an Indian guru known best for his Art of Living foundation, which has a vast global community of followers, claims to have attempted to start peace talks with the militants of the Islamic State. But his efforts proved futile.

“I tried to initiate peace talks with the ISIS recently but they sent me a photograph of a be-headed body of a man,” he told Indian media, using another name for the extremist organization. “Thus, my effort for a peace dialogue with the ISIS ended.”

The advocate for meditation and harmony offered this frank conclusion: “I think the ISIS does not want any peace talks. Hence, they should be dealt with militarily.”

It's not clear when this overture was made or to whom — whether actual militants in Iraq and Syria or proxies elsewhere. According to the news agency ANI, Shankar said he made a phone call in which he proffered the failed invitation for dialogue.

The guru was speaking to media in Agartala, a city in India's remote and restive northeast, which has been the site of longstanding ethnic insurgencies. In recent years, he has sought to spread his philosophy of mindfulness and inner spirituality to conflict zones, including in Iraq, site of some of the worst ravages of the Islamic State.

In 2014, he visited refugee camps in northern Iraq that were home to many Yazidis, members of a minority sect deemed heretical by the Islamic State. Their brutalization at the hands of the extremists has been likened to genocide by the international community.

A statement on the guru's website said his Iraq peace efforts were part of a “two-pronged mission: providing stress relief and disaster management techniques to overcome personal stress and helping people pick up their lives through service initiatives.”

We Would Appreciate Your Feedback
Please Send Your Response To :

feedback@mukundagoswami.org

Character or Capability?

By Sutapa Das, sutapamonk.blogspot.hu, February 18, 2016

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



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

“In spiritual circles, people are remembered for who they are.”

Scriptures are often replete with long lists of names, exalted personalities who most have never heard of, but who are nevertheless immortalized in the pages of history. In the material world people are remembered for what they do – their groundbreaking achievements, their high ranking positions of responsibility, and their impactful influence on others. In spiritual circles, however, people are remembered for who they are. In some cases these outstanding spiritualists also made a visible mark on the world, but in many cases they were quiet, simple, humble souls who went about their daily life with a deep sense of devotion, sensitivity and saintliness, their consciousness merged in transcendence. Unassuming, and often unnoticed. The value system in spiritual circles, you see, is entirely different. Character over capability.

The spotless and exemplary character of these saintly personalities is an unending source of instruction and inspiration. They were never found to be duplicitous or superficial, but ever-preaching the highest ideals of human life and simultaneously walking the talk. A recent survey showed that over 70% of first-time attendants to a spiritual institution never return. Why? Because of the huge gap between the ideals of the philosophy and the behavior of its adherents. How

is that possible? Why might the practitioners of a worldview that’s all about character development, neglect to spend time to improve themselves?

Maybe we think the spiritual regime will automatically clean up our hearts, and that the deliberate effort to imbibe saintly qualities is neither genuine, effective nor sustainable.

Maybe we are so busy with the external activities (material and spiritual) that there is little time left for contemplation on the quality of our interactions and the purity of our dealings.

Maybe we tend to prioritize external achievements over internal purification — after all, that’s what gets the claps and nods from our social circle. Maybe we’ve surrendered to our defective character, convinced that nothing can change us — “I am who I am, and everyone just has to live with it.”

Maybe we find it too depressing to deal with the internal issues, instead choosing to brush our bad qualities under the carpet and hope nobody will notice. Maybe something is blocking us from seeing defects that are strikingly obvious to others.

Whatever it may be, the world is in desperate need of kind, generous and broadminded saints. If not us, then who? If not now, then when? Let’s value and encourage character over capability.

Launch of “*Monks in Manhattan*” the Novel

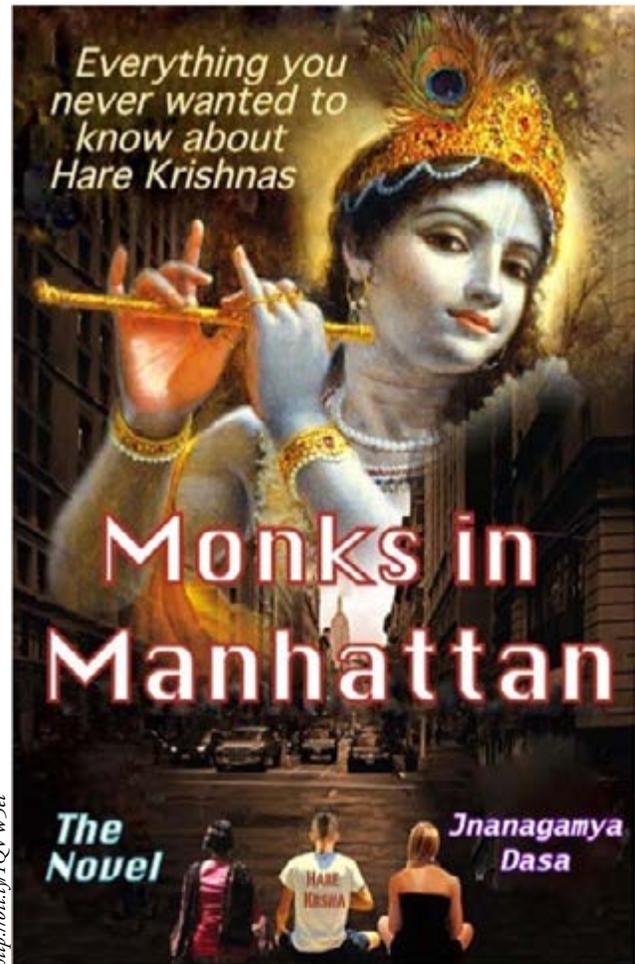
By Rupavilasa Dasa, *ISKCON News*, April 21, 2016
<http://bit.ly/1QVW5el>

Jnanagamy Dasa (John J. Partin) is/was my oldest friend. He was an artist and writer of immense creativity, enthusiasm, and talent. *Monks in Manhattan* started out as a screenplay and went through a number of incarnations as such. In the final year or two before his departure, he turned the screenplay into an entertaining novel about a somewhat fanatical devotee who falls in love with an heiress.

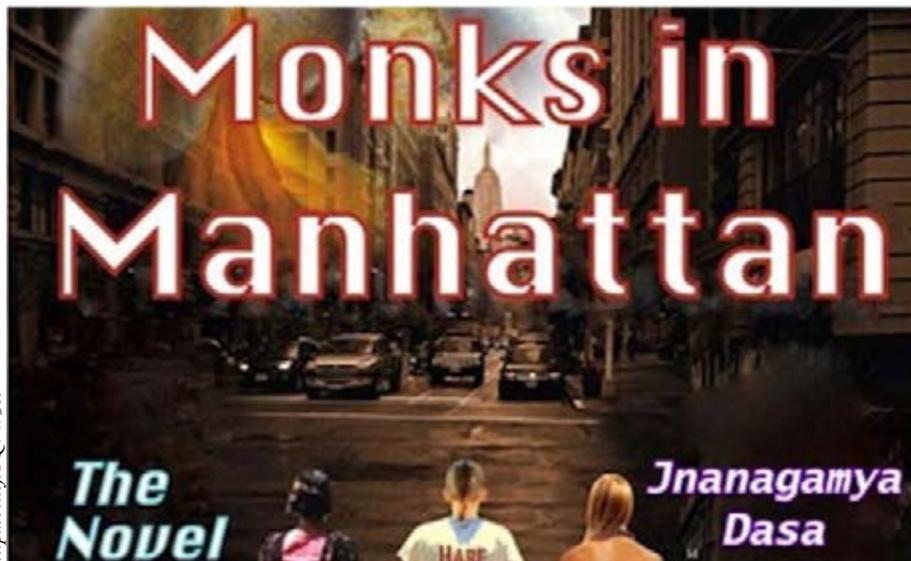
This extraordinary novel is filled with humor, romance, and philosophy. Jnanagamy would not object (if he were still with us) to my saying that this book is bizarre, preachy, original, funny, and strange. It is, by turns, unusual, hysterical, wonderful, and highly entertaining.

Very few novels have been produced by contemporary members of the Hare Krishna devotee community, and certainly none with the ambition, scope, humor, and philosophical depth of this one. Only he would even consider writing what is essentially a Krishna conscious romantic comedy. It is being brought out as an enovel.

This was the final effort by the eccentric and kind artist/designer/builder/writer before he passed away in Mayapura, India, on February 17, 2015. He is sorely missed by all who loved him and whose lives were touched by him.



<http://bit.ly/1QVW5el>



<http://bit.ly/1QVW5el>

Photos above and left:
Cover and partial cover of the novel
“*Monks in Manhattan*” by Jnanagamy
Dasa.
The ebook is available through Amazon.
com:

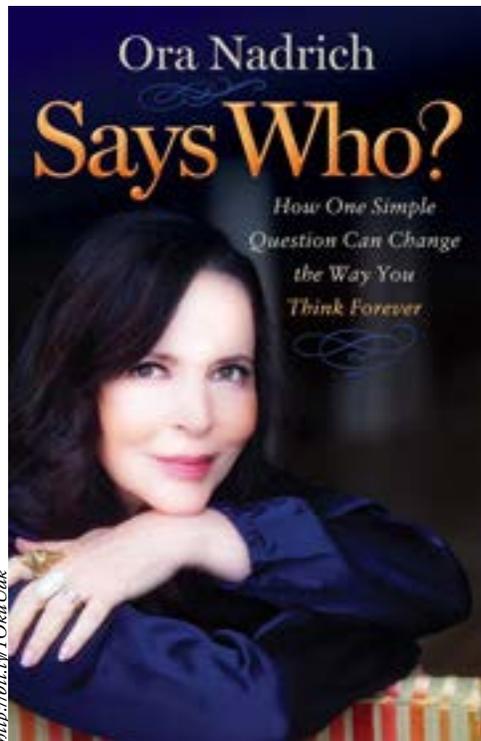
<https://amzn.com/B01E968KNO>

Paying Attention to Judgmental Thoughts

By Ora Nadrich, republished for www.Spiritualityhealth.com

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

Excerpted from *Says Who?: How Asking One Simple Question Can Change How You Think Forever*



linked or connected to our beliefs, which, as we now know, affects our thoughts and our behavior. Based on what those beliefs are, they can influence or distort our perception about someone we barely even know. That's not to say that someone can't be off-putting or offensive in their behavior when we meet them, and no matter what our beliefs are, they just rub us the wrong way, and we don't feel drawn to them, period. If you can subscribe to the Buddha quote "Recognize others as yourself," then maybe you can be more forgiving or tolerant of others' shortcomings or inadequacies, but not everyone chooses to see others as possessing aspects of themselves, as unattractive as that may be.

Sometimes we need to use discernment rather than harsh judgment when it comes to identifying certain characteristics in someone, and if they're undesirable or distasteful to you, and you don't happen to agree with Buddha's sentiments, recognize how you feel and move on. Not everyone has to be each other's cup of tea. But sometimes you've made up your mind about someone a little too quickly, and if they aren't offensive or off putting as far as you (or others) can see, you might want to look a little further as to why you feel judgmental, and quick to dismiss them.

Our thoughts are largely made up of opinions, values and judgments. How we see ourselves, and others, is entirely based on what we believe, and our beliefs are formed early on in our lives as a result of the experiences we've had, positive or negative. How others have influenced us also affects our experiences and how we come to know things, which also helps shape who we are, and can sway our beliefs.

As adults we're pretty set in our beliefs and accept them as real for us, which I've explained become our core beliefs—that is, the main ideas we have about ourselves and others. The good news is that we live in a free country, and nobody can tell us what to believe or what not to, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we are always accepting or tolerant of each other's beliefs, which can be the reason why we are judgmental of others because of our differences. Politics is always a hot

Just like someone cutting you off in traffic can trigger an automatic thought like, "What an idiot!" (or something with more expletives), sometimes we don't need something rude or aggressive to occur to evoke a thought or reaction in us that can be surprising or throw us off guard.

You can walk into a party, a business meeting, or any social situation, and find yourself having a visceral feeling about someone you've never met before, and a negative or judgmental thought about them suddenly pops into your mind. It could be, "This person is dull or boring," or, "They're pretentious or a snob," or, "They're unattractive," or even, "They're too attractive." I could go on and on with the type of thoughts we have about others (and some of them can be really nasty), but I think you get the idea.

We make snap judgments about people without knowing them based on how they look, act, or even how they speak. But how we perceive someone, especially if it's immediately upon seeing or meeting them for the first time, may be directly

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“If you judge, investigate.” — Seneca

topic when it comes to people’s differences, and if you and your friends have different political views, you know it’s probably a good idea not to discuss them over dinner, unless you’re prepared to get into a heated debate or argument, which, if not handled respectfully, can spoil a good evening if you let it, and possibly even a friendship. But judging others quickly without really knowing them well is important to pay attention to because you might find something out about yourself that can be both revealing and valuable, and help you get to know yourself better. For some people, their reason for being judgmental of someone can simply be for superficial reasons,

like how they’re dressed or even wear their hair. But judging someone because of the way they look can be shallow or narrowminded, and by challenging those thoughts through the *Says Who?* method, you might find out that you’re a superficial person, and maybe want to consider changing that about your character because, deep down, you’re not proud of that.

Just like asking yourself the *Says Who?* questions about your negative thoughts to find out why they’re in your mind and if they’re real or not, using the method to investigate your judgmental thoughts will also connect you directly to your beliefs, which are what’s controlling your thoughts. It’s a good opportunity to find out what you’re carrying around in the judgmental beliefs department.



On April 29, 2016, Mukunda Goswami poses with Sadbhuja Prabhu, chief of construction for the Mayapura Temple of Vedic Planetarium (TOVP)

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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