



# SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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

## Karma and Compassion

By Radha devi dasi

Olympic gold medalist, Bruce Jenner, recently disclosed his transition to living as a woman rather than a man. As he explains his situation, he realized very early in life that he felt like a woman. Despite these feelings, he was married to three different women and fathered six children. Now at the age of 65, he is transforming his material identity in a significant way. While many applaud his journey, others protest.

Part of our discomfort with this phenomenon may arise from the use of new technologies and new roles for those who have transitioned from one sex to another. Transgender people have a traditional place in Vedic society as *hijra*, a term used in South Asia to refer to an individual who is transsexual or transgender. *Hijra* have a recorded history in the Indian subcontinent from antiquity onwards. They often live in separate communities and perform traditional work as entertainers and funeral mourners. In the modern West, transgender people receive a medical diagnosis (gender identity disorder) and a host of treatments, from surgery to psychotherapy to hormone therapy and more. They live and work amongst the larger society.

Many online discussions of the new wave of transgender people have focused on the need to accept one's karma. If you were born in a male body, the thinking goes, that is your karma and it is sinful to present yourself as anything other than a man. While transitioning between genders might be a thing some cannot accept, the "accept your karma" justification for judging transgender people seems weak.

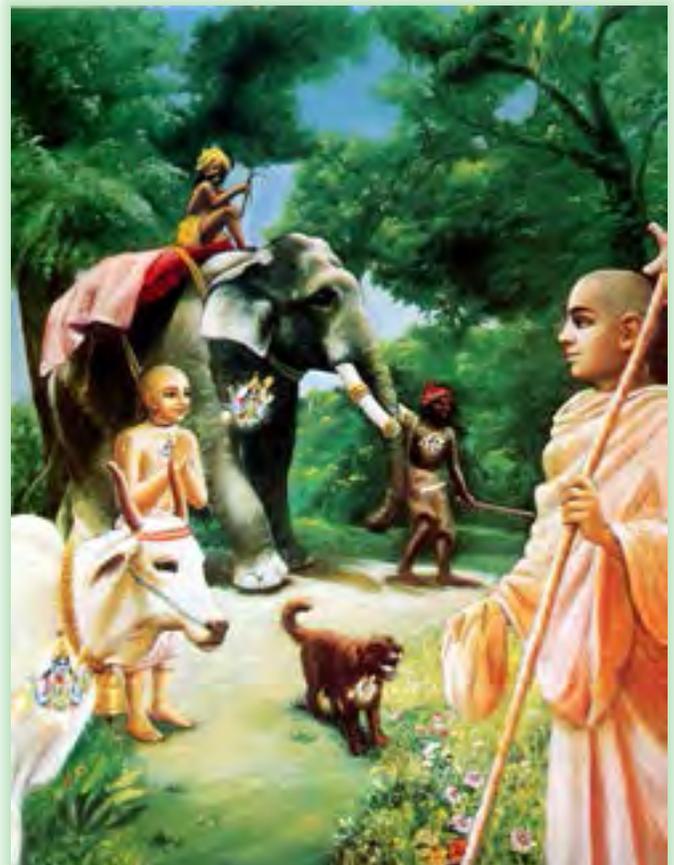
By the same logic, someone diagnosed with cancer should accept her karma and forgo treatment. Born with crooked teeth? That is the way the Lord wanted you and braces would amount to a sinful challenge to the Divine Will. Our collective and individual lives are replete with

examples of how we alter our environments and our bodies. Thus, from the spiritual angle, this topic is more complicated than it might at first appear.

In fact, much of the opposition to transgen-

der people seems to rest on Christian theology which holds that the soul and the body are inextricably linked. Thus, blogger Matt Walsh, concludes that someone born in a man's body has a man's soul. The notion of a transgender person is, from his point of view, an impossibility.

Vaisnavas understand that the spirit soul is distinct from the body which may be male in this lifetime and female in the next. Rather than debate the extent to which others are allowed to alter their bodies and social identities, a better focus might be on how to engage such people (and everyone else) in practicing Krishna Consciousness. Our perception of someone else's karma is nowhere near as important as the steps we take to share the Lord's mercy.



*"The humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater {outcaste}."*  
Bhagavad-gita 5.18



## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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# Famous Indian Yoga Teacher Swami Baba Ramdev Visits ISKCON Melbourne

By Bhakti Dasi, ISKCON Communications Officer, Melbourne, Australia, *ISKCON News*, April 17, 2015  
<http://bit.ly/1P8MMgw>



<http://bit.ly/1P8MMgw>

*Swami Baba Ramdev*

As part of ongoing efforts to establish good relations with the wider Hindu Community, ISKCON's Melbourne Mahaprabhu Mandir Temple was honored to welcome Swami Baba Ramdev, the famous yoga teacher from India, on Friday April 10<sup>th</sup>. It was just a short visit (part of an official welcome to Melbourne) as Swami Ramdev gave his yoga programs elsewhere.

Swami took *darshan* of the Melbourne deities Sri Sri Gaura Nitai, Sri Sri Radha Ballabha and Sri Jagannatha Baladeva Subhadra, and very much enjoyed his tour of the temple, especially Srila Prabhupada's rooms. Along with his entourage, Swami Ramdev enjoyed a sanctified vegetarian lunch in the dining room, after which he received a selection of Srila Prabhupada's books.

ISKCON Communications director for Australia, Bhakta dasa, comments, "My impression of Swami Ramdev is that he is a very humble and sincere personality.

During the time of his visit with us we developed a respectful friendship. I discussed some of our Melbourne development projects with him including the new kitchen and our interests to establish a Vedic School in the Western Suburbs in the near future. Swami Ramdev showed interest in supporting such a school that teaches the various aspects of yoga to its students."



<http://bit.ly/1P8MMgw>

*Bhakta dasa presents Swami Baba Ramdev with Srila Prabhupada's books*

# A 5,000-year-old Underground City Discovered in Turkey

By Contributor, *themindunleashed.org*, April 8, 2015  
<http://bit.ly/1GVKAz5>

The previously unknown ancient metropolis was unearthed in the course of the implementation of an urban transformation project initiated by Turkey's Housing Development Administration's (TOKI) in Nevşehir province of Central Anatolia.

While carrying out earthmoving works in the area, which was meant to be used for the

construction of new buildings, the developers stumbled upon a massive underground network of cave tunnels, escape galleries and chambers spanning over 3.5 miles (7 kilometers).



<http://bit.ly/1GVKAz5>

*A reconstruction of what the Derinkuyu underground city is believed to have looked like*

## What Hinduism Says About Success

By Ramnath Subramanian, *The Huffington Post*, April 27, 2015  
<http://huff.to/Ozrj32>

I grew up in an orthodox South Indian Hindu family where success was defined in terms of high educational qualifications and a prestigious job title, preferably in the United States. As a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, I distinctly remember my mother pointing her finger out of the bus on our way to my aunt's home. She was pointing to the Indian Institute of Technology (I.I.T.), which is equivalent to M.I.T. and accepts one percent of its applicants each year. She said, "You must worship this place from your heart. This is where you must study." Sure enough, it left strong impressions in my mind and I wanted to shine in her eyes.

It was only after I got admitted to the I.I.T. ten years later that I felt a strong dissatisfaction in my heart. It felt like after all that I had achieved over

the course of my life, I was filling up a bottomless bag, into which each time I dropped a "medal" I could not hear it clink. I motivated myself by constant comparison to the students whose success I covertly envied. Each time I equaled them or surpassed them, I felt on the top of the world, for all but a few hours. And then it was back to the emptiness. I had to concede that my notion of success had a very short shelf life. I was getting tired of this relentless pursuit that had no real longevity, in spite of the accolades that friends and family showered upon me.

Perplexed and internally confused, I turned to Hindu scriptures and its broader understanding of the meaning and goal of life. I found that Hindu scriptures consider success an important part of

*Continued on page 4*

life. It is called *artha*. *Artha* means that which is an asset or that which is meaningful. Hinduism classifies success according to stages of life - the first half of life and the second half of life.

Many scriptures focus on the first half of life success. They directly recommend pursuit of education, family, wealth and fame as essential to healthy and fulfilled living. But that could be pursued only in a moral way by following dharma or sanctioned codes of living. Such success, according to ancient Hindu culture, is a necessary source of security, continuity, predictability and impulse control that we need to establish a sound ego structure - before the chaos of real life shows up. Ironically, according to Hinduism, you need a very strong and disciplined ego structure before you let go of the ego itself. The creation of that disciplined ego structure is considered to be success in the first half of life.

The success of the first half of life is only understood when the second half of life sets in - usually not by our own doing. According to Hinduism, we “fall” into the second half of life. Usually that fall manifests itself in the form of an existential crisis that we cannot avoid using first of life success formulae. In the modern day context, such existential crisis is usually referred to as mid-life crisis. Hinduism says that such crises keep appearing in our lives. We usually respond to them by starting new projects, finding new relationships or pursuing new careers. The crisis disappears, only to reappear in the form of a bigger, deeper and unexplainable anxiety that is brought out by life’s unplanned events.

## Seminar on Vedanta and Science at TELKOM University, Bandung, Indonesia

By Hari Narayana Das, [www.dandavats.com](http://www.dandavats.com), April 27, 2015

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

Science and Spirituality are two powerful forces shaping the world today. Science deals with the measurable realm where one can experience the workings of gross matter. Beyond this we are faced with the limitations of science. Here begins the thesis of Spirituality dealing with subtle realms such as mind, intelligence, false ego, the spirit soul and ultimately the Absolute Truth. It is a self-evident fact that science alone is unable to completely address the problems we are facing in the society and in our personal lives as well and in order to fill up this vacuum prominent scientists are turning towards spirituality for solutions. Research in

At this juncture, the Hindu scriptures explain, the individual is invited unwittingly to pursue success in a very different form - to inquire about the true meaning of life itself - its *artha*. The *Vedanta Sutra*, the essential conclusion of all the Hindu scriptures, in an anticipatory way begins with the statement, “*Athatho brahma jignasa*” which means, “Therefore, inquire into your identity.” I was amazed to find a text that began with the word “therefore.” In an almost unassuming fashion, it was expecting me to get here - waiting patiently and congratulating me for the success of the first half of life - that after all the pursuits, I have been able to ask the question that truly mattered. The question is, “What is my essence, my soul, really calling me to achieve?” According to the *Vedanta Sutra*, it is not possible to ask this question if the first half of life has not been done right.

Whatever success is, however defined by the neurosis of the moment, what the ego and the collective culture define as success and what the soul asks of us to do seldom have any relationship with each other. We can drive ourselves to be successful and realize later that we are further and further from ourselves, the more so as the goal of success has driven our efforts. True success, according to Hinduism, is in relentlessly living the second half of life question. It is not in the achievements of the first half of life, but in the unraveling of a deeper mystery of our authentic identity and relationship with this transient world.

Prayers and Forgiveness are well underway, surprisingly carried out by scientists.

On April 12, 2015, the Hindu Student family of TELKOM University, Bandung, Indonesia, in collaboration with the Indonesia Bhaktivedanta Institute, hosted an international seminar on Vedanta and science entitled ‘Chemical and Consciousness,’ to give a glimpse to the students how as a scientist one can appreciate the contributions of Spirituality. Srila Prabhupada wrote about the importance of college preaching in a letter to his disciple Brhaspati dasa, on November 17, 1971:

*Continued on page 5*

“Kindly push on this college program, for only the most intelligent persons can understand Krsna philosophy, so it is very important that we spread this message to the intelligent class of men.”

The participants of the seminar were students of

<http://bit.ly/1Ej1La>



*H.H. Subhag Swami at the seminar on Vedanta and Science at TELKOM University*

University along with students from other faiths. As Srila Prabhupada stated in another letter on December 12, 1971, to another disciple, Danavir das: “...it is nice that you are infiltrating into the schools and colleges. These are the best customers for our philosophy. Give them nice philosophy...” The main speaker of the seminar was His Holiness Subhag Swami. Sriman Dinanath Das, representative of the Indonesia Bhakti Vedanta Institute, gave a brief appreciation to the students for preparing the event in a short time. The moderator of

the seminar was Sriman Samudrasena das. Subhag Swami opened the seminar by stressing on the point made by Srila Prabhupada, how life comes from life and not from chemicals, how consciousness is beyond the jurisdiction of science and how prominent scientists today are appreciating this lack and finding possible solutions in spirituality. All the students, including the devotees present, became greatly satisfied after having their doubts cleared in a simple yet satisfying way.

Then there was a question and answer session that lasted for more than an hour. Subhag Swami answered the students’ questions by elaborately explaining complex topics and making them suitable for the students to understand. Participants also received a questionnaire and they indicated interest in organizing such seminars again. Subhag Swami encouraged the students saying, “At your request



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we have delivered the seminars, now please accept our request also, please see our books at the book table and take some. You will become truly happy.” After the seminar many of the students and teachers bought *Bhagavad-gita* and other books written by Srila Prabhupada. The Swami personally signed copies of the books.

With reference to book distribution in educational settings, Srila Prabhupada wrote in his letter to Govinda Maharaja on September 22, 1970, “So I can see that there is very good potency at the

present moment for spreading this movement as was desired by my Guru Maharaja, and I am simply trying my best to carry out His desire. And if some of my students adopt this attitude, without any other motivation, surely Krishna will fulfill our desire. So push on with book publication and distribution, and I am very glad that you are now distributing to schools and libraries.” The program concluded with the distribution of prasadam to all attendees. Thirteen books were distributed during the program.

## Massive Earthquake Strikes Nepal – ISKCON Also Affected

By ISKCON News Staff, *ISKCON News*, April 25, 2015  
<http://bit.ly/1cpGlyg>

A massive earthquake of 7.9 magnitude struck central Nepal on Saturday, April 25, affecting Kathmandu and the city of Pokhara. The tremors could also be felt in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

According to international news agencies hundreds of people had been killed across Nepal. Rescuers are digging through the rubble of collapsed buildings in Kathmandu trying to reach survivors. A number of historic buildings have been destroyed.

Patri das, ISKCON’s regional secretary in Nepal reported that the temple in Kathmandu is basically

okay, but there are severe cracks in a number of buildings on the ISKCON property.

The Deities have been moved outside of the main temple.

No devotees were injured at the temple complex, but there is a concern that since many houses in the area collapsed, it is impossible to determine at this point if all ISKCON devotees are safe.

ISKCON Kathmandu is asking devotees and well-wishers worldwide to please pray for the safety and lives of ISKCON members and all the people living in and around the affected area.



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

# METROSOCIAL: Charade of the Church attacks

By Abhijit Majumder for <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/>, April 25, 2015

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/article-3055589/METROSOCIAL-Charade-Church-attacks.html>

“Church leaders have speculated that the Hindu far right might also be behind the church attacks,” the *New York Times* wrote.

US President Barack Obama too swiftly took to the pulpit, “India will succeed so long as it is not splintered along the lines of religious faith.”

Ex-cop Julio Ribeiro to boxer Mary Kom to former Navy Chief Sushil Kumar spoke about growing fear and insecurity among Indian Christians.

And then, it all started unraveling.

While a special investigative team is looking into the Dilshad garden church fire, pesky children were found behind the Jasola church stone-throwing, short circuit behind Rohini crib burning, a drunken dare behind Vikaspuri vandalising, and a burglary at Vasant Kunj church.

A church which was attacked in Hisar was an illegal construction. However, it was perhaps the only communal one among recent church attacks, with the accused planting a Lord Hanuman idol inside it and blaming the priest of dodgy conversion attempts.

The Navi Mumbai church attack grabbed headlines till it was found to be the handiwork of gamblers exacting revenge for church authorities setting the police after them.

In West Bengal, mainstream and social media suspected Hindu fundamentalists behind the rape of a 72-year-old nun till the accused, Bangladeshi Muslims, were tracked down and arrested.

And now, a jilted Muslim lover has been arrested for the attack on an Agra church, belying earlier claims that it was a communal incident.

Disbelievably, almost disappointedly, those who strung together a neat narrative of intolerant India watched each bead of untruth explode. Ribeiro even admitted to exaggerating the threat to Christians.

But the mainstream media, which so enthusiastically spotted and reported a trend, did not report a fraction as comprehensively how it was never a trend in the first place.

The meltdown of the great church attack story was reported in trickles — a single-column story here and there, a passing byte. No channel had a debate on it or stood corrected.



*The fire that started at the St Sebastian Church in Delhi's Dilshad Garden on December 1, 2014, had caught on to national media by January and was raging internationally by February*

Nobody asked who jumped the gun, who tarred the nation's image, or who created the communal discourse in the first place.

International media, too, seemed to be a part of this collusion of silence. Apart from creating baseless fear among minorities, what the media and intelligentsia have achieved is to further erode their own credibility.

Social media has time and again shown the mirror to the mainstream in the last couple of years on matters of biased reportage and poor fact-checking.

One can't shrug it all off as trolling. But here is the real danger: If a communal attack actually takes place (we know what happened to Graham Staines or Arul Das), mainstream media reports could be taken with extreme scepticism.

The truth could get buried in the ashes of past lies. The bigger danger to the minorities is not from their perceived enemies but their irresponsible champions.

Bias and lies breed anger, and often harden the stance of otherwise liberal, tolerant people. And it is never wise to keep announcing the arrival of the wolf.

**Please send us your feedback**

**[feedback@mukundagoswami.org](mailto:feedback@mukundagoswami.org)**

# Personal Message...



Dear Friends,

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

## The Printed Word

Before 1850 almost all knowledge was memorized. Hearing was king. Irish monks, living in igloo-shaped dwellings that dotted the Erie countryside, painstakingly copied manuscripts – mostly biblical.

Before books, writings were either memorized or copied by hand onto large tree leaves and thin wooden strips.

Then in 1450 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. That changed the world. By 1500, printing presses throughout Western Europe had already produced more than twenty million volumes. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an estimated 200 million books were printed.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Maharaja, also known as “the walking encyclopedia,” was not only a great intellect, but also a revolutionary and innovative figure. He changed the world of Vaishnavism. He emphasized the importance of the printed word in the form of books.

Srila Prabhupada himself stressed the importance of books. He is known for his translations and purports in *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, and *Caitanya-caritamrita*. During his entire stay in the West, in the wee small hours of the morning, he was dictating and translating the books that are the basis of ISKCON.

Srila Prabhupada in about 1974 sent a letter out to many of his leading disciples stating that they must sign and return a paper that committed them to vows of celibacy, non-use of intoxication, no consumption of meat, fish or eggs, swearing-off of gambling and agreeing to chant 16 rounds daily of the Maha-mantra (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*). Most of the recipients to this letter had previously taken these same vows verbally before the spiritual master, the Vedic sacrificial fire, the Deities and the assembled Vaishnavas.

In 1973 Srila Prabhupada said he would give up managing ISKCON so that he could concentrate on writing books.

“Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the *Upanisads*, *Puranas* and *Narada-pancaratra* is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society,” is a statement written in Rupa Goswami’s *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.101).

On August 8, 2013 in the temple room of Mayapura Dhama, an ISKCON devotee named Acintya Caitanya Das said this in a lecture: “. . . Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati pushed publishing books, books, books, books. And Prabhupada also said books, books, books. This is the actual basis of unity in our movement...”

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

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

