



Spiritual Perspectives

April 2017

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

Divided We Fall

By: Radha devi dasi

A swell of isolationist movements is sweeping the world, from England's Brexit to American President Trump's travel ban to India's mandatory flag waving shows of patriotism. While global politics used to be seen as breaking down between the liberal left and conservative right, we now see it swinging hard towards unbridled self-interest, a trend that is transmuting itself into movements we understand as nationalism.

For the spiritualist, it is tempting to dismiss this "us vs. them" bodily mentality as a something the less enlightened struggle with. Surely in this *Kali-yuga* age of quarrel, it is no surprise that many are blinded by differences in skin color, language, or the place of someone else's birth. But, as Vaisnavas, are we really above the duality of vision that is creating such wide divisions in the world? Or have we merely shifted our "us vs. them" thinking to focus on different characteristics.

For example, a recent letter to ISKCON's Governing Body Commission sought action on the issue of kirtan standards. While the author began by pointing to inappropriate dancing going on in a holy place, he concluded with a demand that the GBC prevent ISKCON kirtanias from performing kirtan in yoga studios. The yoga practitioners, he wrote, allow men and women to mix freely during kirtan and jump around wildly rather than be-



Kirtan at New Vrindaban temple in West Virginia, USA

having like "gentlemen." Others have called for resolutions banning the use of instruments other than *mrdanga* and *kartals* during kirtan or limiting the number of times a particular mantra can be chanted.

The desire to be in control and the tendency to assume that one's own standard is the highest are not limited to those outside our society. In spite of Srila Prabhupada's oft repeated instruction that "there are no hard and fast rules for chanting," some devotees want to control how kirtan takes place at non-ISKCON venues. This is just one example of how the "us vs. them" mentality dividing countries is at work dividing devotees as well.

We may feel that we are on "the right side of history" in different controversial issues facing ISKCON today. However, if we cannot understand and thoughtfully consider opposing views, we fail in our duty to Srila Prabhupada. We are justifiably concerned by the divisive attitudes we see in our local and national leaders, but the most important place to root out those attitudes is in our own minds and hearts.



Kirtan dance event

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

<http://bit.ly/2nl8uCZ>

German Interfaith Dialogue Asks ‘Do Religions Cause Peace or War?’

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, March 16, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2n7RqzD>



Participants at previous interfaith forum

An interreligious dialogue, to be held in ISKCON Germany/Austria’s headquarters near Frankfurt from April 21st to 23rd, will discuss the very topical question, ‘Religion: Peacemaker or Cause of War?’

This will be the third annual such event organized by ISKCON and Religions for Peace, the largest international coalition of world religion representatives dedicated to promoting peace.

About 100 people will attend this April’s event. Devotee speakers will include Dina Sharana Dasi, who is the GBC for Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, and a representative for ISKCON and Vaishnava-Hindus in interreligious dialogue.

Dina Sharana is pulling double-duty and also representing Religions for Peace at the event, as she has worked with the organization for over twenty years and is one of its leaders in the region.

Also speaking will be Dina Sharana’s husband Chakravarty Das, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada who represents ISKCON in interfaith dialogue.

Meanwhile Religions for Peace representative Dr. Franz Brendle will also address the assembly, as well as Daniel Bauer, Mayor of the local Hoheinstein municipality.

Also attending will be representatives of different faiths from all over Germany, such as Islam, Catholicism, Evangelism, Judaism, Bahá’í and Zoroastrianism.

Representatives of different departments of the environment, local politicians and other key personalities such as a local refugee organizer will participate too.

Finally, all of ISKCON Germany’s temple presidents will attend along with political and religious leaders from their areas.

The event will be hosted and catered by the ISKCON Wiesbaden temple, where ISKCON Germany/Austria’s headquarters is located.

Everyone will arrive on Friday before 6:00 pm for a kirtan evening. “For many of our guests, it will be their first introduction to the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra,” says Dina Sharana Dasi. “So we will have specially-assigned kirtaniyas who are sensitive to laypeople.”

Saturday will begin with everyone attending a morning program that will be shortened to 7:15 am to 8:45 am to accommodate guests, but will include *Mangala arati*, *Tulasi arati*, *Guru-puja*, some *japa* and a talk.

“Part of the reason for this is that we want to show what we are doing, that we’re not just talking theory,” says Dina Sharana. “Also, Religions for Peace’s philosophy is for everybody to go to the different churches and religious houses and participate or at least observe each other’s worship.”

Following breakfast, the conference will run from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm, with many speakers giving their presentations on the topic “Religion: Peacemaker or Cause of War?” from different perspectives. There will also be an open discussion at the end.

After lunch, everyone will attend three special events.

The first will be the opening of ISKCON Wiesbaden’s new interfaith library, housing all of Srila Prabhupada’s books as well as extensive Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist literature.

The second will be the launch of ISKCON Wiesbaden’s new Vaishnava Museum, where a collection of paintings depicting Vaishnava culture that has been years in the making will be displayed.

And the third will be the World Ethos Exhibition. Presented by Religions for Peace, this will show a timeline of when and how the different world religions appeared, key events in their histories, and what their main objectives are, for quick and easy comprehension.

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On Sunday, guests will again participate in the morning program and be served breakfast before returning home.

“These kinds of events are important for several reasons,” says Dina Sharana. “For ISKCON devotees, it’s important that we learn to interact with the outside world and other religions. When we do this, others also learn about our Vaishnava culture, our society and Srila Prabhupada, and accept us as a bona fide religion like Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

“These events are also important in making personal connections with the members of other faith traditions. By building these relationships, we can help each other, and eventually develop common projects that we want to offer to society.

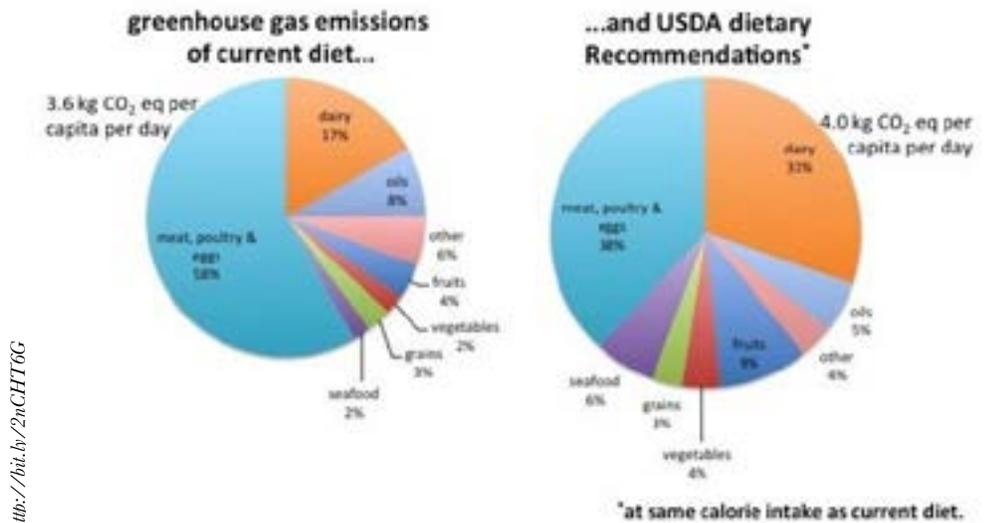
“In this way,” she concludes, “We can show society that religions can be friends, that we can drop our prejudices and cooperate under our shared belief in God, while respecting our differences.”

Discord in Angela Merkel’s Government After Environment Ministry Bans Meat at Official Functions

By: Justin Huggler, [www. telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), February 23, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2nCHT6G>

A row has broken out in Angela Merkel’s government after the environment minister banned meat at official functions. Barbara Hendricks claims eating meat is damaging to the environment and has ordered only vegetarian food to be served. A rival minister has accused her of “nanny-statism” and trying to force vegetarianism on people “by the back door.”

With elections only months away and Mrs Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) lagging behind their junior coalition partner in the polls, it was only a matter of time before tempers started to fray.



The present and the USDA-recommended daily diet of an average American, in relation to the greenhouse effect.

But no one expected the first falling-out to be over vegetarian vol-au-vents.

Kirtan Vancouver Focuses on Non-Sectarian Outreach

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, March 10, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2okD6UL>

In Vancouver, Canada, a group of young professionals have established a unique and non-sectarian Krishna conscious outreach program, with no goal to convert visitors.

Instead, the focus is on finding out what needs people have, fulfilling those needs, and building caring relationships.

The group of ten first and second generation devotees behind Kirtan Vancouver includes a school teacher, a holistic nutritionist, one member who works in the financial sector, and another doing their Masters in counseling.

“We’re just a group of really close friends who all love kirtan, and want to share it with the

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http://bit.ly/2okD6UL

Chanting and dancing

Vancouver community,” says Anirudh Kansal, one of the founding members.

Kirtan Vancouver began in 2010 as a single event, an annual outdoor kirtan concert in Stanley Park with an organic bazaar and food distribution.

Its organizers, who also organized the Vancouver Ratha-yatra festival, had noticed that with Ratha-yatra’s overtly “Hare Krishna” presentation, they were isolating many people who had a preconceived negative notion of organized religion.

“At the same time, many of these people were interested in spirituality,” Anirudh says. “So we wanted to create an event where we could offer kirtan and prasadam in a very simple way without opening with ‘We’re Hare Krishnas,’ and thus reach a broader demographic.”

Simultaneously, other devotees in Vancouver independently embarked on their own projects with the same outreach style in mind – a bi-monthly yoga studio kirtan event called EnChant, and a prasadam distribution program at Simon Fraser University called Veggie Lunch.

Realizing their similar goals, they all joined forces so that they could share resources, and Kirtan Vancouver was born.

EnChant is Kirtan Vancouver’s “bread and butter,” a kirtan, short talk, and prasadam at a yoga studio every second Saturday that attracts an impressive fifty to seventy people of all ages each time – some from different yoga paths, but many completely new to Eastern spirituality.

Once advertized through Facebook, meetup.com, and physical posters, EnChant is now the most well-

known kirtan event in the city, and is spread just by positive word-of-mouth.

EnChant is also most people’s first experience of Kirtan Vancouver – and Anirudh says that over the past seven years, he and his friends have learned a lot about how to deliver something that will be well-received.

To be successful at outreach, he explains, you have to know the needs of your demographics. “We have a tendency to present things that we want to present, in the way that we want to present them. But how do you know whether a person is going to receive and understand what you’re giving, if you don’t know where they’re at?”

People attending Kirtan Vancouver programs, Anirudh explains, are looking to add something spiritual to their lives, but are coming from different perspectives: some are into yoga; some are interested in Eastern philosophy; some just want to improve mental health.



http://bit.ly/2okD6UL

Absorbed in the Holy Name at one of Kirtan Vancouver’s Bhakti immersion retreats

From the kirtan, most are looking to get absorbed in meditation and leave their worries aside for a couple of hours.

“So we pick mantras and tunes that are very easy to follow,” he says. “If the tune is too complicated we’re isolating them, but if they’re able to chant the mantra back, then they get into it and become very attracted to kirtan.”

As far as food, Vancouver’s rapidly growing vegan movement has people very health conscious – so Kirtan Vancouver finds that if they distribute healthy, vegan prasadam, it’s better received.

From philosophy, meanwhile, people are looking to hear something positive and uplifting.

“Rather than finding fault, telling people about the regulative principles and what not to do, we present things to people that will help them improve their life,” Anirudh says.

To make everything more accessible and comfortable for people with preconceived ideas of organized religion, Kirtan Vancouver mem-



http://bit.ly/2okD6UL

Kirtan gets lively

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bers wear street clothes rather than dhotis and saris. They avoid words like religion and God, using words like spirituality, love, and the divine instead.

“We also train ourselves to speak in a way that doesn’t include ISKCON jargon,” says Anirudh. “It’s very difficult, because we’ve all been conditioned to hearing the philosophy presented in a very niche kind of way, using all these words that are not really relatable to the general public. So we have to train ourselves to speak in a way that people can understand at least 90% of what we’re saying!”

Kirtan Vancouver members also regularly get feedback from their guests on what is palatable to them and what order to present Krishna conscious philosophy in.

“For instance as devotees, we tend to really push the idea of karma and reincarnation, feeling that it will attract a lot of people,” Anirudh says. “But in Vancouver at least, we discovered that many people consider things like reincarnation to be really weird. So if we talk about these things at the beginning, there’s a tendency to scare people away.”

Of course, such topics are an essential part of Vaishnava philosophy, and are introduced later, when trust has been built and people are more open.

For those naturally interested in learning more, there are home events such as “Meet a Monk,” in which a visiting devotee shares philosophy in a way that new people can relate to.

There are seminar series based on the *Bhagavad-gita*, wherein a specific topic is selected – such as destiny – and people come and explore it for four to five Mondays.

And there are Bhakti immersion retreats, in which people take a whole weekend out of their lives to spend more time with Kirtan Vancouver members in a beautiful rural location, going deeper into kirtan and the philosophy.

Kirtan Vancouver also holds regular kirtan concerts; and its Veggie Lunch program, run by Kala Rupini Dasi at Simon Fraser University three times a week, serves \$6

unlimited vegan prasadam plates. This program is a big draw, because while kirtan is playing as they eat and Prabhupada’s books are available, no philosophy is pushed on anyone, and Kala Rupini’s motherly nature makes them feel loved and cared for.

This, according to Anirudh, is the essence of Kirtan Vancouver. “More than anything else, we invest our time in relationships,” he says. “People come because they like us as people, they feel a mutual bond as spiritual seekers, they enjoy what we’re doing, and they want to be with us more. So Kirtan Vancouver, which started out seven years ago as an event, is now a community.”

Because Kirtan Vancouver is based on relationships and is completely non-sectarian, with no pressure to join a different tradition, people from many different traditions feel comfortable participating.

“We have Kundalini practitioners, followers of Amma, and people from the Shivananda ashram coming to our practice and saying they



<http://bit.ly/2okD6UL>

feel like it adds to their love for God,” says Anirudh. “And this isn’t just specific to Eastern traditions – we have Christians coming and saying the same thing.”

Today the Kirtan Vancouver community has swelled to over 1,000 people. And its non-sectarian approach has taken off around the world, with Kirtan London, Kirtan Moscow, Kirtan Johannesburg, Kirtan Brisbane and Kirtan Dubai all springing up in the past few years.

“I would love to see all temples globally have a branch of outreach where Krishna consciousness is being presented in a very safe and non-sectarian environment,” Anirudh says.

He beams. “I love being part of a community where people love and support each other, more than expecting anything from each other. And I love that it’s being done with spiritual practice as the central focus.”



Bhaktimarga Swami speaks at a Kirtan Vancouver event

<http://bit.ly/2okD6UL>

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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ISKCON Food Relief Foundation receives IMC Ramakrishna Bajaj National Quality Award

By: Radha Krishna Das, www.Dandavats.com, March 18, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2nqoXrv>

ISKCON Food Relief Foundation – Annamrita, an NGO that has been working tirelessly for nearly 13 years to fight classroom hunger and provide the underprivileged school children of India with wholesome nutritious meals has bagged the IMC Ramakrishna Bajaj National Quality award for the second year in a row.

Being inspired by Srila Prabhupada – the Founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness who was a true visionary and wanted to see a hunger free world, the motto of Annamrita is to serve “Food as Pure as Nectar” to all. In partnership with the Government of India and various state governments and inestimable support from many philanthropic donors, corporations and well-wishers, Annamrita has grown from humble beginnings of serving just 900 students in one school, to today serving 1.2 million meals every day of which over 100,000 meals are served in Mumbai itself and nearly 300,000 meals daily in Maharashtra. The work received recognition

and commendation through several awards and citations. This decision was preceded by four qualifying rounds: an application and interview, then documentation, followed by submissions and NGO site visits — Mira Road and Tardeo centers were both visited by a quality award panel and ISKCON Food Relief Foundation finally won the Certificate of Merit in the NGO category.

The award boosts Annamrita’s resolve and commitment to quality, with a focus of reaching out to more children especially in the non-government aided sections, with nutritious, healthy, wholesome meals. Being the largest midday meal provider in Maharashtra has put a responsibility on Annamrita’s shoulders to consistently deliver on quality without a compromise on quantity. Their new kitchen at the Hindu Hriday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray Medical College and Dr. R. N. Cooper Municipal General Hospital serves nearly 1800 needy patients in two hospitals. The project has received recognition from a number of well-known public officials.

View of TOVP from the Navadvipa Bridge

By: www.Dandavats.com, March 16, 2017
<http://bit.ly/2nG1wNH>

Sadbhuja Das: For many years we were meditating on how the temple would look from a few kilometers away.

Here we can see photos from the other side of Navadvipa, where the main bridge crosses the Ganges.

You can see the visibility of Navadvipa and the big temple. Also you can see the contrast of the landscape and the surrounding buildings around the temple.

Srila Prabhupada’s *samadhi* is a very large building, but compared to the height of the main temple it looks so small! And the full temple height has not yet been reached. The main *kalash* is 65 feet (about 20 meters) tall, and when it is placed on top it will make the temple look even higher.

For more: <https://goo.gl/oQLB2q>



View of TOVP from the Navadvipa Bridge