



December 2018

# Spiritual Perspectives

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

## Real Freedom

By Radha devi dasi

Srila Prabhupada frequently referred to the material world as a prison. These days, however, prison is an improvement over everyday life for some. South Koreans in need of a break from the demands of everyday life, find that a faux jail is a welcome relief rather than a place to escape from.

“This prison gives me a sense of freedom,” said Park Hye-ri, a 28-year-old office worker who paid \$90 to spend 24 hours locked up in a mock prison.

Prison rules are strict. No talking with other inmates. No mobile phones or clocks. Clients get a blue prison uniform, a yoga mat, tea set, a pen and notebook. They sleep on the floor. There is a small toilet inside the room, but no mirror. The menu includes steamed sweet potato and a banana shake for dinner, and rice porridge for breakfast.

Co-founder Noh Ji-Hyang said the mock prison was inspired by her husband, a prosecutor who often put in 100-hour work weeks. “After a stay in the prison, people say, ‘This is not a prison, the real prison is where we return to,’” she said.

In fact, we are trapped in this material prison because we don't know our real identity and cannot protect our real self-interest. Identifying with the material body and mind, we seek to please our senses. Not only do these attempts at finding pleasure fail, they actually increase our misery. Like the South Koreans, we become trapped in a cycle of desperate endeavor to relieve the misery caused by our desperate endeavor to find material happiness. At a certain point, even prison is preferable.

Happiness is not a product of uncontrolled sense enjoyment. In fact, sense enjoyment binds us to the material plane where we continue to suffer material miseries. As South Koreans are discovering, limited sense enjoyment can actually be a relief. Voluntary austerity brings immediate material relief as well as helping us advance in spiritual consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada encouraged us to live simply. We have no need to pay others to “lock us up.” All we need is to follow Srila Prabhupada's instruction and example to find real freedom and happiness.



# The Award-winning Documentary About the Yamuna Released in Six Languages

By: ISKCON News Staff, *ISKCON News*, November 10, 2018  
<https://bit.ly/2ra18oD>

The Stolen River, the multiple award-winning documentary about the River Yamuna has been released for public screening in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The film is now available in six languages: English, Italian, Hungarian, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian.

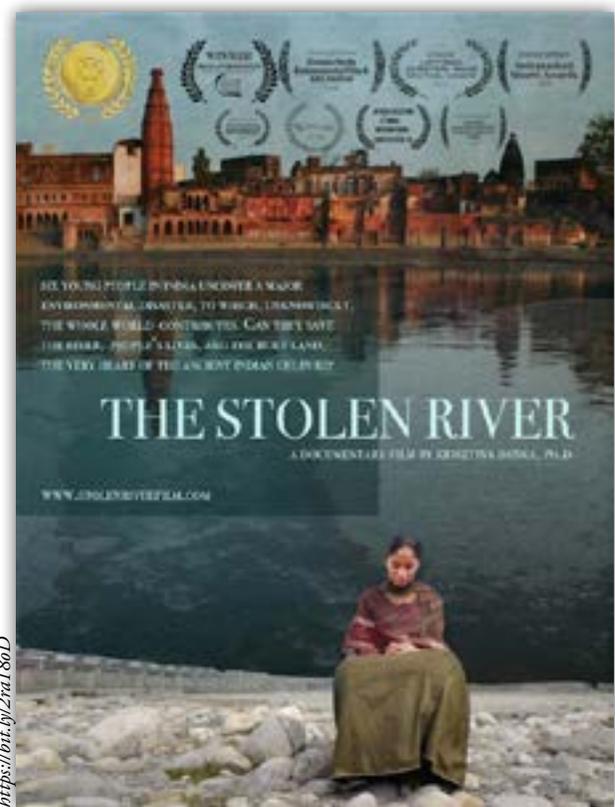
In celebration of the holy month of Kartik, communities who are wishing to entertain their guests with a heart-rending but inspiring story of young Brajabhasi environmental activists trying to save their sacred land and river from toxic waste and pollution, can get their public streaming license to rent or download the film for a discounted 30% price.

The film's summary: Six young people in rural India set out on a journey to find out who is poisoning their sacred river Yamuna, causing people and animals to fall sick and die en masse in their village and surrounding areas. By the time they arrive at the foothills of the Himalayas, a shocking reality unfolds in front of them: their river has been "stolen" and replaced by an open flow of sewage, causing a major ecological disaster affecting tens of millions -- to which, unknowingly, the whole world contributes. Can they save the river, people's lives and their holy land, the very heart of the ancient Indian culture?

After its world premiere in late 2017, besides film festivals across the globe, the film has had successful screenings in several ISKCON centers including Washington DC, Prabhupadadesh, Italy, and Radhadesh, Belgium as well as The Bhakti Center in New York. In September 2018, The Stolen River has also been made available for educational purposes, and has been shown in universities such as Yale and Georgetown University in the USA, and the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Some of the feedback the documentary has received:

"This film is a gripping story of one of the most sacred rivers in India. The future of the Yamuna is at risk along with the lives of some 60 million people who depend on it. With powerful images and engaging narration the viewer will be forever changed." -- Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University.



<https://bit.ly/2ra18oD>

*The Stolen River a documentary film by Krisztina Danka Ph.D.*

"I liked the human story, and the importance placed on it. Seeing, firstly, why people cared about the river, and, secondly, how they were affected was powerful." -- David Buchanan, Ph.D. student, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

"Wow, that was wonderful. I was moved, angered and yet felt purified by the whole experience of the film. It captured the issues beautifully and the cinematography was, at times, breathtaking." -- Akhandadhi Das - former Temple President of the Bhaktivedanta Manor, UK

"The film is so well done, very moving. It is heartbreaking in one sense, but it also gives us hope that maybe we can all pull together and do something." -- Bada Haridas – musician, Florida, USA

Click here to rent or download the film for public screening purposes: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thestolenriver2>

For more information on the film and to get involved please visit: [stolenriverfilm.com](http://stolenriverfilm.com)

# Bhaktivedanta Academy Receives Grant for Science Education

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, November 16, 2018  
<https://bit.ly/2FMJfqm>



*On behalf of the Bhaktivedanta Academy science teacher Deepa Mukhtyar accepts the grant from Keith Powell, Vice President of Sales at Toshiba*

Bhaktivedanta Academy, a combined Montessori – International Baccalaureate school at ISKCON of Alachua, Florida, has been awarded a \$3,000 grant for science education.

Deepa Mukhtyar, the science teacher for Krishna Sharanam, the school's Middle Years program, applied for the grant from the Toshiba America Foundation, and received approval on October 23. "This is a national program, so it was quite a surprise that it came through for us," says Bhaktivedanta Academy principal Visvambhar Aguilera. "Often you apply for these grants but don't necessarily expect to get them. So when we did we were rather excited!"

The Middle Years program, which runs from seventh to tenth grade, covers different areas of science over a four-year-cycle, such as physics, chemistry, and this year, biology. The new grant will provide high quality anatomical models of different bodily systems for the students to study, which are normally too expensive for the school to buy.

The five models they'll receive are of the heart; digestive system; skeleton; brain; and kidneys. Along with these will be miscellaneous charts and posters related to the various systems of the body. All this equipment will give students an in-depth and practical understanding of how these systems are constructed. According to Deepa Mukhtyar specific objectives are: (1) To be able to identify the major parts of the human musculoskeletal system; (2) To explain how muscular contraction enables motion of the muscular system; (3) To identify the different portions of the human heart and explain how they function in maintaining blood flow through the circulatory system; (4) To identify the major parts of the human digestive and excretory system; (5) To identify the major parts of the brain; and (6) To reflect on the impact of science, how the different systems keep the body healthy, and why these organs are necessary for the function of the human body.

"In biology in particular, having a good foundation in terms of the workings of the human body is important," Visvambhar says. "Particularly if we

*Continued on page 4*

<https://bit.ly/2EMJfgn>



*Krishna Sharanam class lead teacher Jay Sri Radhe Kaseder (second from the left) and Bhaktivedanta Academy director Vishvambhar Aguilera (3rd from the left) have been instrumental in encouraging and helping Deepa Mukhtyar throughout the grant application process.*

have students with an interest in going into the medical field.”

Indeed, there is a lot of enthusiasm among students for science. “Science is such a fun way to learn more about our planet and its history,” says Nikunja Gallant, 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and according to 8<sup>th</sup> grader Harini Burke, “Science classes are an inno-

multiple career interests.

“In addition, science is a vehicle by which we’re able to teach valuable processes of thinking and problem-solving that students can then learn to apply in numerous settings, beyond just regular science.”

vative way of learning more about our world and how we came to be.”

Recently, in August, Bhaktivedanta Academy received International Baccalaureate accreditation after a rigorous five-year process, which recognizes it as a holistic educational program that fully prepares students for life beyond the school.

“We see our responsibility at Bhaktivedanta Academy as preparing students for whatever they may decide to do in their life,” Visvambhar says. “And having a solid science background is the starting point for



<https://bit.ly/2EMJfgn>

*The Krishna Sharanam class is looking forward to using the new science equipment*

# ISKCON Members Participate in Parliament of the World's Religions

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, November 16, 2018  
<https://bit.ly/2KIsA5Z>



<https://bit.ly/2KIsA5Z>

*The main plenary during which a video of the Govardhana Eco-Village was shown*

Nearly 10,000 delegates from 80 countries attended the 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions from November 1-7 in Toronto, Canada. They represented nearly 200 religious, spiritual and indigenous traditions, comprising the single largest interfaith gathering in the world.

The Parliament was first held in 1893 with the aim to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities, and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable planet. It began again in 1993, and has occurred every few years since then.

ISKCON members have participated every time, with devotees attending Parliaments in Salt Lake City, Chicago, South Africa, Australia, and Barcelona. This year, ISKCON members from Canada, the U.S., England and India participated.

The event, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, featured dozens of high-profile guest speakers such as author Margaret Atwood and former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell. There were more than 1,000 spiritual programs, lectures and interactive cultural experiences, in-

cluding a film festival and a sacred music night. Each day different themes were highlighted such as indigenous peoples and their wisdom traditions; the dignity of women across the world's wisdom traditions; climate action; peace vs war; and youth's role in change and the future.

ISKCON members contributed several of the multiple workshops and presentations that went on concurrently throughout the day, on a variety of topics.

## **Bhakti Yoga**

ISKCON Communications director Anuttama Das was part of a presentation coordinated by the Hindu American Foundation on the different paths of yoga, speaking about Bhakti.

Anuttama pointed out that most song lyrics talk about hankering for love, and that this desire for a deep, meaningful relationship is what we all search for most in life. The process of bhakti-yoga, he said, recognizes this as our deepest spiritual need and helps us awaken it by learning how to do everything in relationship to the Divine. Thus yoga becomes a way of linking with our self and God.

*Continued on page 6*

<https://bit.ly/2K1sASZ>



*Gopal Patel, Anuttama Dasa, Mat McDermott and Krishna Parmer led the yoga session at the Parliament*

somewhat defensive tack, cautioning people not to cross the line. Without disagreeing with them, Anuttama presented a different point of view, citing the Vaishnava aphorism *athato brahma jijnasa*, that the purpose of life is to enquire about the Absolute Truth.

“We should be open and encourage people that any spiritual or religious practice, or cultural activity, that helps us achieve that awakening is good,” he said.

Recalling how previously in the Parliament, a

**Cultural Appropriation**

Anuttama also contributed to a panel on the current hot topic of cultural appropriation, along with seven other religious leaders.

“These days, many concerns are being raised in a spirit of being respectful to different traditions, that people shouldn’t just assimilate others’ deeply held beliefs in a cheap way,” he explains. “For example, someone might think that a picture of Vedic Deities are cool, so they put them on their tennis shoes. Or they might think Native American spiritual clothing is hip, so they put it on for a night out. The panel explored, where do you draw the line?”

Several panelists took an assertive and

Jewish politician had quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, and a Christian scholar had quoted a First Nation chief, Anuttama said no one would consid-



*A scene from the drama ‘Many Fathers, Many Mothers’ presented by Bhaktimarga Swami*

*Continued on page 7*

er that improper cultural appropriation – rather, we are learning from one another. Similarly, Vaishnavas take the point of view that if people want to practice yoga in a Christian church, as long as they respect it as a sacred tradition, that is a good thing.

“If it helps them calm their minds and come closer to God, that’s exactly what we want,” Anuttama said. “We don’t care who owns yoga – we care about who makes progress from yoga.”

We want to embrace and encourage people, he concluded. So we should in fact learn about and use others’ cultural and spiritual practices. But we should do so: (1) in a respectful way, (2) while understanding the boundaries that other people put around their traditions, and (3) we should give credit to where we have gotten the practice from.

### **The Power of Women’s Voices – Women in Vaishnavism**

Srila Prabhupada disciple Rukmini Dasi also spoke, contributing to a panel entitled “The Power of Women’s Voices: How They’ve Changed the World’s Spiritual Landscape.” Alongside her, other scholars delved into women’s contributions to Buddhism and Christianity.

Rukmini, meanwhile, talked about important women in the history of Vaishnavism, including Kunti Devi, Pingala – a prostitute who became self-realized – and Mirabai. She presented them as examples of women from very different backgrounds who were drawn, through their difficulties in life, to call out to God. Thus they became purified, and their words and examples have been passed down through history for others to follow.



<https://bit.ly/2KIs45Z>

*Rukmini Dasi spoke on a panel about the power of women’s voices*

### **Spiritual Pilgrimage**

ISKCON guru Bhaktimarga Swami made an hour-long presentation at the Parliament, showing a film of his famous cross-country walks, and answering lots of questions from the audience about the importance of spiritual pilgrimage and walking in different traditions.

In addition Bhaktimarga Swami and a troupe of Toronto devotee actors performed the drama “Many Fathers, Many Mothers” about King Chitraketu’s son, who came back to life to explain the philosophy of the soul and reincarnation to his father.

### **Caring for Mother Earth**

Gopal Patel, an ISKCON member, also participated in half a dozen different sessions in his capacity as the head of the Bhumi Project, an environmental organization affiliated with the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies.

Representing the Govardhana Eco-Village in Maharashtra, India, Gauranga Das spoke on several panels about the attention the Village is receiving for its environmentally conscious efforts.

On the day of the Parliament highlighting environmental issues, a three-minute video about the Govardhana Eco-Village was shown during the main plenary session to a huge audience of around five thousand people.

---

**All of us have the responsibility to minimize, as much as we can, our impact on the Earth, to refrain from treating living beings and the environment as mere things for personal use and enjoyment and to consider the effects of our actions on future generations**

---

*Continued on page 8*

## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
Mukunda Goswami

**PRODUCTION MANAGER**  
Hari-kirtan das

**EDITORS**  
Mukunda Goswami  
Radha devi dasi

**PROOFREADING & EDITING**  
Haridasa das  
Padma malini devi dasi

**GENERAL CONSULTANT**  
Devaprastha das

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT**  
Raj Dutia

Articles published in this newsletter are not necessarily the opinion of *Spiritual Perspectives* or ISKCON.

### Working Together, Religious Communities Can Have A Major Positive Impact

Reflecting on the Parliament of the World Religions 2018, Anuttama Das says: “The Parliament is an evolving assembly of religious

people, who are understanding more and more that together they have a powerful voice in trying to redirect human energies towards a more spiritual focus.”



<https://bit.ly/2KIsA5Z>

*Bhaktimarga Swami speaks about spiritual pilgrimage and walking*



*Pictured Left: Gopal Patel, Director of the Bhumi project, speaks during a plenary session of the Parliament introducing the Fifth Direction of the Global Ethic*

We Would Appreciate Your Feedback  
Please Send Your Response To :  
[feedback@mukundagoswami.org](mailto:feedback@mukundagoswami.org)

# Personal

## Message...



Dear Friends,

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

William Shakespeare hit on some Vedic truths.

He was, in addition to being one of the foremost poets of the English language and an acclaimed playwright, having written more than 191 dramas and sonnets, a penetrating intellectual, although a tiny philosopher compared to the ISKCON disciplic succession. Occasionally Srila Prabhupada referred to his writings. Perhaps this was because Srila Prabhupada's secondary education took place in Scottish Churches College in Kolkata, an English-medium school. Most of the teachers there were Scottish [British] Christian missionaries, who had an excellent command of the English language.

In Hamlet's famous soliloquy, starting with, "To be or not to be," Hamlet is considering death. Some of his most famous lines are: "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them?"

In a sense the five Pandava brothers suffered the "slings and arrow of outrageous fortune" when they tolerated Kaurava atrocities, including attempting to denude their wife publicly, setting fire to their house, poisoning and banishment. In the face of all these attacks, they not only didn't retaliate, but their saintly mother prayed for more such tribulation, so that she could better remember God.

In the end, however, they fought Duryodhana and company in the battle of Kuruksetra, thus taking "arms against a sea of troubles" [tyranny and atheism] with the aim of bringing an end to the strife. They were, after a manner of speaking, taking the moral high ground by ridding the kingdom of godlessness. According to the phenomenon of transmigration of the soul, even the souls of warriors received a higher destination, not unlike the Valhalla of Scandinavian fighters who died in battle. In this case, they engaged in sanctioned capital punishment. The laws of Manu state that those who set fire to your house must be punished.

Srila Prabhupada also referred to a Shakespearean drama in May of 1966 in New York when he said, "... I think there is a line in Shakespeare's literature, "The lunatic, mad, and the poet" or something like that, "all compact in thought ..." The actual passage, according to the Archive database is, "... The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, are of imagination all compact ..." [from "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Act V, Scene 1].

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

