



# Spiritual Perspectives

March 2017

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

## What's A Vaisnava To Do?

By Radha devi dasi

As of January 2017, more than 65 million people have been displaced from their homes around the world. This is the second highest number of refugees since World War II ended in the 1940s. This humanitarian crisis has strained the resources of the countries nearest to the mass migrations from Syria and Afghanistan. At the same time, an anti-immigrant backlash in Europe and the US means that few options exist for resettling the millions now isolated in sub-standard refugee camps.

Expectations are that the number of refugees will continue to increase, meaning that more will die in hazardous attempts to reach safe countries, more will be physically and sexually assaulted, more will suffer from hunger, disease and lack of shelter, and more children will grow up without education or even a safe place to play.

What obligations do Vaisnavas have in responding to this crisis? Some feel called to activism on the part of refugees, to participating in humanitarian missions, to advocating for policies that allow refugees to seek political asylum. This crisis is so large that it demands a response on the part of nations, not just individuals. But nations are run by people who are politically active. Personal activism is an important part of social change, some argue. Vaisnavas are compassionate and should not ignore the tremendous suffering of others, they contend.

Other devotees write that Vaisnavas should avoid involvement in politics in general and in secular solutions in particular. They remind us that Srila Prabhupada advised us to avoid reading newspapers and watching television and advised us not to become involved in politics. Real compassion, as Srila Prabhupada explained, means focusing on the needs of the soul. We should not, some argue, become distracted from our primary mission to spread God consciousness.

In a recent essay for *ISKCON News*, Yogesvara dasa, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, asked whether devotees have an obligation to object to American President Donald Trump's recent attempt at banning refugees from certain Muslim countries. Holocaust genocide, he notes, was facilitated by those who failed to protect members of a minority religion. His question: "If we abstain from engagement with world events, are we practicing Bhakti



*Greece overrun with refugees*

or perpetuating its irrelevance in world affairs?" Others stood up for ISKCON when our rights were challenged. We should do the same, he concludes.

At the same time, there is a danger in becoming involved in divisive issues. Rajendranandana dasa, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, recently published an open letter on social media addressing this point. He suggests a "litmus test" to gauge our ability to engage in secular advocacy while remaining Krishna conscious.

"Are we becoming angry, fearful, or developing dislike for others based on their expression of differing opinions than ours?" he asks. "Are we forgetting to see others as suffering souls who are conditioned by material nature and need our help or at least our prayers for their upliftment?" These are excellent questions for keeping us grounded in any endeavor.

Ultimately, Krishna consciousness is a personal path that recognizes each individual as unique. It is natural that we may have different viewpoints and manifest our concern for others in different ways. Each devotee, according to his or her nature and level of consciousness, must find a way to respond to the challenges of the secular world. These two devotees, Yogesvara prabhu and Rajendranandana prabhu have given us all some food for thought as we consider the world today.

# Houston's Goswami Academy to Hold Open House This March

By Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, February 23, 2017  
<http://bit.ly/2mg75iU>

ISKCON Houston's Goswami Academy, an elementary school from pre-K to fifth grade, is already a success, teaching students from its own large congregation as well as ISKCON children from other states.

But now the school, established in 2014, is also hoping to attract students from the broader Houston community to avail of its values-based education.

"There is a serious lack of values in our education system," says school board chairman Saranga Thakur Das, who feels that ISKCON can really contribute something toward this need.

To show the public what it has to offer, Goswami Academy has scheduled an open house event for Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, which will be widely advertised in local media outlets.

Over 200 people are expected. The day will start at 10:30 a.m., with the school children leading visitors in a kirtan procession to first tour the grand new ISKCON Houston temple (also built in 2014), and then the school building, located within the temple premises.

One of the children's games sets up another exciting new development – a new school building for the Goswami Academy. Kids will get to color in pictures of the building design, and the best will win a prize.

Currently, the school shares a building with the ISKCON Houston Sunday School. The new Goswami Academy building will have about 10,000 square feet of space and state-of-the-art lab, library, and computer room facilities. It will also accommodate more age groups, introducing a nursery for ages two and up (currently only students from three are accepted) and running all the way to eighth grade in middle school. It will be located just 1,000 feet from the temple.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the new building will be held the day after the open house, on the auspicious day of Gaura Purnima, March 12<sup>th</sup>. Construction will start immediately, with a view to opening the building for the 2017/2018 school year.



<http://bit.ly/2mg75iU>

*Students at Goswami Academy*

During the school tour, visitors will get to see the classrooms, meet the teachers and the principal Subhra Dasi, and talk to parents whose children are already enrolled. They'll then have lunch at the new Govinda's restaurant, which is offering a buy one, get one free special for its own grand opening event.

During this time, there will be fun kids' activities in the courtyard to keep visiting children engaged while their parents talk to the teachers, including facepainting, balloons, a treasure hunt and other games.



<http://bit.ly/2mg75iU>

*Classroom at Goswami Academy*

Even before then, the Goswami Academy is already an attractive prospect. The school currently has twenty students from pre-K to fifth grade, including ISKCON devotee families from North Carolina; Columbus, Ohio; and Seattle, who heard about it through word of mouth and have already moved to Dallas to enroll their children in it. There are also already a couple of students from outside the ISKCON community, whose parents were attracted to the school's values-based education and high academic standards.

Academics adhere to state standards but are also inquiry-based, challenging and cutting edge

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– children learn through exploration, experiments and interacting with each other.

Values – such as compassion, respect, tolerance, and humility – are not taught in isolation



<http://bit.ly/2mmeZ5iU>

### *Kīrtan for the classroom Deities*

but integrated into the curriculum. They're also learned through practical application rather than just theory.

“For example, in our school we see children all the way from three-year-olds to fifth graders practically applying compassion all the time,” says principal Subhra Dasi, who previously served as a public school teacher in California.

“If they arrive and their friend is not there, they'll immediately remind the teachers to call their friend's parents to find out if they're sick. Then when the friend returns, they'll ask them, ‘Are you okay? Did you go to the doctor?’ Or if somebody slips and falls while walking up the steps, they'll help each other, bring them to a teacher to ask for a bandaid – things like that.”

Students also learn leadership skills from Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kids*,

learning important skills like conflict resolution, being proactive, and listening before trying to be understood. Other classes include gardening, yoga, and Spanish language.

Students also learn *Bhagavad-gita* and *Siksastakam* prayers, Sanskrit, and do *kirtan* every day. But nothing spiritual is forced.

“If a new student comes in and doesn't want to clap their hands during *kirtan*, I'm not going to tell them they have to,” Subhra says. “I want that to come from their heart. What's more, as teachers we try to set by example rather than telling them – we'll take *kirtan* as important, and they'll see us sitting down and enjoying it.”

With this mood, not only ISKCON parents but also parents from the broader community don't feel like anything is being pushed on their children. “The mother of one of our students from outside the ISKCON congregation was just recently telling us how much she loves the positive vibration of the *maha-mantra* and the *Siksastakam*, and how they change the whole environment in her home,” Subhra says.

Subhra hopes that March 11<sup>th</sup>'s open house attracts more parents from the broader community looking for values-based education for their children.

She's also excited about the future. “We're really looking forward to the new school building and facilities,” she says. “And we're so happy that our ISKCON Houston Temple President, Shyamasundara Prabhu, has placed education of our children as a priority.”

## Meet the Vegan Saudi Prince Who's Turning the Lights on in Jordan

By Elizabeth McSheffrey & Jenny Uechi, [www.nationalobserver.com](http://www.nationalobserver.com), February 14, 2017

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

“Climate change and the unjustified consumption of energy are two of the most serious issues we face today at the macro-level.”

These words were spoken by Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed in December 2015 at a business forum in a five-star hotel in Riyadh, the bustling capital of Saudi Arabia. At the time, his call for restraint in consideration of Earth's climate might have seemed surprising in a room full of businessmen who built their wealth on oil.

While Saudi Arabia produces the most oil of any country in the world, it is also the world's

sixth-largest consumer — with a population of barely 31 million. The petroleum sector accounted for 90 per cent of fiscal revenues and 80 per cent of export earnings in 2015, according to the International Monetary Fund. Crude is so cheap in the desert country that SUVs and Cadillacs crowd its highways. The flow of oil revenue is smooth and constant, free from the burden of income tax.

Yet slowly, despite this abundance, the country's elite are starting to wake up to the reality that this high-flying lifestyle of fossil fuel

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



Prince Khaled tucks into the plant-based dishes of *Cha-Ya*, a vegan Japanese restaurant in San Francisco's bustling Mission District

consumption may not be sustainable. Much has changed in Saudi Arabia since bin Alwaleed spoke in 2015, and the Middle Eastern country has strengthened its commitments to mitigating climate change.

Bin Alwaleed is the son of the billionaire investor and philanthropist Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz al Saud, also known as *Time* magazine's "Arabian Warren Buffett." As the scion of one of the world's wealthiest people, he grew up surrounded by opulence and glamour in his father's colossal \$136-million, 460,000 square foot palace in Riyadh.

For more information go to: <http://ISKCONNEWS.org/vegan-saudi-prince,6055>

## South African Devotees Walk 650 kms to Raise Funds for Sankirtana Bus

By Madhava Smullen for *ISKCON News* on February 17, 2017  
<http://bit.ly/2lzAtN5>

Two South African devotees – brahmachari Narottam Dasa and his friend Mukharavinda Dasa, both from ISKCON Sandton – have walked 654 kilometers from Johannesburg to Durban, to raise funds for a new *sankirtana* bus.

Because they are humble, unknown *brahmacharis* without the pull to draw instant financial support, and their ashrama doesn't have enough funds to pay for a bus, they decided to get creative to manifest what was important to them.

"Our motivation was that there's very little *sankirtana* happening in South Africa right now," says Narottam. "And as *brahmacharis*, we felt we weren't fully engaged enough. So we wanted to do something that might attract the hearts of devotees and inspire them to contribute so that we would be able to go out preaching every weekend."

Narottam and Mukharavinda set off on October 22, 2016 from Johannesburg, arriving in Durban eighteen days and 654 kilometers later, on November 12<sup>th</sup>.

They walked alone, with no supporting vehicle, using Google Maps and their smartphones' GPS to chart a route that took them along backroads between farms and occasionally alongside highways.

Every day, they would begin at 6:30 in the morning, walk 35 kilometers – 21 miles, nearly the length of a marathon – and arrive at their next destination at around 6:30 pm.



<http://bit.ly/2lzAtN5>

Narottam encounters sheep crossing a backroad along his journey

The journey was fraught with challenges.

"Mukharavinda was physically fit and had trained in preparation for the walk," says Narottam. "But I was only mentally prepared. It was difficult. Sometimes he would be a kilometer ahead of me. By the fourth night, I was in so much pain that I couldn't move my legs. I thought that after a few days of walking, my body would adapt to the routine. But it never really did."

The two endured the elements, from baking sun to heavy rain. They dragged their meager possessions along on a small trolley, and would often run out of water, sometimes having to walk five to eight kilometers in the heat

*Continued on page 5*

to the next water station with nothing to drink. Occasionally they would lose their cellphone reception and GPS, take a wrong turn and walk for ten kilometers in the wrong direction.

Sometimes Narottam and Mukharavinda would be stopped by police, who interrogated them about why they were walking around backroads no one else ever frequented.

When there were longer gaps between towns, they'd have to walk 45 kilometers in a day, reaching civilization by 8 o'clock at night.

"We just depended on Krishna to find a place to sleep," says Narottam. "We had a tent so we would simply knock on people's doors and ask to camp in their backyard. Sometimes we'd arrive too late or people would be too suspicious of us, so we'd end up setting up camp at a gas station."

When Narottam felt like quitting, he would pep-talk himself. "I would think, 'No, I'm doing this for South Africa,'" he says. "The dream of having a bus and spreading Srila Prabhupada's teachings and the *sankirtana yajna*, seeing people chanting and happy, kept me going."

The way wasn't always hardships. Sometimes hospitable farmers would pick the devotees up on the backroads, drive them to their farm and give them food, water and rest. Sometimes police or curious people in towns along the way would be genuinely interested in their mission and their message, donating whatever coins they could and taking some of Prabhupada's books.

"We would explain to them that we were raising money to get a bus and travel around the country, sharing our message of God, the nature of the soul, and devotional service," Narottam says. "And they were happy to hear it. Some even became my Facebook friends and I've kept in touch with them since."

Local newspapers even picked up the story, featuring photos of the pair in their saffron and white robes, and reporting on them as "students walking to promote bhakti-yoga."

Unfortunately, while the walk was a meaningful offering to Srila Prabhupada for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ISKCON, not enough support was gathered and the two have not yet been able to raise enough money for their *sankirtana* bus.

Staying positive, Narottam and Mukharavinda still hope someone will come forward, inspired by their story, and either pay for their bus or contribute a chunk towards a large deposit. They are hoping to purchase either a VW Crafter or a Mercedes Benz Sprinter, which each cost around 575,000 Rand or \$39,000 US dollars, can accommodate 23 passengers, and get excellent gas mileage.

Currently, Narottam, a certified yoga teacher, runs a Bhakti-Yoga Society at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, where students learn hatha yoga, mantra meditation, vegetarian *prasadam* cooking, and have *kirtan* evenings.

With a new bus he would like to be able to take students on outings to ISKCON Durban's iconic Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding, as well as to house programs with visiting Swamis in Johannesburg, so that they can get a deeper experience of Krishna conscious practices and philosophy.

He also wants to be able to do traveling *sankirtana* every weekend, visiting the many townships around Johannesburg such as Soweto and picking up the young devotees there who are enthusiastic about *Harinama* and book distribution, then dropping them back home afterwards.

"Many of them are street kids who don't have transport to come to where we are," he says. "But they want to do *sankirtana*."

Narottam and his friend Savyasaci Dasa also would like to use the bus to take chanting and book distribution to rural areas such as Swaziland and Mafikeng, in the Northwest province of South Africa.

"We have gone to these places before, set up book tables, distributed *prasadam* and sang *kirtan*," he says. "And people are always very eager for us to return."

At its core, a reliable *sankirtana* bus is essential to the wellbeing of Johannesburg's *brahmacharis*, Narottam feels. "I have seen many *brahmacharis* leave the movement, because they're not fully engaged in colorful, exciting *sankirtana*," he says. "So a bus like this would really bring life back into the *sankirtana* movement here."

To contact Narottam, find out more information about his preaching programs, and help fund a *sankirtana* bus for the Johannesburg *brahmacharis*, visit him at <https://www.facebook.com/narottam.dasa>



Newspaper covers the story

## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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# Editorial by Radhanath Swami

<http://www.speakingtree.in/article/connect-with-your-core>

Radhanath Swami points out the beneficial effects of using science and technology for common benefit

Science and technology could be potential reasons for great benefit to humanity and all living beings, or they could be reasons for great devastation; it depends on the character of the people who use them. When a knife is in the hands of a thief, it is destructive. But the same knife, when in the hands of a surgeon, could save a person's life. So the knife is as good or bad as the person who holds it. That's the way everything in this world is. Knowledge, fame, strength, science, and technology, have tremendous strength. But we could use that science and technology out of greed and we can actually pollute the environment, cause so much suffering to so many living beings including humanity, or we could use it to create great health, prosperity, and enlightenment. So science and technology, especially when harmonized with universal spiritual principles and character, can have such great value within the world.

The destiny of the world is very much in hands of students, who are going to universities and learning technology and science, and it is going to be determined by values, character, and the spirit of compassion that they have actually imbibed within their hearts. Question is, whether we want to be a part of the problem or a part of a wonderful holistic solution. So the practice of meditation, chanting God's names or mantras, *puja*, *seva*, are all ways of reconnecting to that deep enlightened state that is within us. That is our true potential. There have been many medical and scientific researches of how

meditation affects the brain and the cells of the body, positively. There is detailed research on chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra and how it positively affects the cells in the brain and the way we think. So science is beautiful if we are beautiful; and science can be ugly if

we are ugly. So this is a holistic form of education along with the tools to discover and accomplish great things in this world.

### Spiritual Core

Humility means you are acknowledging that there is a higher power beyond you and you humble and harmonize yourself with it. This could make us very enthusiastic, determined, courageous and fearless — not in the mood to exploit, but in a mood to serve. There are three principles, which are at the core of the Indic spiritual traditions. One is *satsang*, meaning whatever we are doing in life, we should regularly be in the company of people who really inspire us and enlighten us toward the importance of spirituality and character, so that we don't get distracted. In this world, we are always being bombarded by weapons of mass distraction. There are so many distractions, and if we have a strong spiritual foundation, even when the storms come, our integrity is preserved. So *satsang* is important, being regularly in the company of people who really inspire us and educate us in these higher values. The second is *sadhana*, our own spiritual practice, to give some time every day, as far as possible to actually make that interconnection. When you water the root of the tree, it naturally extends to every part of the tree: branches, twigs, flowers, and leaves. Similarly, when we make that connection to God within ourselves in our own essence, then we find in that, love, and it extends to everyone wherever there is life. All that comes through *sadhana* or spiritual practice, comes by tuning into the grace that is within us and it is important that we tune-in regularly. The third principle is *sadachar*, which means living with virtuous conduct and compassionate values. *Seva* means embracing within our heart that there is no greater thing in all of creation than the opportunity to serve with love. This is good character, in its deepest sense. When we make those connections in whatever religion we are in or in whatever social position we may be, then the science and the technologies we learn — just like our own body and mind — could be beautiful instruments to heal in a spirit of compassion. Follow Radhanath Swami at [speakingtree.in](http://speakingtree.in)



<http://bit.ly/2m4IQjR>

# Personal

## Message...



Dear Friends,

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

We have often heard that Śrīla Prabhupāda said that cooperation is the key to success for ISKCON. Unfortunately, having scoured many digital teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I have been unable to date to find Śrīla Prabhupāda ever uttering that message.

The nearest thing I have encountered is a passage in which one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples says that Śrīla Prabhupāda said that. Following is the quote with the relevant passage in italics [this if from the DVD "Following Śrīla Prabhupāda-Remembrances," DVD11: Final Pastimes, October-November 1977- Vrindavana, India, Arrival, *Parikrama & Darshan*]:

Pita dasa: One afternoon many of our older godbrothers were in the room with Śrīla Prabhupāda, and many of those who were supposed to initiate disciples after his disappearance were there. Then Prabhupāda said to them, "Of my disciples, I see no one who has my qualities. If I see a group of them together, some percentage of my qualities are certainly there." He said, "So I have some faith that this movement can go on. The test of your love for me will be shown by how well you cooperate together."

However, even though it hasn't been possible so far to find out the exact quote directly from Śrīla Prabhupāda, it appears quite clear to me that he wanted the members of ISKCON to lay aside their personal differences for the greater good of preaching. This following excerpt from a morning walk in Mayapura, on March 16, 1977, corroborates this point:

Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself wanted our cooperation. He is God, Kṛṣṇa. And therefore cooperation is very important thing. Nobody should think that "I have got so great ability. I can do." No. It is simply by cooperation we can do very big thing. "United we stand; divided we fall."

... Devotee (3): I found the verse. It's in "*Ohe Vaiṣṇava Thākura.*" *Ekākī āmāra nāhi pāya bolo, hari-nāma-ṣaṅkīrtane.*

Prabhupāda: Yes, yes, not this verse. What is the meaning?

Devotee (3): Meaning is, "I do not find the strength to carry on alone the *ṣaṅkīrtana* of the holy name of Hari. Please bless me by giving me just one drop of faith with which one can attain the great treasure of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa."

Prabhupāda: So nobody is powerful alone. In Kṛṣṇa's service also, combine together. That is wanted.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: I think there is no question of being alone anywhere, because the guru is always with one.

Prabhupāda: Yes, that is the ideal.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami