



# Spiritual Perspectives

March 2018

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

## What's Important

By Radha devi dasi

When one takes up spiritual life, it becomes apparent that secular society values the wrong things. Rather than valuing a relationship with God, or even virtues such as compassion and truthfulness, secularists value money and fame. That tendency is only increasing as the years pass. Americans, in particular, not only prioritize material success, they identify with their job and find meaning in working more and more hours.

Over-endeavor for material success undermines spiritual growth. In *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Sukadeva Goswami describes the dangers of focusing on wealth and fame. He also describes the benefits of having fewer resources. Wealth and power, he points out, inflame the false ego. Poverty, on the other hand, forces one to become humble.

Unfortunately, the larger society we live in values wealth and power over spiritual advancement. Those who forgo financial success in order to focus on personal growth are seen as foolish, at best. The growing American tendency to define ourselves by the jobs we hold and the hours we work only increases the pressure to re-direct our energy away from spiritual practice.

Journalist Derek Thompson, a staff writer at the *Atlantic Magazine*, has written extensively on the new American “religion.” “For the college-educated elite, he writes, “work has morphed into a religious identity—

promising transcendence and community, but failing to deliver.” Historically, increased wealth translated into less work and more time to focus on other matters. All of that has changed with the new philosophy of workism.

What is workism? According to Thompson, it is the belief that work is not only necessary to economic production, but also the centerpiece of one’s identity and life’s purpose. “We’ve created this idea that the meaning of life should be found in work,” says Oren Cass, the author of the book *The Once and Future Worker*. “We tell young people that their work should be their passion. But our desks were never meant to be our altars.” This mismatch between expectations and reality is a recipe for disappointment and it might explain why rates of depression and anxiety in the U.S. continue to rise.

As spiritual practitioners, we understand the limits of material success and that working long hours at a mundane job is neither a good way to prove one’s worth or to find happiness. This tendency to workism is insidious, though, and can creep into our devotional service. For example, we sometimes measure our personal worth by book points or *laxmi* points. We take note of how many devotees we’ve “made.” In other words, we forget that loving Krishna is the goal. While our active service is necessary and important, we should never forget the importance of actually striving to purify our hearts.



<https://bit.ly/2Cb10ed>

# ISKCON Desire Tree Celebrates 17 Years of Serving the Vaishnavas

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, February 22, 2018  
<https://bit.ly/2SUADPr>



*Radhanath Swami visits with Desire Tree staff*

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, Nityananda Trayodasi, the ISKCON Desire Tree network of websites celebrated seventeen years of serving the Vaishnavas worldwide – and looked forward to new endeavors.

The seed of the ambitious project was planted as far back as 1987, when Vaishnava Seva Das, then a just-joined devotee still in medical school, was taking care of the sound system and media at ISKCON Chowpatty, Mumbai.

“I always felt great pleasure in helping other devotees get Krishna consciousness,” he says. “When there was a class going on, I would record audio cassette tapes, and distribute it to those who weren’t able to attend.”

In 1994, Vaishnava Seva, then a surgeon, had to leave his media engagement to oversee construction of the then brand new Bhaktivedanta Hospital. But the service was still close to his heart, and so he ensured that every room at the hospital had a speaker with two channels where patients and staff could hear Srila Prabhupada’s lectures and kirtan 24 hours a day.

In 1998, because devotees at the hospital were missing the regular classes at Chowpatty temple, Vaishnava Seva began to broadcast the lectures live via phone line, as there was no Internet in India in those days.

When the one hundred or so families living around Bhaktivedanta Hospital got word, they wanted in – so he connected them all too, via an audio cable network.

Soon, devotees in other parts of Mumbai began to ask if they could also be part of the

famous network. On Nityananda Trayodasi in 2002, when Internet in India was still very poor and it took three to five minutes to download a 10MB file, Vaishnava Seva started his first website, [ISKCONdesiretree.com](http://ISKCONdesiretree.com).

“I began uploading Chowpatty lectures, then lectures from other Guru Maharajas and devotee speakers,” he says. “At first, there was a lot of resistance. In those days, there were tape ministries for each guru, and the devotees who ran them would sell tapes and CDs and didn’t want to give them away for free. So I would place bulk orders with them, in order to get permission to host the audio lectures.”

Vaishnava Seva began adding music, images with inspirational quotes, videos and devotional comics to his website.

As the site grew and grew, he turned his apartment into offices, then purchased the neighboring apartment to expand the workspace.

Today, ISKCON Desire Tree is a large network of over fifty-five websites, some for ISKCON gurus, some for temples, and some for various different services – all created and maintained by the same team.

That team now consists of thirty-six devotee employees, working full-time at ISKCON Desire



*Vaishnava Seva Das and his wife Kalindi Dasi greet Radhanath Swami at the ISKCON Desire Tree office*

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Tree for a salary. Vaishnava Seva Das, working long days as a surgeon at Bhaktivedanta Hospital – often from 8am to 9:30 at night – keeps in constant touch with them in between operations, via webcams and mobile chat. He also develops all new projects before handing them over to the team.

And there are a lot of projects to develop. At least 12,000 audio tracks are downloaded from the site daily; its Youtube channel, featuring darshans, lectures and music gets 150,000 to 200,000 views every day. Desire Tree has its own audio recording studio and produces bhajans. It runs and hosts online courses for devotees including Bhakti Sastri, the ISKCON Disciple Course, and e-counseling programs. It also hosts live streaming broadcasts from ISKCON Mumbai's Chowpatty, Juhu and Mira Road temples.

Its latest project sees ISKCON Desire Tree moving into a whole new arena: television. Vaishnava Seva has created a dedicated video recording studio and on Janmastami 2016 launched Hare Krishna TV, the first 24/7 Hare Krishna television channel. Broadcast on cable networks in India, it aims not for devotees but for the general public and reaches an astonishing 30 million people.

The channel shows live aratis from ISKCON temples five times a day; lectures in Hindi during the day and in English at night; kirtans; festivals; and has produced over 350 episodes of its own vegetarian cooking show. As well as cable, it is also shown on OTT platforms, including many smart-phone apps and Youtube.

Looking to the future, Vaishnava Seva and his team say their main focus will move away from websites and towards television and social media



*Staff photo with Bhakti Brihad Bhagavatamrita Swami*

preaching. Already, they are engaging thousands of devotees in their 250 or so Whatsapp groups on different topics.

“Mobile phone traffic is huge, compared to computer traffic,” Vaishnava Seva says. “So we are spending more time on social networks and chat platforms, spreading the glories of the Holy Name.”

It's all exciting stuff, but help is needed. Despite common misconceptions, ISKCON Desire Tree is not funded by Chowpatty temple, but by Vaishnava Seva Das himself and his wife Kalindi Dasi, who work very hard at Bhaktivedanta Hospital as a surgeon and anesthesiologist respectively and put nine out of ten rupees towards Prabhupada's mission.

“So as we reach seventeen years, we want to put the message out there and ask if anyone wants to donate,” he says. “We're not expecting big donations – but so many thousands of devotees are using our sites, that if they simply give \$5, \$10 or \$50 per month, then with their support we can do so many more things.”

As far as he's concerned, Vaishnava Seva continues to give everything he has to his service. “This life is temporary, and we're not going to carry anything with us when we leave,” he says. “So while we have whatever physical, mental and financial facility Krishna has given us, we just want to give it back to Krishna. It's a token of our appreciation and love for what we have received as mercy from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Srila Prabhupada and our gurus.”



*Staff with Kavi Chandra Swami during their Youtube medal celebrations*

# Sri Chaitanya Cultural World Heritage Centre Planned in Mayapur

By: Subroto Biswas, *ISKCON News*, February 22, 2019  
<https://bit.ly/2C96dDK>

Renowned industrialists Sajjan Jindal Chairman of JSW group of companies, B.K. Goenka Chairman of Welspun group and Ashok Goel Chairman of Essel group along with Devakinandan Das, visited the world headquarters of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> of February, in Mayapur, Nadia, India, regarding the proposed plan of ISKCON to set up the Sri Chaitanya Cultural World Heritage Centre (SCCWHC).



*Sajjan Jindal (middle) with Ambarish Das at the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium*

Spread over 700 acres, ISKCON has decided to set up a Cultural World Heritage Centre at *Mayapura*, Nadia, the birth place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and the spiritual headquarters of the institution. The construction of a grand temple, Temple of the Vedic Planetarium (TOVP) is the first step towards it. The temple is expected to be inaugurated in 2022.

On Sunday morning, the illustrious group arrived at Mayapur by helicopter. They were warmly greeted and welcomed as per the Vedic traditions by senior leaders of ISKCON Dayaram Das, Hriday Caitanya Das and other ISKCON leaders. After having darshan and offering *arati* at the Chandradoya temple the group travelled the entire landscape where ISKCON has planned to

set up the Heritage Centre. Madhava Gauranga Das, Vice Chairman of ISKCON Mayapur, took them to see the Gurukula, where they were treated with sumptuous lunch Prasadam prepared by the students. The honored guests expressed great appreciation for the beauty of the school.

During the visit to ISKCON Mayapur the group also met Mr Alfred Ford, disciple of the founder Acharya of ISKCON A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Mr Ford better known as Ambarish Das in the devotee community exchanged pleasantries with the visiting group of industrialists. They discussed at length the details of the World Heritage Centre.

Later the top management of ISKCON shared the masterplan of the Heritage Centre with Sajjan Jindal, B. K. Goenka, Ashok Goel, Devakinandan Das and others. The masterplan was met with great enthusiasm and appreciation. Devakinandan Das has been meeting these illustrious leaders of Indian industry over many years and had with great fervour convinced them to visit ISKCON Mayapur. After this visit and seeing the holy place of Mayapur Sri Sajjan Jindal along with Sri B. K. Goenka and Sri Ashok Goel were convinced to assist in the future development of this heritage city, and at the request of Devakinandan Das and other ISKCON leaders, agreed to form a committee to steer its development.



# ISKCON Camp at Kumbha Mela Distributes Thousands of Books and Prasadam Meals

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, February 17, 2019  
<https://bit.ly/2UtOcab>



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

*Sadhus and pilgrims bathe in the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati*

Following Srila Prabhupada's example, ISKCON devotees participated in the Ardha Kumbha Mela at Prayagraj (Allahabad) from January 15<sup>th</sup> to February 12<sup>th</sup>, bringing the Holy Name, Prabhupada's books and prasadam with them.

Kumbha Mela is the largest public gathering and collective act of faith in the world, and drew about 120 million pilgrims – nearly double the population of the UK or France – this year.

Kumbha Mela takes place four times within a twelve-year period, rotating between four of the most holy places in India -- on the banks of the Godavari river in Nashik (Maharashtra), the Shipra river in Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), the Ganges in

Haridwar (Uttarakhand), and confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati in Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh).

Many sadhus from different traditions attend to bathe in the sacred rivers – which is believed to give liberation from the cycle of birth and death – as well as to associate with each other and make organizational decisions. Pilgrims come to see and hear from the sadhus, hoping to gain spiritual progress.

Srila Prabhupada himself attended the Ardha Kumbha Mela with his disciples in 1971, and then the Purna Kumbha Mela in 1977, to bring the message of bhakti, or devotional service.

For many years ISKCON devotees today have been participating in the Mela in his footsteps. This year some three thousand devotees from India and around the world attended, including Gopal Krishna Goswami, Lokanath Swami and Radhanath Swami.

At Kumbha Mela, thirteen "Akharas" each house followers of similar religious ideologies. In 2004, ISKCON was recognized as a bona fide member of the Brahma Madhva Gaudiya Sampradaya within the Vaishnava Akhara, with Lokanath Swami designated as the ISKCON Mahant, or head priest.

This year, as always, ISKCON had its own large camp at Kumbha Mela within the sprawl-



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

*The tent city at Kumbha Mela*

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*ISKCON Camp organizer Sanak Sanatana Das drives a bullock cart carrying Gaura Nitai and Srila Prabhupada*

ing tent city of eighty-seven colonies, each of which host about 2,000 pilgrims.

People could enter the ISKCON Camp through a gate featuring huge paintings of Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda. Inside, the camp included book stalls, dioramas, a large kitchen and prasadam hall, offices, premium and dormitory accommodation, and a pandal where spiritual programs were held daily.

During the Mela, ISKCON devotees cooked and served over 80,000 full prasadam meals to sadhus and pilgrims, cooked with ghee and included rice, dahl, subji, chapati, and a sweet.

Every afternoon, they took a bullock cart carrying deities of Sri-Sri-Gaura-Nitai and a murti of Srila Prabhupada out into the Mela, to perform *Harinama Sankirtan* and mass book distribution.

In the process, they distributed 250,000 of Srila Prabhupada's books, including 150,000 *Bhagavad-gitas*.

With their bullock cart, devotees also entered each of the three main shahi snaan (royal bathing) processions of sadhus at the Mela, while chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra.

“The three bathing days are Makara Sakranti on January 15<sup>th</sup>, Mauni Amavasya on February 4<sup>th</sup>, and Vasant Panchami on February 10<sup>th</sup>,” says ISKCON camp organizer Sanak Sanatana Das. “We participated in all, and were always appreciated.”



*Sanak Sanatana Das and other devotees perform a yajna at Kumbha Mela*

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# ISKCON Pune Devotees Care for Blind Children

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, February 22, 2019  
<https://bit.ly/2EX7BuP>

ISKCON devotees in Pune, Western India are bringing Krishna consciousness to blind children, with inspiring effects on the children's mood, health and spirits.

Champakalata Dasi, motivated by her spiritual master Bhakti Raghava Swami, first visited the Poona School and Home for the Blind in November 2016 and, she says, felt an instant connection with the children.

School authorities explained that the children were often depressed and unhappy, and invited Champakalata to give them weekly classes on moral values, which they felt might help. The Poona School is a dormitory for boys, with seventy-three of the one-hundred-and-twenty students living on site. Champaka began visiting these boys – aged eight to fourteen – every Saturday from 5pm to 6pm.

"I start by playing an audio of Srila Prabhupada kirtan," she says. "Then, depending on which Vaishnava festival is close, I teach them a bhajan – for instance, Nrsimha Pranam, Gaura Arati or Damodarastakam. I also tell them stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayan*, and teach them verses and parables from the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad*

*Bhagavatam*. Finally, I serve them *prasadam* popcorn, cakes or lemon rice that I make at home."

Champakalata also asks the students to repeat the *maha-mantra* eleven times, then later twenty-one, gradually inducing them to chant japa on beads on their own time in their dormitory. She also encourages them to discuss Krishna *Katha* instead of other topics, and to teach their friends who don't attend her class. Many children are now chanting one round of japa daily.

"The caretaker at the school told me that a lot of them have reported feeling happier," Champaka says. "And their attitudes have changed. Before they used to fight, but now they don't anymore, and are more friendly and peaceful."

According to the caretaker, blind children tend to be sleepy more often; but since attending Champakalata's class, they are more alert. Meanwhile one particular child who was prone to fits and was heavily medicated due to his condition is now weaned off of many medicines because of the effects of chanting.

"I can see a sea change in this boy," the caretaker told Champakalata.



Children from the School for the Blind lead Nrsimha Pranams at the Pune temple

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## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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Encouraged by the results, school authorities allowed Champaka to take fifty children and seven staff members to visit the ISKCON Pune temple and New Vedic Cultural Center on February 13<sup>th</sup>.

She first took the children to have *darshan* of the Deities of Sri Sri Gaura Nitai, Sri Sri Radha Vrindavan Chandra, Jagannath, Baladev and Subhadra, and Lord Balaji.

“Because they are blind I described to them Gaura Nitai’s postures, how Their arms were raised, what They were wearing, and how Their glance is very merciful,” she says. “I described Radha Vrindavan Chandra and Lord Jagannath in the same way.”

After darshan, vice president Bal Govinda Das gave a short class in Marathi, teaching the importance of “ABCDE” in life: Association of devotees; *Bhagavad-gita*; Chanting; Diet; and Engagement.

“He also narrated a beautiful story on how we must make the best use of all resources and assets awarded by the Lord in life, to make it spiritually fruitful not just for oneself but for others too,” Champakalata says. “He dealt with the children gently and lovingly, giving them a lasting impression of his message.”

Finally, the students participated in kirtan during the *arati*, led Nrsimha *pranam* themselves, and were served lunch *prasadam*.

“I feel that it etched wonderful memories of devotional activities in their hearts, which could be an impetus for their future endeavors in bhakti,” says Champakalata. “They were very

happy with the experience. One child came to me, held my hand and said, ‘Until now we thought you were coming only to teach us and go. But today we understand that you really care for us.’”

“Another said, ‘The temple atmosphere made us feel very happy – there is something so special about this place.’ And another marveled at how ‘bhakti is very simple, because you can just eat and dance, and meet loving and caring devotees.’”

Next, with support from the School for the Blind’s head and staff, Champakalata will begin teaching the children how to offer their food to Lord Krishna. She has also used the school’s Braille software and printer to create Braille editions of the Vaishnava Songbook and, on Nityananda Trayodasi on February 18<sup>th</sup>, *Light of the Bhagavata*. Now, she is translating into Braille a number of Srila Prabhupada’s small books including *Introduction to Bhagavad-gita*; *Krsna, The Reservoir of All Pleasure*; *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*; *On the Way to Krishna*; *Beyond Birth and Death*; and *Coming Back*.

The service is extremely fulfilling to Champakalata. “The first thing I always wanted in life was to be happy and make others happy,” she says. “The only way to do that is by practicing and giving Krishna consciousness to all. When I see the lives of these children changing for the better, and their happiness quotient increasing as they chant japa and partake of *prasadam*, that’s a great success to me.”

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.

Every time we purchase something in a supermarket, we are indirectly supporting slaughterhouses. Every time we pay taxes we are indirectly supporting abortion on demand. Every time we vote, we are supporting unnecessary killing. Every time we take a step, we are potentially killing ants. Every time we crush spices, every time we draw water, we are killing tiny living beings.

Michigan State University College of Law recently published a passage that reads: “Products made from or that contain parts of cattle are everywhere. These products are so ubiquitous that people often interact with cattle, in some form, on a daily basis. There are not any laws that oversee the processes that people follow when they breed, raise, and ultimately slaughter cattle. The laws that do exist typically do more to foster the industry than to protect the welfare of the cattle. A growing segment of the population looks to ‘humane meats’ for their meals, but fails to consider that many of their leather products, plastics, detergents, skincare products, and many other purchases come from cattle that live short, abysmal lives.

“State and federal governments can do more to protect the lives of cattle, but thus far these sovereigns have not seen fit to protect cattle welfare nearly as much as they consider the industries that exist because of these cattle.”

Fortunately, even in the midst of such a society there is *bhakti*, devotional service to Lord Krishna. Regarding the power of devotional service: “The purificatory power of devotional service to Krishna, beginning with the chanting of the holy name, is stated in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (11.2.42) *bhaktih pareśānubhavo viraktir anyatra ca*. [this translates as] ‘Devotional service to the Lord is so powerful that one who performs it is immediately freed from all material desires.’”

In 16<sup>th</sup> century India, if a Muhammadan sprinkled water from his water pot onto the body of a Hindu, that Hindu was considered a Muhammadan. Lord Caitanya was personally confronted by Buddhimanta Khan, a wealthy elderly Hindu who was sprinkled by the water pot of the ruling Nawab (Muslim king). Buddhimanta asked the Lord what to do. Lord Caitanya advised him to give up his affluent lifestyle, move to Vrindavana and engage in pure devotional service, including daily chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. In this way, Buddhimanta would be totally freed from the scourge of Muhammadan identity. He did this, and was thus absolved from the societal scourge of having become a Muhammadan. He lived happily ever after.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

