



Spiritual Perspectives

January 2017

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

Understanding Our Experience

By Radha devi dasi



Fifty years ago, *Time* asked in a famous headline, “Is God Dead?” The magazine wondered whether religion was relevant to modern life in the post-atomic age when communism was spreading and science was explaining more about our natural world than ever before. Atheism and lack of religion have spread since the 1970s.

According to *National Geographic*, the religiously unaffiliated, who practice no religion, are growing significantly. They’re the second largest “religious group” in North America and most of Europe. In the United States, they make up almost a quarter of the population and have overtaken Catholics, mainline protestants, and all followers of non-Christian faiths.

There have long been predictions that religion would fade from relevancy as the world modernizes, but all the recent surveys are finding that it is happening rapidly. France will have a majority secular population soon. So will the Netherlands and New Zealand. The United Kingdom and Australia will soon lose Christian majorities. Religion is quickly becoming less important than it has ever been.

One cause of the spread of religious disbelief is the extent to which science appears to explain “religious experience.” Now, a new study shows through functional MRI scans that religious and spiritual experiences have a physical basis. They activate the same reward systems between your ears as do feelings of love, being moved by music and even doing drugs, according to the study,

which was recently published in the journal “Social Neuroscience.”

Many will see these findings, and others like them, as proof that religion is imaginary. Out of body experiences and near death experiences have already been explained away as hallucinations triggered by brain stressors. Is this a point on which religion and science simply have to disagree?

Real understanding of the phenomena described by science can only come from understanding the purpose of the material world.

Even if religious experience is related to brain and body changes, we have to ask why that should be true. In a secular view of the world, human behavior has developed to promote the “survival of the fittest.” Thus, the relationship between religious experience and the brain should have some advantage to our species.

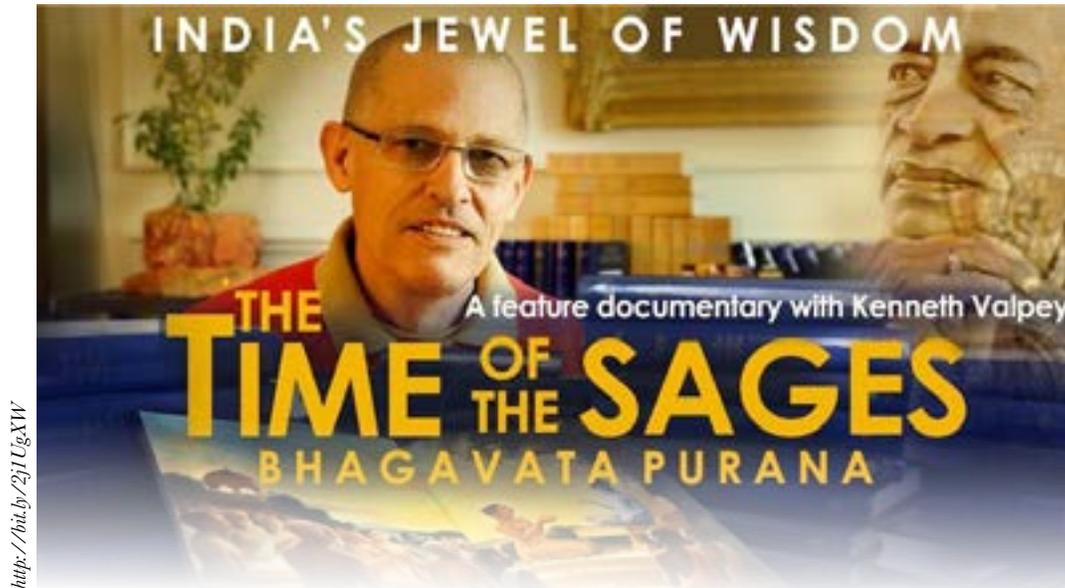
While secularists might struggle to explain the survival benefit of religion, our philosophy teaches that the material world is primed in many ways to turn us toward Krishna. From material difficulties, to great *acaryas*, to impulses hard wired into our very brains, Krishna keeps encouraging us to engage in activities that make us more aware of Him. What some might see as a challenge to faith is actually proof of the Lord’s constant compassion on all living entities.



New Film Aims to Bring World Fame to *Bhāgavatam*

By Madhava Smullen for ISKCON News on December 23, 2016

<http://bit.ly/2j1UgXW>



“The Time of the Sages,” a documentary film currently in production, will aim to bring the same kind of worldwide recognition to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as is awarded to the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

The hour-long film will follow scholar Krishna Kshetra Swami (Dr. Kenneth Valpey), a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, as he interviews fellow academics and visits key places in India relevant to the *Bhāgavatam*.

“The *Bhagavad-gītā* has become quite widely known — since it was first translated into English in 1785, it has had quite an impact in the intellectual world in Europe and America,” he says. “But although Prabhupāda’s translation of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* has been distributed all over the world, the *Bhāgavatam* is still not so well known in comparison to the *Gīta*.”

Krishna Kshetra explains that the *Bhāgavatam* begins where the *Gīta* — dubbed ‘the ABCs of spiritual life’ — ends. So it’s the natural next step. He hopes that a film will be the perfect way to introduce modern audiences to the *Bhāgavatam*, to show them that it belongs as world literature, and that it is serious philosophy and not just stories, and to inspire them to read it.

“We want to make viewers think and ask questions,” says director Citra Karuni Dasi. “‘Could there be a higher reality? What is Asian philosophy? Who are the avatars? Who am I? What is the purpose of life?’”

Citra Karuni, who started out as a professional designer, will be working with a crew of talented devotee professionals on the film. They include Gaura Govinda Das from Croatia, who was the cinematographer on the Yamuna-in-plight film “Rescuing the Stolen River,” and Shyam Gopal Das from Kazakhstan, whose film “Reconnection” won 15 international awards.

“The Time of the Sages” will explore what is so special about this ancient 18,000-verse work, and why it remains so popular in India with practices like the Bhāgavat Saptaha, where it is spoken over seven days.

In the film Krishna Kshetra Swami will attend an international conference on the *Bhāgavata Purāna* at Madras University in Chennai, India and interview many of the scholars there.

These will include Dr. McComas Taylor, who has led the South Asia Program at the Australian National University in Canberra; Dr. John Stratton Hawley, Professor of Religion at Columbia University; and Dr. Barbara Holdrege, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Krishna Kshetra will also speak with Dr. Graham M. Schweig, Professor of Religion at Christopher Newport University; Dr. Ravi M. Gupta, Director of the Religious Studies Program at Utah State University; and Acharya Srivatsa

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Goswami from Vrindavana's Radha-Ramana temple.

The filmmakers also hope to visit Ahobilam in Andhra Pradesh to discuss the Nrsimhadeva avatar; Vrindavana Dhama to discuss Lord Krishna; and the astonishing Vaikuntha Perumal temple in Kanchipuram.

"The late Dr. Dennis Hudson wrote a full-length book about this one temple, showing how it is a three-dimensional *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*," says Krishna Kshetra Swami. "It has fifty-two bas-relief sculptures from many of the pastimes in the *Bhāgavatam*, and he analyzes in great detail why these sculptures are in the particular positions they are. He spent twenty-five years studying it."

The film will also discuss the history of the *Bhāgavatam*'s migration beyond India, in which Śrīla Prabhupāda plays a prominent role.

"The Time of the Sages" is being independently produced and is raising funds on Indiegogo.com. The makers hope to put it in circulation in the educational film distribution system, so that it will be shown at universities, colleges and libraries everywhere. They also want to translate it into multiple languages.

The film is part of a bigger *Bhāgavata Purāna* Research Project at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies in the UK, led by Krishna Kshetra Swami and Radhika Ramana Das, that has published two academic books on the *Bhāgavatam* so far. It also aims to bring together as many of the 80 existing Sanskrit commentaries on the *Bhāgavatam* as possible.

"I've been reading, studying, and discussing the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for the last more than forty years, and I haven't tired of it," says Krishna Kshetra Swami. "Because it's so rich. It's a kind of adventure story which brings you to the point of really inquiring about deeper matters – such as what's the purpose of my life, and how can we live the best life possible."

Krishna Kshetra feels that now is the perfect time to introduce people to the *Bhāgavatam*, with its depth of thought.

"We're living in a world fraught with troubles," he says. "People are overcome by anxiety, by fear, by uncertainty. The *Bhāgavatam* is a medicine for the disease of the heart. A medicine that is giving us a broader vision by which we can change ourselves individually, and the world."

Neurologist's Study Shows *Maha-Mantra* Could Help Anxiety, Schizophrenia

By Madhava Smullen for ISKCON News on December 15, 2016

<http://bit.ly/2iy6BQo>



<http://bit.ly/2iy6BQo>

The Hare Krishna maha-mantra could calm the mind and help anxiety and schizophrenia, according to new research

Dr. Viveck Baluja, a neurologist at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, has begun a study on the effects of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* on the brain that has already yielded exciting findings and impressed hospital staff.

Dr. Baluja (Vinaya Gauracandra Das), was inspired to embark on the project by his guru

Jayapataka Swami and *siksa* guru Nidra Dasi. He is also working with his wife Padmakshi Sri Devi Dasi, as well as members of Jayapataka Swami's medical team headed by Dr. Achyutananda Das.

Vinaya Gauracandra began his study by observing the effects of the *maha-mantra* on the brain of one test subject—himself—using MEG, a neuroimaging technique for mapping brain activity.

First, the subject's brainwaves were observed while in a peaceful, resting state. Next, the brainwaves were remeasured after the subject chanted four rounds of the Pancha Tattva mantra, followed by half an hour of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*. Then the difference was recorded.

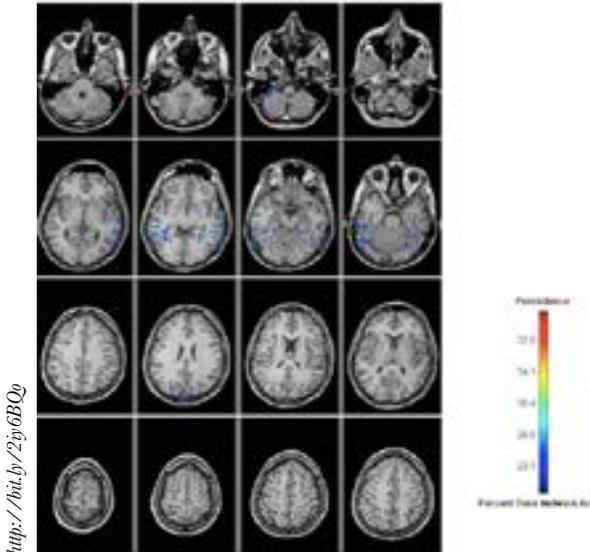
The findings were incredible.

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“The data showed that the brain is not actually restful in the so-called resting state,” Vinaya says. “Your brain continues to constantly give you information. After chanting, however, the data showed almost no cortical activation, or brain activity. This is very interesting, because it shows that you’ve actually been able to calm down the brain.”

What’s groundbreaking about this is that according to Vinaya, the only method doctors currently have of decreasing such brain activity is anti-epileptic medication. This is used as a therapeutic measure to treat patients with anxiety, schizophrenia, and other such mental disorders.

“Voluntarily decreasing your brain activity is unheard of,” he says. “But our findings show that we can create the same therapeutic effects



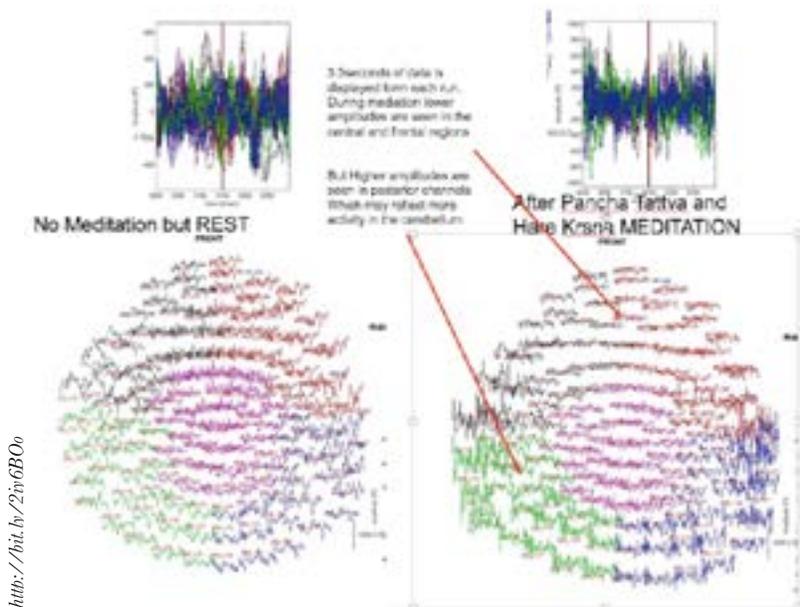
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Here we see the brain after four rounds of the Pancha-tattva mantra and 30 mins of the Hare Krishna maha-mantra. Notice the decreased activation in the brain, and more rest than in the ‘resting state’

of medication by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra. That’s very exciting.”

Vinaya Gauracandra says that the findings also correlate with the model Lord Krishna gives in the third chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, where He says “one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence.”

“The data showed that in the back of the brain in the area of the Cerebellum — which is associated with fine tuning and balance, and is under more automatic activation — there was more control and more stimulation after chanting,” he explains.



<http://bit.ly/2jy6BQg>

During chanting, lower amplitudes are seen in the central and frontal regions of the brain. But higher amplitudes are seen in posterior channels, which may reflect more activity in the cerebellum.

Vinaya says that all this has piqued the interest of members of the Director of the MEG Program at Henry Ford Hospital, who have approved the study of ten more subjects to gather more data and further validate his findings.

The subjects will all be devotees of Krishna who have been chanting for five years or more. “It’s key that they already have a taste for chanting, because it may not be so easy to get someone to chant for half an hour who hasn’t chanted before,” Vinaya says.

This study will develop baseline scientific proof of the effects of chanting on the brain.

The Institutional Review Board at Henry Ford has also approved an anonymous survey of 95,000 participants to gain their retrospective views on chanting. This next step, currently underway, will conduct an online survey of initiated devotees across the globe — or any devotees who have been chanting for some years — on their experience with chanting the maha-mantra.

“We’re asking subjectively, has it made them feel better? What has it done for them?” Vinaya says. “Is there any fluctuation? Do they feel different on days that they chant and on days that they don’t? This is to gather data on what effect chanting has on anxiety, depression, addiction, and just on your mood on a day-to-day basis.”

These ‘big data metrics’ will be used to show medical institutions the efficacy of chanting. The final phase of Vinaya Gauracandra’s project will then be to try therapeutic chanting

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in a hospital setting with patients who have not chanted before.

“The ISKCON movement will benefit by metrics of success,” he says. “This data is crucial to being able to point to the effect of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s intervention on the world in a scientific way. We’ll use it to establish the basis for clinical trials, and to point us in the right directions for where chanting is effective in increasing quality of life and where it is not.”

“For the movement to really be able to prescribe the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*,” Vinaya concludes, “we need to simply collect our data in an organized fashion, so that it will no longer be viewed as a pseudo-scientific process. Then we will have unbiased data to move forward in our preaching movement, in a systematic and metric-based fashion. And we will be able to ethically approach the scientific community as Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted.”

U.S. House of Representatives Library Purchases *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Set

By Madhava Smullen for ISKCON News on December 15, 2016

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

The U.S. House of Representatives Library in Washington D.C. recently purchased an entire set of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, during the House’s Diwali celebration on October 31st.

Meanwhile on December 14th, the Indian Embassy stocked their library with eight copies of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.

The books came from ISKCON Baltimore’s Jiva Daya Sankirtana Team, which is working hard during ISKCON’s 50th Anniversary to place Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books at various prestigious locations such as government offices, libraries, and embassies in the Washington, D.C. area.

The books were delivered by Himmat Patel, who is president of the Gayatri Parivar Hindu group in the D.C. metro area, and is well connected with politicians and leaders. Mr. Patel regularly visits the ISKCON Baltimore temple, and shares Jiva Daya’s goal of spreading transcendental knowledge to bring about real peace and unity in the world.

“We met Mr. Patel at ISKCON Baltimore in October, and he immediately agreed to take a *Bhāgavatam* set to the White House during its Diwali celebration,” says Jiva Daya’s Lokadhyaksha Das.

“However before going, he contacted Democratic Congressman Steny Hoyer, the U.S. Representative for Maryland’s 5th Congressional District. Congressman Hoyer was the House majority leader from 2007-2011. He suggested to Mr. Patel to place the set in the House Library instead, as more people would have access to it there.”

On Oct 31st, Mr. Patel went with Congressman Hoyer to attend the Diwali func-

tion at the House of Representatives, and placed the *Bhāgavatam* set and one copy of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* at the House Library along with a ceremonial puja.

During the Diwali event, Mr. Patel met with Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, who appreciated the puja and asked about the books. Mr. Patel explained that these books help one become free from the cycle of birth and death, and connect one to the Supreme Divinity. Congressman Ryan expressed interest in reading the books, and insisted on paying for them, even though a donation had not been expected.

In the House Library, the books will be read by congressmen and women, the leaders of society.

Meanwhile on December 14th, Himmat Patel also placed eight copies of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* in the library at the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Next, Mr. Patel is connecting with contacts at the Library of Congress, the largest library in the world and the main research arm of the U.S. Congress. He plans to place another full *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* set there soon, installing it with a puja.

Beyond that, the Jiva Daya team hopes to place Prabhupāda’s books in other government offices and embassies.

“This is an important effort for ISKCON 50, as Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his books to be in all prominent places where leaders of society could come in contact with them,” says Lokadhyaksha. “We are very excited to work with Himmat Patel on this, as he is also very enthusiastic in spreading this message.”

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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RISE by Radhanath Swami, a New App to Take Spirituality to Every Phone and Tablet

By Bala Nimai Das for ISKCON News, December 9, 2016
<http://bit.ly/2iY7Wmm>



Rise brings its users short bursts of wake-up wisdom from the comfort of their phones. It has simple, uncomplicated spiritual tools specific for everyone's needs. If you're stressed, search through the videos on stress. If you're looking for advice on relationships, search through the videos on relationships. And if you're looking to realize your inner self, the app may even have something for that, too. It's a practical, accessible approach to spirituality created for the modern world, which is why it all fits into everyone's mobile.

Rise was inspired by Radhanath Swami, a life-long monk in the bhakti tradition and author of the New York Times best-seller, *The Journey Within — Exploring the Path of Bhakti*. With a wealth of experience on mindfulness meditation, relationships, happiness and well-being, his daily doses of inspiration are just what many people need to

start the day right. Users can tailor content based on topic, save their favorites for easy navigation and read the video summaries for a quick insight.

But that's not all. In the next update, users will be able to learn from full-feature courses on motivation, leadership, kirtan and a host of other topics — created by Radhanath Swami and friends — all to help people demystify spirituality.

An integral part of Rise by Radhanath Swami is the philosophy. The app is completely free of charge. No in-app purchases or hidden costs; all their content is free. They simply run off the donations of the users. In fact, running costs aside, any profit made goes towards charitable projects founded by Radhanath Swami or those close to his heart.

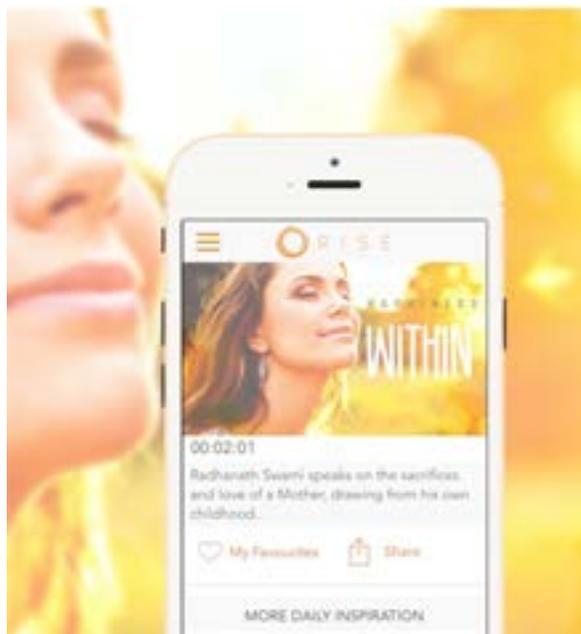
Good to know:

Radhanath Swami inspired an innovative food distribution program called “Midday Meals” (or Annamrita) in which they feed 1.2 million impoverished school children throughout India daily!

The Govardhana Eco-Village (GEV) is a sustainable farm community, yoga and meditation center in India. Also founded on the principles Radhanath Swami lives by, the GEV has won multiple awards for its contribution to organic farming practices, water conservation, animal care, alternative energies and women empowerment.

Bhaktivedanta Hospital is a not-for-profit whose prime mission is to provide quality health care service to the underprivileged. The hospital combines cutting-edge medical practice with time-honored holistic sciences to offer patients solace for the body, mind and spirit. They also run mobile medical camps, disaster relief, hospice care and preventative education.

RISE was released on iOS and Android, on December 7, 2016 which is the appearance day of Radhanath Swami.



Personal

Message...



Dear Friends,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda inspired devotees, especially early disciples, to execute Krishna Consciousness. He didn't simply command them to act.

Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't simply direct and order devotees to do various needed service, he inspired them to act in Krishna consciousness.

Devotees, who act obediently, may forget, after some time, that they are serving Krishna.

Of course obedience is a good quality, one of the initial symptoms of love, Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes told us. However obedience is not the ONLY way to act in service to the Lord.

A successful entrepreneur once told me that the secret to his success in regard to employee retention – and his organization has an unusually high employee retention rate – was to ask each potential recruit two questions.

1. What do you love to do?

and

2. What do you do best?

Of the two questions, the first counted the most to this business magnate. He bases his relationship with all his employees on the answer to the first question.

When I wrote my first book, *Miracle on Second Avenue*, I indirectly implied that I took up service to ISKCON because I loved who I was serving – Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Krishna. I wasn't acting out of carrying out an order. I was doing what I loved to do. My motivation was to change the world for the better, using Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and other teachings as my guide and inspiration. Therefore I undertook many arduous tasks (which many people today regard as impossibly difficult) with relative ease. These tasks included travel to a foreign land and living in abject poverty.

What to me was fun and a “magic carpet ride” appeared uphill, impossible and daring to many.

These are words from *Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līla*, 16.65:

“If we simply follow Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's instructions and follow in the footsteps of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, this Krishna consciousness movement can advance, and even more difficult tasks can be performed by the preachers remaining faithful to the service of the Lord.”

The above passage demonstrates what the corporate world calls empowerment. This is exactly what Śrīla Prabhupāda got his followers to do – to move forward with ISKCON activities. This happened primarily through the mercy and energy of Śrīla Prabhupāda himself and through their love of their service, their love of Śrīla Prabhupāda and their love of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

I remain,

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami