



Spiritual Perspectives

July 2017

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

Real Heros

By Radha devi dasi

Sharing Krishna consciousness with others requires some personal sacrifice. At a minimum, we must give our time and energy and risk rejection when we approach others. But Krishna appreciates our attempts to spread his message. According to Srila Prabhupada, just as "... during war time, a farm boy or ordinary clerk who goes to fight for his country on the front immediately becomes a national hero for his sincere effort. So Krishna immediately recognizes (sic) a preacher of Krishna consciousness who takes all risks to deliver his message."

Vaisnavas in the former Soviet Union are prime examples of what it means to take risks to share Krishna consciousness. The Russian government has been hostile towards Vaisnavas and other minority religious groups for many years. The trials of ISKCON Russia, as we all know, began in Soviet USSR, where devotees were imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs throughout the 1980s. In 1988, the Moscow government finally allowed the Moscow Society for Krishna Consciousness to officially register as a religious organization.

Devotees in Russia continued to experience difficulties even after registration, however. While they were allowed to rent a temple building in 1991, the government decided to demolish that temple in 2004. As required by Russian law, Moscow authorities then gave devotees a piece of land where they could construct a temple. Upon receiving complaints from the Russian Orthodox Church, however, officials in Moscow took that land back from ISKCON, demolishing the temporary temple the devotees had constructed. Preaching to those outside one's own faith remains illegal in Russia. Despite these difficulties, however, Russian Vaisnavas have continued their outreach programs, hosting large festivals and regular temple programs.

Those of us living outside Russia may not appreciate the risks that Russian Vaisnavas face in their outreach activities. Minority religions there must walk a careful path between irritating civil authorities and failing to share their message. Both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Scientologists recently stepped over the line with Russian civil leaders, bringing serious consequences.

Jehovah's Witnesses have also experienced persecution in the USSR and in Russia. Just as Vaishnavas did,

when Soviet authorities prohibited religious literature and services, Jehovah's Witnesses set up underground bunkers to print illegal magazines and gathered in small groups in their apartments, often in the middle of the night. The 1990s brought a promise of more religious freedoms under Yeltsin for both groups. However, the stigma attached to minority religions in Soviet times continues.

Jehovah's Witnesses were recently banned in Russia and their members have been arrested for crimes such as holding private prayer meetings and reading the *Bible*. Scientologists were banned in Russia in 2015. Last month, five of their leaders were arrested for "participation in an extremist community" among other charges.

When we see photographs and video clips of Russian Vaisnava festivals with thousands of participants ecstatically chanting in kirtan, we may not be aware of the difficulties devotees in Russia face. All programs and festivals there must be arranged without public advertising. Images of *harinam* parties in Russia are especially inspiring when we consider that everyone attending, from veteran devotees to the newest *bhakta* could face prison simply for attending.

In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna advises his devotees, "ma sucah," do not fear. In Russia, Vaisnavas are heroes who have taken that instruction to heart and they are an example for us all.



6000 souls and counting for ISKCON Russia's Sadhu Sanga Festival

<http://bit.ly/2sXjuaX>

www.travelingtoiskcon.com

Hare Krishna! Film Wins Jury Prize for Best Picture

By Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, June 7, 2017

<http://bit.ly/2tOGSMF>



<http://bit.ly/2tOGSMF>

'Hare Krishna!' won Best Picture at Illuminate Film Festival

Documentary film *Hare Krishna!*, about the life and achievements of ISKCON Founder Srila Prabhupada, has won the coveted Jury Prize for Best Picture at Illuminate, the world's premier conscious film festival. The festival ran from May 31st to June 4th in Sedona, Arizona.

The audience erupted into applause when *Hare Krishna!* – subtitled “The Mantra, the Movement and the Swami Who Started It All” – was announced as the winner out of nine U.S. and World premieres.

Co-directors John Griesser, Jean Griesser and Lauren Ross ascended the stage to accept the award. “We are simply stunned,” said John. “We hope our film will go all over the world... And we’re just so appreciative that you have honored us like this and accepted us into your hearts. Thank you so much.”

Jean later added that she was thrilled and encouraged the film was being so well-received by its intended audience – the general public outside the ISKCON devotee world. She also thanked Srila Prabhupada ‘for creating such a story with his life,’ and the hardworking *Hare Krishna!* team including Lauren Ross, Jessica Heinrich, Krishna Sanchez, and Srivas Perla.

“We also want to express our deepest gratitude to all the many, many people who have supported us through all these years of production,” she said. “Sometimes the going was tough, and we didn’t know if we’d ever come out with a successful film. But you believed in us and we’re really grateful for that.”



<http://bit.ly/2tOGSMF>

Director John Griesser accepts the award for Best Picture

It turns out that this belief was well-founded. When *Hare Krishna!* was screened at the Mary D. Fisher theater during the Illuminate Film Festival, tickets sold out in half an hour and

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it had to be shown a second time at the larger Sedona Performing Arts Center.

After the first screening, co-directors John and Jean Griesser and Lauren Ross participated in a Q&A. During the session, many audience members expressed their appreciation and said that they felt much more well-informed about the Hare Krishna Movement and its founder.

The session also included a *maha-mantra* kirtan led by Dasarath Das and C.C. White that saw audience members dancing in the aisles.

Sandra De Castro Buffington, founding director of the Global Media Center for Social Impact at UCLA said “she cried, laughed and was so engaged by the film she didn’t want it to end,” according to Jean. Meanwhile, Illuminate’s executive director Danette Wolpert has been an enthusiastic champion of the film since the beginning.

arrived in Manhattan on a mission from his master with a few Sanskrit texts and not much else.”

Hare Krishna!’s win at Illuminate is likely to draw the film more interest from reviewers, theaters and filmgoers.

Already it’s set to show at the Village East theater in New York City from June 16th to 22nd, the Laemmie Monica in Los Angeles from June 23rd to 29th, and other arthouse theaters in Boulder, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; and Houston, Texas throughout the summer, with more to be added.

Jean Griesser says there is a grassroots movement to get the film shown in cities throughout the U.S. She encourages ISKCON devotees to contact distributors Abramorama (for larger venues) and Gather (for smaller ones). Devotees can then rent theaters in their cities, sell tickets to cover

the cost and fill the theaters through advertising and word of mouth.

“It can run for a day, a week, a month – as long as interest remains,” says Jean. “There’s no limit to how far and wide this film can be shown – it just depends on the enthusiasm and efforts of the devotees.”

And there’s no time better than now for *Hare Krishna!*’s message.

“The executive director of Illuminate commented – and I agree

– that there is a similar wave of dissatisfaction and unrest in America today as there was when Prabhupada came in the sixties,” Jean says. “And there’s no reason why his message – that it is a revolution in consciousness that will solve the problems of the world -- can’t inspire and be taken up by people now, too.

“Because Prabhupada’s message is authentic, profound, full of integrity and purity. And it’s universal. It’s not for any one race, religion, nationality, gender or age. It appeals to the hearts of people across the board.”

To find out how to get *Hare Krishna!* shown in your area, send a message at

<http://harekrishnathefilm.com/contact/>

For more information, visit

<http://harekrishnathefilm.com/>



The Hare Krishna! team after winning their award

A large contingent of ISKCON devotees from California and Arizona attended the screening and were thrilled to see such an impactful film about Srila Prabhupada. Suresvara Das, who travels with his seminars on Prabhupada said he was ‘overwhelmed.’

The first review of the film, by *LA Yoga* magazine, is extremely positive, commenting, “If *Hare Krishna!* film director John Griesser’s goal was to reintroduce the world to the magic of Prabhupada, he hit his mark. *Hare Krishna!* is the second coming of Prabhupada.”

Elsewhere reviewer Sam Slovick writes, “Prabhupada’s vibration is found in every frame... We also understand the decidedly enlightened arc, immutable faith, and selfless contributions of an elevated spiritual being who

Parliament of World Religions on Climate Change

By ISKCON News Staff, *parliamentofreligions.org*, June 9, 2017

<http://bit.ly/2sSWjih>



<http://bit.ly/2sSWjih>

Recently, the Parliament of World Religions issued the following statement:

The Parliament of the World's Religions enters 2017 convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that the reality and basic causes of climate change are settled science. We are also convinced that the evidence for the danger posed by human-caused climate change is irrefutable. For all persons of good faith, 2017 must be a year of action to reduce human caused greenhouse emissions and to prepare for and address the inescapable consequences of the changes we have already imposed upon the planet.

2016 has been the hottest year in recorded human history. The impacts of rising temperatures on our planet and our ways of life are drastic, evident and indisputable. Our decisions and action in 2017 will shape the conditions for existence, including for humans, on our planet for the foreseeable future.

Organized religions and faith based communities across the world have come to similar and supportive conclusions. In a spirit of harmony, we join in calling for a Year of Climate Action; individuals, organizations, businesses, and institutions at all levels of organization must actively accept responsibility for the impacts of climate change on life on Planet Earth. Those with the greatest opportunity to reduce emissions and counter adverse consequences have the greatest responsibility to act aggressively and decisively.

The engagement of the spiritual communities of the world is critical to every aspect of that challenge. We cannot do what is in our hearts if

we cannot listen to what is in our hearts. And if we see no meaning and value in the world beyond what our science and our economics can reveal we will lack the motivation to make the tough choices we must make and accept responsibility for our actions.

The wisdom on which we must draw as we choose our futures will come from diverse traditions and insights catalyzed by common purpose — the well-being of humans, our societies, and the Earth's natural systems. As diverse as our cultures and traditions may be, it is even more certain that we will share the future.

Faith communities can help us recognize our interdependence, see beyond our science and knowledge to perceive meaning and wisdom, and encourage mutually reinforcing action. And there is a fearsome urgency to this challenge.

Our actions each day write the future across the face of this planet. Just as we have chosen the world in which we live today, we can choose a better world for our future. The religions, the faith traditions, and our individual spiritual experience are necessary to making those choices wisely.

The Parliament is not a scientific organization. We make no claim to independent findings or insights with regard to the physical state of our planet, the causes of climate change or its impacts on humans and their environments. We do assert, however, the universal responsibility for each person to be accountable for our actions.

The Parliament of the World's Religions, acting with the leadership of its Climate Action Task Force, seeks to encourage and enable collective and individual action to reduce and counter the adverse impacts of human-caused climate change. The Task Force bases its mandate in the Interfaith Call to Action of October 2015 and December 2016.

In 2017, the work of the Task Force will include:

Encouraging and supporting actions by individuals and communities, governments at all levels, religious congregations, and for-profit and

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not-for-profit entities to reduce and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by reforming patterns of production and consumption, decreasing reliance on fossil fuels, promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency, and promoting the sustainability of natural systems.

Advocating aggressive action by the National Governments, International Agencies and Financial Institutions, and Corporations and business entities in implementing and supporting the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Promoting and supporting the transition to clean, safe and affordable renewable energy in all countries, and the realization of a post-carbon global economy with fair and affordable access to energy for all.

In 2017, we will emphasize the important task of organizing a Global Climate Action

Forum as a central component of the Global Parliament to be convened in October 2018. The Climate Action Forum will recognize the actions of the World's Religions to respond to the imminent threat of climate change, as well as Action Commitments which will be implemented by all partners over the period of 2018 to 2021. The Forum will also update the Interfaith Call to Action, and invite further endorsements of the declaration as revised.

Plans for Preparatory Events will be announced at the Annual Meeting of the Parliament in 2017.

We invite all who share our concerns and values to join with us in these endeavors.

David Hales
Climate Action Task Force of the Parliament of the World's Religions

Hollywood Actress Campaigns for Sandipani Muni School

By Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, June 8, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2sM6nOF>



'The 100' actress Marie Avgeropoulos spends time with girls in the Sandipani Muni School classroom

Marie Avgeropoulos, one of the stars of popular American sci-fi TV series 'The 100', recently visited Food For Life Vrindavan's Sandipani Muni School for underprivileged girls. Her visit marked the beginning of the #SheMustCount campaign, an initiative started and supported by the Lubert family and Without Exception Films in Los Angeles.

problems underprivileged Brijabasi girls face. Her six-part documentary series on her experience will be released by Without Exception Films through an online campaign this month, and will premier during a series of fundraising events in Los Angeles starting with one hosted by Marie herself on June 15th.

The campaign aims to raise funds to support the education of a thousand more girls at the three Sandipani Muni Schools in Vrindavan, Lord Krishna's birthplace. Currently the schools provide free education, healthy meals and medical care for 1,500 girls from kindergarten to twelfth grade, but have a capacity for 3,000.

During her week-long visit, Marie spent her time trying to understand and document the

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<http://bit.ly/2sM6rOF>



Marie plays tabla with the girls

Avgeropoulos was extremely moved by her visit and commented, “My experience in Vrindavan, India, with the FFLV girls was life-changing. I went into this project unsure of what to expect. I was quickly greeted with a very warm welcome by the amazing young girls at the FFLV schools and began an incredible journey and lasting friendships. They inspired me. They live in such a chaotic city, in complete poverty – but even with so many obstacles, they are so positive and thankful.”

Food For Life Vrindavana director Rupa Raghunath Das explains that without education, girls are married off as young as 14, giving birth to stunted and undernourished children, and unable to break the cycle of extreme poverty and suffering that has long gripped their families – many of their parents are sick, lame or dead, while some have committed suicide.

“The school program is a pathway to transform each and every one of the students into confident, healthy and brilliant young women,” says Marie. “The schools equip them with the tools they need to become educated and therefore independent, and in the process end the cycle of child marriage and have a career.”

According to Rupa Raghunath, the Sandipani Muni Schools follow U.P. Board of Education standards in academics. The students also have kirtan every morning, and spiritual classes about Srila Prabhupada, Krishna conscious philosophy, and how to chant japa. Then there are lessons on martial arts, yoga, Bharatanatyam and Odissi dance, mridanga, harmonium, singing, embroidery and stitching.

Nearly 100 students have graduated in the last four years and gone on to university, after which they will be able to get good, well-paying jobs. Sandipani Muni also provides vocational training for girls who are not as academically disposed so that they can also have careers.

“Many of them have a chance to pull their whole family out of the slums of Vrindavana and the cycle of poverty and desperation,” Rupa Raghunath says.

Marie Avgeropoulos is inspired to make a difference. “Sponsorship is so important to save a girl’s life; for such a small price, it makes a huge impact,” she says. “I will never forget my experience in Vrindavan, and I feel so honored and privileged to have had this opportunity. I will continue to follow and support the girls and FFLV.”

Oliver Trevena, producer and host of the popular celebrity chat show Young Hollywood, accompanied Marie on her visit and was also greatly impacted. “Going to Vrindavan, India, gave me a whole new sense of self and what is possible in the world,” he said. “The work this charity does and the environment it operates in resonated so much with me and made me feel truly grateful to be able to support and be a part of the work of Food For Life Vrindavan.”

To find out more, follow the campaign #SheMustCount on Twitter @fflvIndia, Instagram – fflvIndia and Marie Avgeropoulos; also on Facebook – Food For Life Vrindavan.

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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When We Distribute What We Have, We Appreciate What We Have

By Chaitanya Charan Das, *gitadaily.com*, June 9, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2tSxcA9>

Suppose someone deals in medicines day in and day out. Medicines are lying all around them everywhere in their warehouse. Because of the abundant availability and prolonged familiarity, they may neglect preserving medicines carefully. But if they go to an epidemic afflicted area and give medicines to the sick, they get to see for themselves those medicines' life saving potency. That first-hand experience increases their appreciation of the medicines, inspiring them towards more vigilant care.

Spiritual knowledge given in the *Bhagavad-gita* is like a life-saving medicine – it cures us of the misdirected desires that make us waste our life in petty or even perverse pleasures. When we first gain spiritual knowledge, we experience its transformational potency in educating and elevating our desires. However, once we start practicing spiritual life regularly, the transformation becomes increasingly inner and subtler. Externally, spiritual knowledge may start seeming like the same old stuff we have heard so many times. Familiarity breeds neglect.

Thankfully however, if we start sharing spiritual knowledge, we get to see for ourselves its transformational potency. People who were squandering their lives in bad habits or frivolous pursuits become better human beings. Spiritual knowledge empowers them to break free from habits that they had been struggling to give up for years, even decades – habits that many can't give up even after a lifetime of struggle. Not only that, their overall life becomes more meaningful and purposeful. By applying the spiritual knowledge of bhakti-yoga, they connect with all-pure Krishna, thereby manifesting their best and making constructive contributions.

Pertinently, the *Bhagavad-gita* 18.68 (below) exhorts us to share spiritual knowledge. By seeing the transformational potency of spiritual knowledge, we appreciate it better and start applying it more seriously. Thereby, we start relishing again its potency in raising our consciousness towards higher levels of realization, purification and satisfaction.

य इदं परमं गुह्यं मद्भक्तेष्वभिधास्यति ।
भक्तिं मयि परां कृत्वा मामेवैष्यत्यसंशयः ॥ ६८ ॥

*ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhakteṣv abhidhāsyati
bhaktim mayi parāṁ kṛtvā mām evaiṣyaty asaṁśayaḥ*

For one who explains this supreme secret to the devotees,
pure devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he
will come back to Me.

<http://bit.ly/2tSxcA9>

Personal

Message...



Dear Friends,

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

[continued from the June edition of *Spiritual Perspectives*]

As we can see, on the one hand many scientists have a deep personal commitment to the concept that life comes from matter. On the other hand they admit that they do not have the evidence to corroborate their conviction, and that their theory is beset with intractable problems. They are convinced that life arose from matter and is reducible to matter, yet at the same time they must confess to having scant scientific grounds for their conviction. Thus their theory is a priori: it supersedes the scientific method and science itself. Their fervent, almost messianic hope is that someday, somehow, someone may be able to validate it, and in the meantime their faith is unshakable.

Dazzling technological achievements have given modern scientists an aura of infallibility, and so when the scientists present untested or unprovable theories about life's origin, people tend to accept with blind faith. In *Passages About Earth* William Irwin Thompson writes, "Just as once there was no appeal from the power of the churches without risking damnation, so now there is no appeal from the power of science without risking a charge of irrationality or insanity." And as botanist Garrett Hardin notes, anyone who questions the status of Darwin "inevitably attracts the speculative psychiatric eye to himself."

The dialogues in *Life Comes From Life* may seem revolutionary, but then were not Newton, Pasteur and Einstein scientific revolutionaries? *Life Comes From Life* does not simply criticize those who support the theory that matter is the origin of life. Rather, this book encourages them to rededicate themselves to a more genuine and intense quest for truth and knowledge, and to thereby redirect their valuable intelligence, resources and work toward the true benefit of the world.

Your well-wisher,

Mukunda Goswami

