



SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

AN ISKCON COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATION
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

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Caught in the Crossfire

By Radha devi dasi

The scene was horrifying. Gunmen stalked through the school, shooting children as they covered under benches and booby-trapping buildings with homemade explosives.

When the siege finally ended, at least 145 people were dead, mostly children between the ages of 12 and 16. Pakistan was left reeling and the world wondering: Who would do such a thing? And how can we prevent such atrocities?

The identity of the group behind the massacre at the army-run school in Peshawar is no mystery. The Pakistan Taliban – who have long conducted an insurgency against the Pakistani government as they seek to bring in Sharia law – were quick to claim the terror attack as revenge for the killing of hundreds of innocent tribesmen and their children during a recent offensive by the Pakistani military.

This cycle of violence is bound to continue. Pakistan's leaders have promised an aggressive response to the deadliest terror attack in the country's bloody history. Unfortunately, this muscular response invites the sort of attacks it is intended to forestall.

One of Pakistan's first decisions after the attack was to rescind the country's four-year moratorium on the death penalty. Pakistan is planning to execute 55 death-row inmates over the next few days.

The other element of Pakistan's response has been to intensify its counter-militancy campaign in the tribal belt. Over the past few days, airstrikes and ground offensives have killed about 120 militants. This assault is sure to galvanize jihadists and increase the likelihood of more retaliatory attacks. And more Pakistani military firepower – not known for avoiding collateral damage – is likely to displace

communities and cause civilian casualties, providing the Taliban with fresh material to recruit new fighters.

Violence cannot always be the answer to violence. Those caught in



A school child prays during a candle light vigil for the victims of a Taliban attack on a school in Peshawar, at a private school in Chennai

the crosshairs of any retaliatory attacks would be ordinary Pakistanis, many of whom have bravely, and unusually, taken to the streets in recent days to protest terrorism. Further violence against Pakistani civilians will lead to new government reprisals, triggering more Taliban violence. Where does it end?

Perhaps the answer is found in the response to another terror attack described in the Mahabharata. Drona's son, Ashwatthama, fought on the side of the Kurus in the battle of Kuruksetra. At the end of the war, as one of Duryodhana's few surviving warriors, he led a sneak attack on the Pandava's camp while they were sleeping. During this raid, Ashwatthama killed the five sons of Draupadi, leaving her childless. Despite his heinous crime, Draupadi argued for sparing Ashwatthama's life – declining to inflict on his mother the pain that he had inflicted on her

The response to terrorist attacks in the modern world must necessarily be nuanced and multi-faceted, and usually includes empathy for those involved. However, we understand that there is a higher code of behavior and that retaliation doesn't always solve problems. Therefore devotees seek solutions that are out of the ordinary.



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India's New Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Aims to Rebrand and Promote Yoga in India

By Annie Gowen, *The Washington Post* on December 5, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1D4x0t7>

NEW DELHI — Shripad Yesso Naik, India's new yoga minister, dreams of a day when sun salutations and downward-facing dog pose will be as popular in their homeland as they are around the world.

Yes, India now has a minister of yoga — and he and his government want their cultural bliss back.

Indian yogic tradition appears in Hindu texts written thousands of years ago. But the discipline bears scant resemblance to the popular exercise regime that has become a multibillion-dollar industry in the West, home of \$90 Lululemon stretch pants and Mommy and Me fitness classes.

In recent weeks, Indian officials have begun efforts to reclaim yoga for the home team, making plans for a broad expansion of the wellness practice into all facets of civic life — including more



<http://bit.ly/1D4x0t7>

than 600,000 schools, and thousands of hospitals and police training centers. They are spearheading efforts to promote and protect India's most famous export, even quietly weighing a "geographical indication" for yoga, a trade protection normally given to region-specific goods such as Champagne from France or oranges from Florida.

Elderly in U.S. are Sicker and on More Meds Than in 10 Developed Nations, Study Finds

By Susan Perry, November 21, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1zOXIYc>

Older adults in the United States are sicker than their peers in 10 other developed countries and also find it more difficult to get timely and affordable health care and to pay their medical bills, according to the results of a new study.

The study also found, however, that American older adults are more likely than their counterparts in those other 10 countries to have relatively quick access to a medical specialist, to have discussed health-promoting behaviors like diet and exercise with their physician, to have a chronic-care plan designed to fit their daily life and to have engaged in end-of-life care planning.

The study is based on results from a survey conducted earlier this year by the Commonwealth Fund and published online Wednesday in the journal *Health Affairs*. It involved more than 15,000 adults aged 65 and older from 11 countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United

States). Those countries offer what the study's authors call a "kaleidoscope of funding models, from tax-funded national health systems to national insurance systems with competing regulated private health insurance plans, some operating through so-called health insurance Marketplaces or their equivalent."

The survey's U.S. respondents were, of course, covered by Medicare.

Health officials from all of the 11 countries that took part in the survey are actively trying to figure out how to redesign their health-care systems to meet the needs of their aging populations, the study's authors point out.

"With older patients often receiving care from multiple providers, taking multiple prescription drugs, and managing complicated care regimens, these people are vulnerable to health system failures that can result in fragmented and poorly coordinated care, as well as costly and injurious medical errors," the researchers explain.

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More illnesses, more medications

Here are the survey's key findings for older adults in the U.S. First, the not-so-good news:

Most people surveyed had at least one chronic health condition, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or arthritis. But the U.S. had the highest rate of such conditions: 87 percent of the survey's U.S. respondents reported at least one chronic health condition and 68 percent reported two or more. In Great Britain, by comparison, only 33 percent of older adults reported having multiple chronic health problems.

Older adults in the U.S. are taking more medications than their counterparts elsewhere. More than 53 percent of the survey's U.S. respondents said they were taking four or more medications. The country with the next-highest percentage of older adults taking four or more medications was New Zealand (44 percent). France and Switzerland tied with the lowest percentages (29 percent).

Despite having access to Medicare's universal coverage, almost one-fifth (19 percent) of the survey's U.S. respondents said that cost had kept them from visiting a doctor or getting a medical test or filling a prescription during the previous year. In addition, 21 percent of the U.S. respondents said they had spent more than \$2,000 of their own money for care during the previous year, and 11 percent said they had experienced problems paying their medical bills (or couldn't pay them at all). A similar proportion of older adults in Switzerland (22 percent) also said they spent more than \$2,000 out of pocket on medical care, but only 2 percent said they had trouble paying those bills. In most of the countries, fewer than 10 percent of older adults said cost was a barrier to care.

The U.S. respondents, along with those from Canada and Sweden, reported having the most difficulty getting same-day or next-day appointments with their doctor when ill. They were also the most likely to report going to the emergency department of a hospital for an illness that they thought could have been handled by their own doctor, if he or she had been available. By contrast, more than 80 percent of respondents in Germany, France and New Zealand said they had no problem getting same-day or next-day access to their doctor.

Coordination of care is important, particularly for people with multiple medical conditions. The survey found that the U.S. respondents were

the most likely to report that their medical records or test results had not been available at a scheduled doctor's appointment or that they had been given duplicate tests (23 percent). That compared with 17 percent or less of the respondents from the other countries.

These findings demonstrate, say the study's authors, that "despite having Medicare coverage, older U.S. adults remained much more likely to face financial barriers to care than their counterparts in other developed countries. This may be surprising, as other studies have found that Medicare offers more stable and protective insurance than other forms of coverage in the United States, including employer-sponsored private coverage. However, it is still clearly less protective than the universal coverage offered in the health systems of other countries surveyed."

Quicker access to specialists

And now for the survey's better news for older adults in the U.S.:

The United States, along with Switzerland, had the greatest number of respondents (86 percent and 83 percent, respectively) who said they were able to see a medical specialist within four weeks.

U.S. respondents were the most likely to report that their doctor had discussed with them how to live a healthy life. Some 76 percent said they had been advised about diet and exercise, and 29 percent said their doctor had talked with them about reducing stress.

The United States also "stood out," say the study's authors, for the number of respondents who said they had discussed advance care planning with their doctor (78 percent) and who said they had a written plan regarding the end-of-life care they wished to receive (55 percent).

The United States — along with Great Britain — was also a top performer in the survey when it came to doctors discussing care goals with their patients. Among chronically ill respondents, 58 percent of those in the U.S. and 59 percent of those in the U.K. said their doctor had explained those goals with them and given them clear instructions on when to seek further care.

One final finding: As many as one in four of the survey's chronically ill respondents in the United States, as well as in several other countries, were themselves caregivers — "a reminder," say the study's authors, "of how interwoven health and social care needs can be in this population."

Tulsi Gabbard Visits India and Talks About Bhakti

By ISKCON News Staff, *ISKCON News* on December 18, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1wpmoWC>

On December 16, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard began a visit to India at the invitation of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who she recently met with during his visit to the U.S. During their first meeting, the two spoke of the priorities shared by India and the U.S., including defeating the threat posed by ISIS and other Islamic extremists, collaborating to address environmental concerns, and maximizing economic opportunities. The congresswoman's visit to India as the Prime Minister's guest will work towards these efforts.

Apart from her official meetings, she will visit holy sites, including Krishna's birth place Vrindavana.

The U.S. Congress is currently in recess, and Representative Tulsi Gabbard will return to Washington, DC before Congress reconvenes on January 6, 2015.

In an interview on NDTV Tulsi speaks about her life as a Krishna devotee and about the role *Bhagavad-gita* has been playing in her life.



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

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard

Watch video here: <http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/the-buck-stops-here/us-should-not-be-policing-the-world-us-congresswoman-tulsi-gabbard/348891>

Pope Francis Denounces the Vatican Elite's 'Spiritual Alzheimer's'

By Barbie Latza Nadeau, *The Daily Beast* on December 12, 2014
<http://thebea.st/1rxYDt7>



Author Barbie Latza Nadeau

VATICAN CITY—Pope Francis may be known for his generosity when it comes to the needy, giving out 400 sleeping bags to Rome's homeless and opening the doors of previously shuttered convents to Syrian refugees; but on Monday he made it absolutely clear he won't be showing the same kindness to the Curia, the clerics who run—or think they run—the worldwide Catholic Church from their comfortable positions in Rome.

In language that left these officials stunned and silent, Francis denounced those among them who “create a parallel world of their own, where they set aside everything they teach with severity to others and live a hidden, often dissolute life.”

The pope didn't just deliver a lump of coal to the Curia this Christmas; he set it ablaze, outlining what he called 15 ailments that he says are ruining the Catholic Church, ranging from “spiritual Alzheimer's” to “existential schizophrenia” which the pope described as “the sickness of those who live a double life, fruit of the hypocrisy typical of the mediocre.” They are afflicted with “progressive spiritual emptiness,” he said, which no amount of academic honors and degrees can fill.

The remarks about a “hidden, often dissolute life,” while not explicit, can easily be construed as alluding to the child sex abuse scandal or the reported gay lobby that runs rampant among Rome's clerics. What's clear is that Francis wants all that to stop. “This ailment particularly afflicts those who, abandoning pastoral service, limit

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<http://buff.to/1scFjgl>

Pope Francis pointing his finger while delivering a speech

themselves to bureaucratic matters, thus losing contact with reality and with real people,” he said.

Among the most dangerous ailments that Francis would like eradicated from the Curia is the persistent backstabbing, much of which, we know, is aimed at him.

Francis also spoke of what he called a “sickness of considering oneself immortal, immune or indispensable,” which many pope watchers in the press, the Vaticanisti, say could be directed at some of his greatest nemeses inside the Curia. Among these is former secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, whose recently renovated million-dollar digs tower above Francis’s meager accommodations inside Vatican City. “It is the sickness of the rich fool who thinks he will live for all eternity,” Francis said, according to the English translation given to the press. “And of those who transform themselves into masters and believe themselves superior to others, rather than at their service.”

Another ill that damages the Church is what Francis called “funereal face, or rather, that of the gruff and the grim, those who believe that in order to be serious it is necessary to paint their faces with melancholy and severity, and to treat others – especially those they consider inferior with rigidity, hardness and arrogance.” This could easily refer

to Cardinal Raymond Burke, who became the anti-Francis face of the Synod on the Family in October. Grinch-faced Burke openly criticized the pope for watering down church teaching when it comes to gays and divorced and remarried Catholics. “In reality,” Francis said, “theatrical severity and sterile pessimism are often symptoms of fear and insecurity.”

The pontiff also blasted the “disease of accumulation: when the apostle seeks to fill an existential emptiness of the heart by accumulating material goods, not out of necessity but simply to feel secure” which was seen as a not so-veiled stab at bishops like Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, the German bishop of Bling who was removed from his post for his opulence.

But the pope didn’t stop at denouncing the powerful among the Vatican’s bureaucrats. He criticized “the ailment of excessive planning and functionalism” as ills that keep church leaders detached from the greater flock. “One falls prey to this sickness because it is easier and more convenient to settle into static and unchanging positions,” he said, no doubt aimed at those who have lost touch with preaching and are focused only on the doctrine. “Indeed, the Church shows herself to be faithful to the Holy Spirit to the extent that she does not seek to regulate or domesticate it.”

Among the most dangerous ailments that Francis would like eradicated from the Curia is

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the persistent backstabbing, much of which, we know, is aimed at him. “The sickness of chatter, grumbling and gossip: this is a serious illness that begins simply, often just in the form of having a chat, and takes people over, turning them into sowers of discord, like Satan, and in many cases cold-blooded murderers of the reputations of their colleagues and brethren,” he said. “It is the sickness of the cowardly who, not having the courage to speak directly to the people involved, instead speak behind their backs.”

But the greatest sin of all for Francis is perhaps that of careerism, chiding those who honor people rather than God. “The ailment of rivalry and vainglory: when appearances, the color of one’s robes, insignia and honors become the most important aim in life,” must go, he said. “They are mean, unhappy and inspired only by their fatal selfishness.” (Whether the pope intended it or not, any Vatican watcher would think of his predecessor’s red Prada-like shoes.)

Francis’s comments were met with scorn, reportedly garnering scant applause or none and plenty of glances among the cardinals who expected the usual [*sic*] benight season’s greetings from the pope. Writing in the “Boston Globe,” Vatican expert John Allen calls the pope’s address “risky” because like a president lambasting congress, the pope does need his Curia to make the changes he so strongly desires: “To insiders, it threw a key question into sharp focus: Is Francis in danger of alienating the very people

he will need, sooner or later, to actually get anything done?”

The Vatican’s English language spokesman Father Thomas Rosica said that the pope’s words were prophetic. “Now and then in our religious history, prophets arise to call us back to our origins, our roots and also our intended mission,” Rosica wrote in a note to the press. “That is what Pope Francis is doing. His words apply not only to the Roman Curia at the Vatican but to the entire Church throughout the world. His words are also valid for many institutions in the world today that lose sight of their original mission.”

Francis has proven time and again that he doesn’t really care whose toes he steps on to make the Church the kind of institution and inspiration he wants it to be, and to many Catholics who feel alienated from the Church as it was, Francis’s commitment to reform is the perfect Christmas present.

Editor’s note: Pope Francis has spoken out strongly against abortion as noted in this Religious News Service (RNS) release found in the Huffington Post:

VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Francis reiterated his strong opposition to abortion on Friday (April 25 [2014]), saying it “compounds the grief of many women” already succumbing to what he called the “pressures of secular culture.”



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

Pope Francis has been quoted, according to a Washington based newspaper, as saying the above quote in reference to a question about homosexual priests

Read article here : <http://bit.ly/13I1d4D>

Ambarish Das and Swaha Dasi Tour the Middle East to Raise Funds for the TOVP

By Muralidhara-priya Das *ISKCON News* on December 5, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1A8Tj00>

Just as Srila Prabhupada had folded his hands with tears in his eyes and thanked his disciples in Mayapur for helping build the Mayapur Chandradoya Mandir, Ambarish Das and his wife Swaha Dasi this kartik month toured Dubai, Bahrain and other Middle Eastern countries to raise awareness about the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium (TOVP) temple in Mayapur. Their humble and sincere appeal to the Hare Krishna congregation raised over 3 million dollars in pledges.

As ISKCON is coming close to celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016, many ISKCON members feel it is the right time to come together

and offer one grand gift to ISKCON-founder Srila Prabhupada as their token of gratitude to him.

For the purpose of raising funds, the TOVP team is minting commemorative coins in platinum, gold, and silver in limited quantities. This idea was welcomed by the devotees, and many willingly participated in this program, thereby pledging a collective donation of 3 million U.S. dollars.

The devotees in the Middle East gave a very warm welcome to Ambarish Das, and felt inspired to assist him in the great work he is doing as the chairman of the project.



<http://bit.ly/1A8Tj00>

Ambarish Das (third from left) and Swaha Dasi (in purple) in the midst of TOVP supporters in Dubai

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.

What is dakṣa?

Dakṣa (expert) is one of the 26 qualifications of a devotee.

It means that even in so-called ordinary dealings a devotee should be expert. Often devotees engage specialists like lawyers, builders and engineers. This indicates that expertise is often required. In this way, devotees become expert by understanding how things have to be done, but not doing the actual work themselves. Being expert, however, also indicates that there are times when devotees have to become adept themselves in various fields of endeavor, especially when dealing with other people.

For this reason, Srila Prabhupada set up temples that had to be administered. Administration frequently requires that wrongdoers have to be punished or outsmarted. Often administrators have to become knowledgeable of legalities and financial matters, in order to see that their part of institutional ISKCON is running effectively. For some, management is a difficult and thankless task. For others, it is enjoyable. According to Vedic rules of wisdom, every endeavor requires four things: land, labor, capital and organization.

But according to Sāstric teaching, one will automatically be a good chief executive if he or she is surrendered to Krishna as stated in Srimad Bhagavatam 5.18.12.

*yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā
sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ
harāv abhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā
manorathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ*

That doesn't mean, however, that in such a leadership position one can be callous and uncaring about ordinary things. However, this verse does intimate that devotion and character are key ingredients, and one who is rightly situated in Krishna consciousness will be cognizant that so-called ordinary things are not neglected.

Several excerpts from Srila Prabhupada's teachings confirm this position to be true. One in particular appears in the *Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līla, 12.44* (purport)

"...Some of the great devotees of the Lord—like Rāmānanda Rāya, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī—were government officers and had a background of very opulent householder life. Consequently they knew how to deal with people. In many instances we have seen the diplomacy of Rūpa Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and Rāmānanda Rāya employed in the service of the Lord. When Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's father and uncle were to be arrested by government officials, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī hid them and personally met the government officers and settled the affair..."

Another reference supporting this position is found in the purport to *Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līla, 7.29*, and further reading of Srila Prabhupada's books will provide us with additional statements confirming its importance.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami



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