



July 2014

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

AN ISKCON COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATION
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

Free to Choose?

By Radha devi dasi



Much of our modern, western ethos rests on the idea that we have free will to make our own choices in life. As William Ernest Henry wrote in the often quoted poem *Invictus*, “I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.” But can we freely choose our destiny? From politics to economics to law, we assume that our choices will be governed by rational decision making. Yet there is ample evidence that people and societies frequently make choices that we know to be destructive. Are our choices freely made or is some other influence driving us?

A pressing example of this phenomenon is the use of antibiotics by the meat industry despite the knowledge that we are creating antibiotic resistant “superbugs.” Millions of people contract antibiotic resistant infections every year. When antibiotics knock out unwanted bacteria, they make room for other bacteria, which are by some quirk in their genetics protected from the effect of the antibiotic. These survivors proliferate and eventually become so dominant that the drug simply has no effect on the disease. The result is that important antibiotics no longer work against staph infections, urinary tract infections, gonorrhea, tuberculosis, and a growing list of other diseases we thought we had conquered.

According to an April 2014 report from the World Health Organization, we stand at the brink of a post-antibiotic world that could mean “an end to modern medicine as we know it.” Dr. Margaret Chan, director-general of WHO, recently warned, “Things as common as strep throat or a child’s scratched knee could once again kill.” The medical community has heard the alarm bells and is curtailing misuse of antibiotics to keep the last few life saving drugs effective for at least a few more years.

However, one large area of antibiotic misuse has hardly changed at all. The single largest consumer of antibiotics worldwide since shortly after World War II isn’t the medical community; it’s the meat industry. The antibiotic era had just begun when researchers accidentally discovered that adding low doses of antibiotics to feed made livestock grow faster.

Proponents of continued use of antibiotics for livestock point out that antibiotics have made it possible to keep animals healthy in large-scale production facilities—enabling industry to provide cheap meat in abundance for American dinner tables. Routine use of antibiotics, and the resulting lower cost of meat, has been a significant factor in the doubling of meat consumption in the US, for example.

But scientific evidence about the public health risks of antibiotic use in meat production is overwhelming. That now pits much of the healthcare community and a broad coalition of political, social, and retail organizations against the giants that dominate the meat business around the world.

In reality, free will is much more limited than we generally believe. As a result, knowing what we ought to do and actually doing it may not go hand in hand. The conditioned soul is governed by the three modes of material nature and even our supposedly “free” choices are controlled by our conditioning. As Krishna says in the fourteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gita*, the real performers in material activities are the modes of material nature.

By understanding the influence of the material energy, it becomes much easier to understand why, individually and societally, we make choices that are diametrically opposed to our best interests. Without a change in consciousness, we are stuck with the unpleasant results of actions performed under the influence of the modes of passion and ignorance. The best way to eradicate our self-destructive choices is to rise above our material conditioning through the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. Seeking our real nature as Krishna’s servants is the only free choice we can really make.



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Scientific Evidence for Life After Death?

By Laura Fitzpatrick as republished from *Time Magazine*, January 22, 2010
<http://bit.ly/1qRL0mZ>



Is there life after death? Theologians can debate all they want, but radiation oncologist Dr. Jeffrey Long says if you look at the scientific evidence, the answer is unequivocally yes. Drawing on a decade's worth of research on near-death experiences — work that includes cataloguing the stories of some 1,600 people who have gone through them — he makes the case for that controversial conclusion in a new book, *Evidence of the Afterlife*. Medicine, Long says, cannot account for the consistencies in the accounts reported by people all over the world. He talked to *TIME* about the nature of near-death experience, the intersection between religion and science and the Oprah effect.

Medically speaking, what is a near-death experience?

A near-death experience has two components. The person has to be near death, which means physically compromised so severely that permanent death would occur if they did not improve: they're unconscious, or often clinically dead, with an absence of heartbeat and breathing. The second component [is that] at the time they're having a close brush with death, they have an experience. [It is] generally lucid [and] highly organized.

How do you respond to skeptics who say there must be some biological or physiological basis for that kind of experience, which you say in the book is medically inexplicable?

There have been over 20 alternative, skeptical “explanations” for near-death experience. The reason is very clear: no one or several skeptical explanations make sense, even to the skeptics themselves. Or [else] there wouldn't be so many.

You say there's less skepticism about near-death experiences than there used to be, as well as more awareness. Why is that?

Literally hundreds of scholarly articles have been written over the last 35 years about near-death experience. In addition to that, the media continues to present [evidence of] near-death experience. Hundreds of thousands of pages a month are read on our website, [NDERF.org](http://www.nderf.org).

In the book you say that some critics argue that there's an “Oprah effect”: that a lot of people who have

had near-death experiences have heard about them elsewhere first. How do you account for that in your research?

We post to the website the near-death experience exactly as it was shared with us. Given the fact that every month 300,000 pages are read [by] over 40,000 unique visitors from all around the world, the chances of a copycat account from any media source not being picked up by any one of those people is exceedingly remote. Our quality-assurance check is the enormous visibility and the enormous number of visitors.

You say this research has affected you a lot on a personal level. How?

I'm a physician who fights cancer. In spite of our best efforts, not everybody is going to be cured. My absolute understanding that there is an afterlife for all of us — and a wonderful afterlife — helps me face cancer, this terribly frightening and threatening disease, with more courage than I've ever faced it with before. I can be a better physician for my patients.

You say we can draw on near-death experiences to reach conclusions about life after actual death. But is that comparing apples and oranges?

Scientifically speaking, interviewing people that have permanently died is challenging. Obviously, given that impossibility, we have to do the next best thing. If these people have no brain function, like you have in a cardiac arrest, I think that is the best, closest model we're going to have to study whether or not conscious experience can occur apart from the physical brain. The research shows the overwhelming answer is absolutely yes.

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You raise the idea that your work could have profound implications for religion. But is whether there is life after death really a scientific question, or a theological one?

I think we have an interesting blend. [This research] directly addresses what religions have been telling us for millenniums to accept on faith: that there is an afterlife, that there is some order and purpose to this universe, that there's some reason and purpose for us being here in earthly life. We're finding verification, if you will, for what so many

religions have been saying. It's an important step toward bringing science and religion together.

Is there any aspect of human experience that you don't think science can touch?

Oh, absolutely. What happens after permanent death — after we're no longer able to interview people — is an absolute. To that extent, the work I do may always require some element of faith. But by the time you look at [the] evidence, the amount of faith you need to have [to believe in] life after death is substantially reduced.

President of India Presented With *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* Deluxe Edition

By: Yudhisthir Govinda Das *ISKCON News*, June 15, 2014

<http://bit.ly/1mF0ZDd>

ISKCON Governing Body Commissioner and Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) trustee Gopal Krishna Goswami met the honorable President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee on June 12, 2014 at the President's official residence in New Delhi and presented him the BBT's deluxe edition of the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* along with the *maha-prasad* of Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi.

Gopal Krishna Goswami thanked the President for inaugurating ISKCON's Pune center last year and invited him to inaugurate ISKCON's upcoming center in Kanpur later this year. He also presented him with a brochure about the twelve acre project and described plans for its use.

Mr. Mukherjee said, "ISKCON is a good organization doing good work," as he graciously accepted the invitation to be present at the temple opening.

Gopal Krishna Goswami thanked the President for accepting the invitation and before the meeting ended, a group photo was taken along with the ISKCON Communications team of Vrajendranandana Dasa and Yudhisthir Govinda Dasa.



President of India Pranab Mukherjee (left) receives the deluxe Bhagavad-gita from ISKCON-guru Gopal Krishna Goswami

On receiving the *Gita*, Mr. Mukherjee personally browsed through it appreciating its beauty while Gopal Krishna Goswami briefed him about this unique limited edition which is printed on Garda-Pat ivory paper produced in Verona, Italy at Fedrigoni, an ancient paper mill established in 1888. The *Gita* with its high-quality artistic handmade binding and artwork is surely a treasure to have. Gopal Krishna Goswami requested Mr. Mukherjee to read a verse of *Gita* daily.



(From right to left) a group photo of Gopal Krishna Goswami, President Pranab Mukherjee, Vrajendranandana Dasa and Yudhisthir Govinda Dasa.

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(Right) President Mukherjee examining the fine quality of paper and the exquisite artwork of the unique book



(Left) A Treasure: the Bhagavad-gita As It Is Deluxe Edition

Panel Discussion on “Spiritual Science and Modern Education” at Macquarie University, Sydney

By Amritha Ahuja *ISKCON News*, June 5, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1ogMXmJ>

An interfaith panel discussion on the topic of “Spiritual Science and Modern Education” was held at the Macquarie University, Sydney on April 29, 2014. The panelists were Bhakti Rasamrita Swami who spoke on the topic from the perspective of Gaudiya Vaisnavism and Mr. Kamal Saleh who spoke in the context of Islam.

The panel discussion was attended by students of the university from various disciplines including law, journalism, and liberal arts.

Mr. Kamal Saleh began the session with a brief talk on the various contributions Islam has made to modern education and technological development. Bhakti Rasamrita Swami spoke at length

on how spirituality is an essential ingredient of education. He also spoke of how in ancient times, unlike the modern age, spirituality was considered an essential part of education and equal emphasis was given to spiritual and material education.

The talk was followed by a lively question and answer session in which Bhakti Rasamrita Swami answered questions from students about the process of transmigration of the soul and how spirituality could be integrated into the modern educational system.

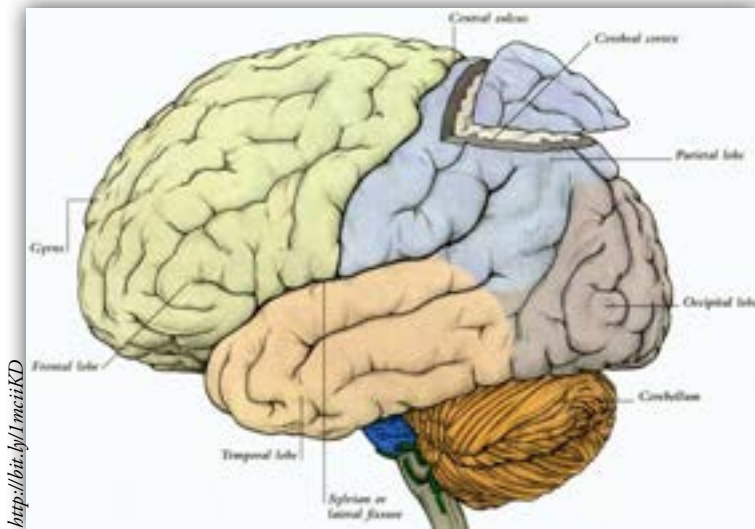
At the end of the panel discussion, all participants were served delicious prasadam from the ISKCON temple in Sydney.



Interfaith panelists at Macquarie University, Mr. Kamal Saleh (left) and Bhakti Rasamrita Swami (right)

Thicker Brain Sections Tied to Spirituality: Study

By Andrew M. Seaman, *Reuters*, December 30, 2013
<http://reut.rs/1iPa61w>



The human brain

(*Reuters Health*) - For people at high risk of depression because of a family history, spirituality may offer some protection for the brain, a new study hints.

Parts of the brain's outer layer, the cortex, were thicker in high-risk study participants who said religion or spirituality was "important" to them versus those who cared less about religion.

"Our beliefs and our moods are reflected in our brain and with new imaging techniques we can begin to see this," Myrna Weissman told *Reuters Health*. "The brain is an extraordinary organ. It not only controls, but is controlled by our moods."

Weissman, who worked on the new study, is a professor of psychiatry and epidemiology at Columbia University and chief of the Clinical-Genetic Epidemiology department at New York State Psychiatric Institute.

While the new study suggests a link between brain thickness and religiosity or spirituality, it cannot say that thicker brain regions cause people to be religious or spiritual, Weissman and her colleagues note in *JAMA Psychiatry*.

It might hint, however, that religiosity can enhance the brain's resilience against depression in a very physical way, they write.

Previously, the researchers had found that people who said they were religious or spiritual were at lower risk of depression. They also found

that people at higher risk for depression had thinning cortices, compared to those with lower depression risk.

The cerebral cortex is the brain's outermost layer made of gray matter that forms the organ's characteristic folds. Certain areas of the cortex are important hubs of neural activity for processes such as sensory perception, language, and emotion.

For the new study, the researchers twice asked 103 adults between the ages of 18 and 54 how important religion or spirituality was to them and how often they attended religious services over a five-year period.

In addition to being asked about spirituality, the participants' brains were imaged once to see how thick their cortices were.

All the participants were the children or grandchildren of people who participated in an earlier study about depression. Some had a family history of depression, so they were considered to be at high risk for the disorder. Others with no history served as a comparison group.

Overall, the researchers found that the importance of religion or spirituality to an individual - but not church attendance - was tied to having a thicker cortex. The link was strongest among those at high risk of depression.

"What we're doing now is looking at the stability of it," Weissman said.

Her team is taking more images of the participants' brains to see whether the size of the cortex changes with their religiosity or spirituality.

"This is a way of replicating and validating the findings," she said. "That work is in process now."

Dr. Dan Blazer, the J.P. Gibbons Professor of Psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, said the study is very interesting but is still exploratory.

"I think this tells us it's an area to look at," Blazer, who was not involved in the new study, said. "It's an area of interest but we have to be careful."

For example, he said there could be other areas of the brain linked to religion and spirituality. Also, spirituality may be a marker of something else, such as socioeconomic status.

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Blazer added that it's an exciting time, because researchers are actively looking at links between the brain, religion, and risk of depression.

"We've seen this field move from a time when there were virtually no studies done at all," he said.

Weissman said the mind and body are intimately connected.

"What this means therapeutically is hard to say," she added.

The Interfaith Faces Of The U.S. Armed Forces

By *Huffington Post Religion Section*, June 20, 2014
<http://huff.to/TQrXea>

There are 1.5 million men and women who are actively serving the United States in uniform, and veterans make up many times that number. The U.S. Armed Forces includes people of all states, races, cultures and religious backgrounds. *HuffPost Religion* celebrates the religious diversity of the military.

First Lt. David Frommer - Jewish

Frommer has lead a small group of service-members and civilians in the chanting of the Torah. A chaplain for four years, Frommer has conducted several celebrations of the holiday Sukkot (Feast of Booths, Feast of Tabernacles), but this was his first in the Middle East.

Sgt. 1st Class Naida Christian Nova - Catholic

Sgt. 1st Class Nova was known as Naida Hosan until last year. The Catholic soldier says her Islamic-sounding name made her a target for harassment by her fellow soldiers.

Captain Thomas Dyer - Buddhist (below)



Chaplain (Capt.) Dyer engages in Zen-posture meditation Dec. 5 at Sightseeing Road Chapel



Paul Loebe - Atheist (above)

Loebe is the Military Director for American Atheists. He told *Patheos*, "I am working tirelessly to ensure that sectarian favoritism within the U.S. Military is stamped out in favor of religious acceptance for people of all or no faiths. I firmly believe in the absolute separation of church and state."

Col. Doug Burpee - Muslim

Burpee's military career spanned over 20 years, and in 2006, the *New York Sun* reported that he was the highest-ranking Muslim officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. "Everyone knows I'm a Muslim. When I fly, attached to my dog tags, I wear a pendant with a passage from the Koran," he said.



Captain Kamaljeet Sing Kalsi - Sikh

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Kalsi poses in Times Square, New York, on September 14, 2010, wearing his U.S. Army ACU Digital Camouflage turban along with his ACU uniform. Kalsi, who is the first Sikh in the U.S. Army to be accommodated in over 25 years, is an emergency room doctor and emergency medical services (EMS) director stationed at Ft. Bragg. Since 2009, the U.S. Army has granted only three exemptions to current uniform policy, allowing these Sikhs to serve while retaining their religiously-mandated turbans and beards.



<http://buff.tolTQrXea>

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard - Hindu

Gabbard speaks at Veterans Memorial Day Hilo in 2012. In January, she became the first Hindu-American to become a member of Congress, using the *Bhagavad-gita* during her swearing-in ceremony. She served in the Hawaii National Guard and was deployed to Iraq and Kuwait during her military career.



<http://buff.tolTQrXea>

Rev. Tony Gatlin- Wicca

According to Patheos, Rev. Tony Gatlin is a Wiccan High Priest who currently serves as the Distinctive Faith Group Leader for the Wicca Faith Group at the U.S. Air Force's Basic Military Training program at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. A retired military veteran of 25 years, he served both as an enlisted Marine and Air Force officer.

**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.

The following is the first question I asked of Srila Prabhupada. It occurred in May or June of 1966. I located it in the Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, which lists it as a *Srimad Bhagavatam* lecture on 1.2.17 in San Francisco on March 26, 1967. In the passage below, I have deleted sections of Srila Prabhupada's answer in order to fit this page.

Mukunda: If a good man, who is passed through the states of being ignorant and passionate and he's really a good man, is walking down the street, let's say, in Delhi or Istanbul or any place, any city. And he sees a very young man beating up on a very old man just for no reason at all. He's just beating up, beating him to death. And the old man is calling out for help and there's a few people standing around. And as he approaches, he, he begins to get stirred by this scene. And being a good man he feels the whip on this other human being's back. Now, as a good man, should he not take sides on the two people quarreling and accept it and just walk on, even though he feels something welling up in him, or should he give way to what would be a passionate desire and try to interrupt and stop this injustice, so to speak?

Prabhupada: action should be done from the spiritual consciousness platform . . . Arjuna's fighting . . . This fighting is on the modes of passion, . . . Now, Arjuna was thinking not to fight, because he thought that "Fighting with my brothers, with my relatives, is not good." . . . He's inducing Arjuna to fight. Does it mean that . . . Krishna is inducing him to be entangled in the reaction of passion modes? No. That action . . . is transcendental because it is direction of the supreme consciousness . . . a soldier is killing his enemy, and the soldier's rewarded . . . Do you mean to say by killing one is rewarded? . . . He's acting on higher consciousness platform, higher order. So if a commander's order can give him immunity from the reaction of being hanged, why not God's command . . . So we haven't to discriminate whether I am in the modes of ignorance or passion or goodness. No. We have simply to see whether I'm acting under the direction of the supreme consciousness.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

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

