



Spiritual Perspectives

June 2019

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

Everyone Has the Right to Worship

By Radha devi dasi

Religious tolerance seems to be on the decline these days. On Easter Sunday, in April 2019, six bombs exploded in Sri Lanka leaving hundreds dead. Three of those bombs went off at Christian churches where Easter celebrations were in full swing. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for those bombings.

In spite of a state of emergency declared following the deadly Easter bombings, mobs rampaged through western Sri Lanka in May of this year, attacking Muslim neighbors with stones, swords and petrol bombs. One person was killed, at least 14 wounded, and over 540 Muslim owned houses, shops and mosques were destroyed. Police suspect Buddhist hard line groups led these attacks in retaliation for the Easter bombings claimed by the Islamic State.

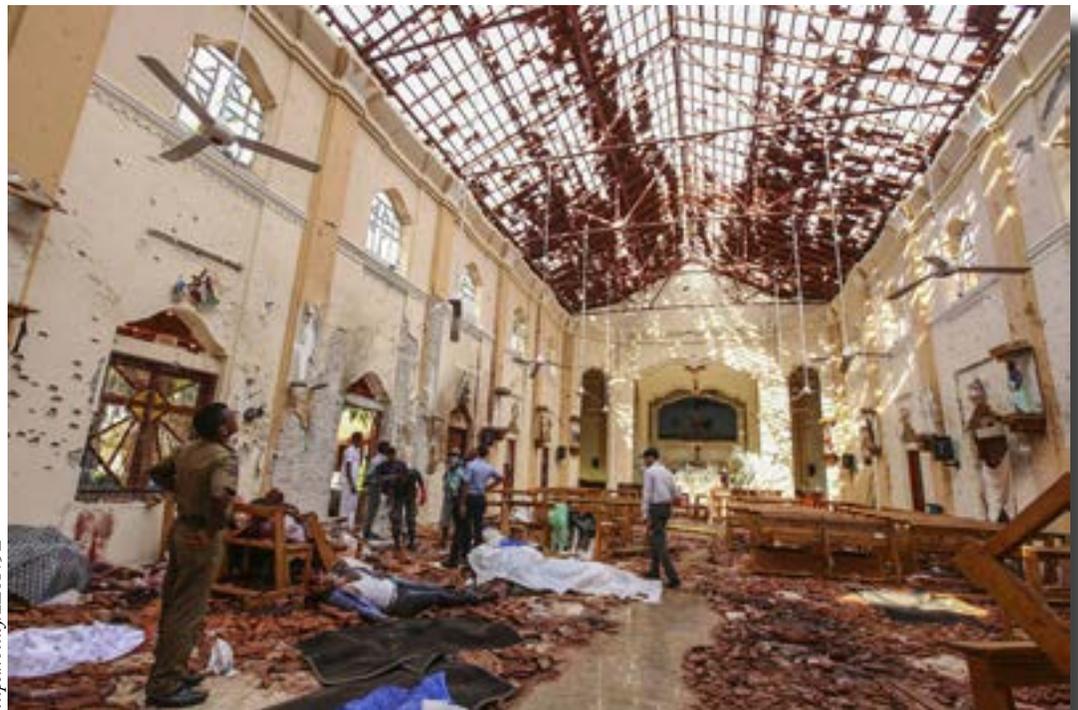
Religious violence is also on the rise in India, where Hindu nationalists have lashed out against Muslims in the name of cow protection and protecting religious freedom. "Lynching has become a nationalist project," according to journalist Mohammad Ali. Killers are protected, even praised as heroes for "defending the faith" and eradicating Muslims.

As Vaishnavas, we support efforts to eliminate meat eating and to promote Vedic values. However, we need to ensure that we do not give support to groups who use religious violence. To attack those who are devout worshippers of the Supreme Being by whatever name is to commit a serious offense that has the power to destroy our own spiritual lives. In fact, religious figures such as Jesus Christ or the prophet Mohammed are stalwart servants of Lord Krishna. In Chapter 4 of the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious principles, He descends. In his commentary, Srila

<https://bit.ly/2Z0Fr9E>

Prabhupada writes that Krishna comes Himself to establish principles of religion or sends His representative. According to Srila Prabhupada, different incarnations or representatives give as much spiritual instruction as the people can understand. In this way, Sri Krishna ensures that everyone has the opportunity to make spiritual advancement.

When we condemn or physically attack others because they are not living up to our Vaishnava principles, we miss the point. If people are making their best effort to advance on a spiritual path, especially a personalist path, they should be appreciated. While we can (and should) invite others to take up the process of bhakti yoga, we can never use force to bring them to Krishna. In His kindness, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has made spiritual advancement open to all through association with the holy names of the Lord. As Srila Prabhupada told us, ours is not a sectarian process. Accepting others where they are and encouraging them to move forward is a powerful preaching tool and much more likely to change the hearts of others.



"Dead bodies of victims lie inside St. Sebastian's Church damaged in blast in Negombo, north of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Sunday, April 21, 2019." - apnews

ISKCON Leader Offers Prayers at National Memorial Service for Sri Lanka Terrorist Attacks

By: Madhava Smullen, ISKCON News, May 20, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2Z3yKDF>

ISKCON GBC and Communications Minister Anuttama Das recently offered prayers at an Interfaith Prayer and Remembrance Service for the people of Sri Lanka, at the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC on Sunday, May 5th.

The event was a memorial for the victims of the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks on April 21st, when three churches and three luxury hotels in Sri Lanka were targeted in a series of suicide bombings that killed more than 250 people.

Over 1,000 attended the service, including religious dignitaries representing Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Christian faiths, members of Congress, US government representatives, Ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, and Sri Lankan community members.

The Very Reverend Randolph Marshall Hollerith, Dean of the Washington National Cathedral, led the congregation. Welcoming all to the interfaith service, the Dean said the presence of such a large gathering of well wishers representing all religious denominations was a testimony of their respect and solidarity for the victims of all faiths.

The service of prayer and remembrance began with a procession of religious representatives walk-

ing down the aisle carrying candles in honor of the victims. The Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington then offered an invocation prayer for the people of Sri Lanka. Next a series of religious leaders each conducted prayers from their tradition and offered blessings for the victims and their families.

Reading stanzas of the *Sacred Script of Thripitaka*, the Most Venerable Maharagama Dhammasiri Thero, Chief Priest of the Washington Buddhist Vihara, emphasized Buddha's teachings on mindfulness and the path to righteousness. At such a time of crisis, Ven Thero underscored the essence of being caring, kind, forgiving and compassionate towards others.

His Grace Anuttama Dasa then offered a prayer spoken by Sri Prahlad Maharaja from *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.18.9. The version he used was a translation by ISKCON scholar Ravindra Svarupa Dasa, which was appropriate for the comprehension of a Western audience.

"May the entire universe be blessed with peace and hope," Anuttama read. "May everyone driven by envy and enmity become pacified and reconciled. May all living beings develop abiding



Religious leaders in procession at the beginning of the service. Anuttama Das is second from the front.

Continued on page 3

concern for the welfare of others. May our own hearts and minds be filled with purity and serenity. May all these blessings flow naturally from this supreme benediction. May our attention become spontaneously absorbed in the rapture of pure love unto the transcendent Lord.” He ended by chanting Om and the holy name of Lord Krishna, asking God’s blessings for all those who suffered from the terrible attacks in Sri Lanka.



<https://bit.ly/2Z3yKDF>

1,000 people attended the service at the Washington National Cathedral

Continuing on, Ustadh Seyed Rizwan Mowlana, Founder of Medina Centre reflected on the *Holy Quran* and Prophetic tradition reiterating that violence and evil has no place in Islam. The true servants of God, he said, are those who walk gently upon this earth and repel evil with good, and when confronted by the ignorant, their reply is “PEACE.”

Representing the Jewish community, Rabbi Bruce Lustig, Chief Rabbi of the Washington Hebrew Congregation remarked, “Leviticus 19:18 teaches us the primary commandment, to love thy neighbor as thyself. Despite the situation, hatred and bigotry, we will not stop loving our neighbor. We stand for the sanctity of the sanctuary that no one should be fearful to pray and praise their God. May our response be to bring more of God’s love into the world, meet hatred with love, injustice with justice, and fear with faith.”

Christian prayers at the service were read from the Episcopal Church’s Book of Common Prayer and the famed Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Reading them were the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, the Dean of Washington National Cathedral, and Reverend Roy Edward Campbell, Jr., Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington.

Finally Sarath Dissanayake, Charge d’ Affaires of the Sri Lankan Embassy expressed his appreciation and thanks to the organizers and guests. He offered his prayers and blessings to the victims’ families. In closing, he noted the similarities in the

teachings of all major faiths, which direct their followers to embrace one another and practice loving kindness towards fellow human beings, so that the world will become a better and more secure place for all.

“It was a very sobering event, because it was a memorial service for the unfortunate people who were killed during the horrendous attacks in Sri Lanka,” Anuttama Das says. “At the same time, it was an honor to be able to represent the Vaishnava tradition, and to read the prayers of Prahlad Maharaja in this most revered of American houses of worship. I was deeply moved by the shared feelings of camaraderie and prayer amongst the religious leaders, and gratified to see interfaith voices stand in solidarity against the violence that is so tearing up our world today.”

The venue where the service took place – The Washington National Cathedral – is, it should be noted, the center of the Episcopal Church in Washington and the nation. It has hosted state funerals of former U.S. Presidents and dignitaries, and is commonly called “the national house of prayer” and “the spiritual home for the nation.”

Interestingly, ISKCON devotees have previously spoken there on several occasions. Ravindra Svarupa Dasa addressed mourners at a national event after the 9/11 terrorist attacks; devotees chanted there as part of a metropolitan DC interfaith holiday service; and devotees have also participated in multiple interfaith events at the Cathedral.

ISKCON of D.C. Holi Becomes Family Tradition For Many Locals

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, May 17, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2K7jj4i>

After years of celebration, the Holi Festival at the ISKCON temple in Washington, DC is now so embedded in the local culture that it has become an annual family tradition for many.

incorporating traditional instruments like harmonium, kartals and mridanga into a high energy dance music style. Inspired by their joy and devotion, an ecstatic audience sang along to the

Hare Krishna mantra and other Vaishnava chants, throwing powdered colors into the air every hour.

Elsewhere visitors could meet the cows and play holi with them by pressing colored handprints onto them. At the Ask A Monk tent, a new addition this year, they could ask any question they desired to seasoned bhakti practitioner Adi Purusa Das.



<https://bit.ly/2K7jj4i>

A colorful scene

This year over 4,000 people attended the event, also dubbed Festival of Colors, on Saturday May 4th. So many turned up, in fact, that offsite parking had to be arranged with buses to shuttle them back and forth. The crowd was extremely diverse – guests were young, old, black, white, Latino and Indian, college students, and members of the congregation.

“Most of the people who come have either never been to the temple before, or are not so familiar with Krishna but really enjoy our family friendly festivities,” says volunteer coordinator Amy Hollis.

Visitors paid \$5 per person to enter, with all food under \$5 – a very affordable day out with the family, particularly in the DC area.

The temple campus was dotted with colorful tents from Madhuha Dasa’s traveling Festival of India, a stage, and numerous prasadam booths. Offerings included a mix of Indian and Western cuisine prepared by devotees, including masala dosa, chole bhature, a full thali plate, pizza, French fries, pakoras, noodles, cake, donuts, and fresh juices.

Onstage, Gaura Klein and his group of devotees from Texas performed live kirtan,

Every half hour, hatha yoga classes were offered outdoors by teachers connected to the temple.

At the Mantra Meditation booth, the aptly-named Maha-Mantra Das had devotee volunteers sit one-on-one or in small groups with guests, teach them the Hare Krishna mantra, give them a set of beads, chant a full round of japa with them, and give them the beads to take home. Over the course of the day, more than 500 people chanted a round of japa.



<https://bit.ly/2K7jj4i>

Colorful guests learn to chant japa on beads

Continued on page 5

In the temple room, president Ananda Vrindavana Dasi introduced guests to the Deities, gave a brief explanation of Krishna conscious philosophy, and showed them how to say a prayer at each of the three altars and offer a candle to the Lord.

“The biggest thing that became evident this year was how the festival has become ingrained in people’s family traditions,” says Amy. “In a lot of conversations

with guests, they shared how their children have grown up with it, and how they look forward to celebrating it together each year. And that’s really sweet – because for so many who would otherwise not be very familiar with our temple, we’ve become a small part of their life.”

This family tradition spans generations and brings together different faiths. This year Walt Mills, a 64-year-old Presbyterian elder and deacon, attended with his daughter Katie, 37, and granddaughter Reagan. All deeply appreciated the festival.

“It was invigorating to be in a diverse crowd of smiling happy faces,” Katie commented. “Seeing

others take joy in chanting together, practicing yoga and praying lit up my soul.”

“I like Holi because I like throwing colors,” added six-year-old Reagan. “The food is delicious. I love the music and the singer’s voice. The rainbow yoga was so fun!”

Grandfather Walt Mills was particularly effusive, finding the commonality across faiths in praising the Lord’s Names. “Krishna Bhakti is joyously and amazingly celebrated at Potomac amongst all generations, and it especially appeals to the ‘young eternal soul’ within all of us,” he said. “The name of God, Krishna, is lifted up, chanted, sung, yelled, and shared among all attendees,

and for many first timers at Holi, the mix of food, fun and Mantra is life changing. I am so appreciative. God’s name is to be adored in all religions, in all cultures, at all times. His Name represents all of His traits, and to call upon Him with such Holi enthusiasm delights Him and delights us. Thank you.”



Sri Sri Radha Madana Mohan in Their Holi outfits

ISKCON Child Protection Director Appointed as UK Magistrate

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, May 13, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2Wm6r6r>

Kamlesh Krishna Das, the International Director of the ISKCON Child Protection Office, has been appointed as a Justice of the Peace Magistrate in the British judiciary system. He will be serving within the Magistrate Court, which handles 95% of all legal cases in the UK. He was officially appointed and sworn in on Srila Prabhupada’s *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* on April 1st, and will be based primarily in Hertfordshire.

Kamlesh Krishna previously worked with the Ministry of Defense, held senior posts in the banking and financial services industry, and has been



Continued on page 6

involved in child protection in ISKCON in the UK for the past decade. In June 2016, he succeeded Champakalata Dasi as the ISKCON CPO Director.

His new magistrate's appointment came as a result of his experience in child protection in ISKCON; as well as the fact that he and his wife Gandharvika Dasi – the CPO Global Assistant – are nearing the completion of a Master's Degree in advanced child protection at the University of Kent.

Kamlesh Krishna will begin his new position with eighteen months of on-the-job training under a senior magistrate, as well as formal academic classroom training. He will then go on to a specialist court, where he will adjudicate cases that specifically deal with child protection issues.

At one end, the wide range of cases will include deciding on care plans for children, from assigning social workers and recommending parental counseling, to putting children in foster care or with an adoptive family, depending on the gravity of the situation. At the other end, Kamlesh Krishna will deal with criminal cases wherein a person may be charged with abuse of a child.

“From this new role as magistrate I hope to gain experience and training, as well as a perspective from the secular world, which I can bring back and apply to ISKCON,” he says, “to help us be more effective and protect our children in a better way.”

Kamlesh Krishna also hopes that, amidst so many secular news stories about how various religions are not taking child protection as seriously as they should, his appointment will raise a positive profile for ISKCON.

“It will show that we do have a robust system; and we do take it seriously, to the point that we even have our International Child Protection Director sitting as a judge in the British judiciary, specializing in child protection,” he says.

Of course, ISKCON has also been criticized in the past for its handling of child protection cases, and concerns continue to be raised. Kamlesh Krishna says he is aware of these concerns and is taking them on board, with two main responses underway.

The first is to acknowledge the devotees that have been abused, build a bridge between them and ISKCON, validate what they have been through, and try to alleviate their hurt. “They want validation that they were abused,” he explains. “Not that it's denied or minimized; but that we actually acknowledge yes, you were abused, the organization is truly sorry for what happened to you, and we will try to put some sort of rectification and healing in place.”

The second is to minimize further incidents.

“We're never going to eradicate child abuse or the risks of child abuse – that is part of the horrible world we live in,” Kamlesh Krishna says. “But what we can do is minimize or deter these incidents from occurring in ISKCON.”

Kamlesh says that he has not changed the CPO policies that have already been in place. But he is working to make devotees – especially ISKCON management – more aware of the policies, and also to make sure that they adhere by them. He feels that this will be the biggest deterrent.

“We have our established policies and procedures in place which are robust and effective,” he says. “It is vital that we increase awareness and application of these via more devotees taking up child protection as a service.”



Kamlesh Krishna Das (far right), just after his swearing-in ceremony at St Alban's Crown Court (with High Court Judges in wigs and the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire in front)

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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Devotees Distribute Prasadam at Mosque During Ramadan in Florence, Italy

By: ISKCON Communication Italy, *ISKCON News*, May 17, 2019

<https://bit.ly/2Z8QSMx>

On May 7th, on the auspicious day of Aksaya Tritiya and second day of Ramadan, Villa Vrindavana devotees in Florence distributed prasadam (sanctified vegetarian food) to the Muslim members in the mosque of Florence.

“I have a long-standing friendship with Imam Izzeddin Elzir,” Parabhakti dasa says, “and when this year he invited us to participate in their prayer I thought it was a special occasion, during it something special has to be done. So I came to the conclusion that this was a great opportunity for distributing *prasadam* and offering service to the Islamic community.”

In Muslim tradition, especially during Ramadan, it is important and auspicious to offer charity, service, goods, and money. In the month of Ramadan, at sunset, the mosque opens up to all, members and not, to pray together and then break the long fast that begins at dawn.

Also present were Massimo Fratini, Assessor of Florence Municipality for relations with religious confessions and intercultural policies and leaders of the Mormon community and others. The ISKCON devotees were greeted with joy and gratitude and the evening was a beautiful celebration of sharing and friendship.

According to Mahamantra dasa, one of the participants, “when the priest sang the verses of the *Koran* and all the Muslims joined together, I perceived and enjoyed a sincere devotion to God that touched my heart.”

“The *prasada* truly unites the hearts of all,” says Gauranga, “people welcomed our offer with great gratitude and reciprocated with gestures and affectionate words.”

Bhakta Adriano explains, “I immediately made friends with some guys present and I



Parabhakti Dasa (second from the left) listening to the explanation of Imam Izzeddin Elzir

found in all of us the great desire to know each other better and to do things together. I also found out that Mohamed Fathi, known as Moa, a brilliant young man in charge of the Youth Muslims in Italy and a candidate in the upcoming Florence elections, is reading the *Mahabharata* with great interest.”

Gadhadar Nath says: “It was a pleasant and reassuring evening - we offered the *prasada* with the heart and they reciprocated with exquisite welcome and affection.”

“These moments of encounter are worth a thousand words, continues Parabhakti, and the Assessor kept repeating how nice it is to see the Hare Krishnas contribute to the Muslims dinner in the mosque, how beautiful is to see how dialogue unites and leads to concrete and prospective results. He then recalled how during the peace walk in early February (in which devotees were co-organizers), despite the cold winter, more than 2,500 participants of all faiths were involved. It was a unique event that had an impact on a national and European level.”

The icing on the cake of a splendid evening was when the Imam said that originally the Ramadan fast was observed monthly for three days, and making quick calculations devotees found out that was in the period corresponding to Ekadasi.

Personal Message...



Dear Friends,

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

We all need a living Guru.

It has been said that we are living in the ashram of ISKCON, a worldwide confederation of temples wherein Srila Prabhupada is the principal *shiksa* guru. We disciples of Prabhupada who are giving *diksa* can be regarded as assistant teachers in the ISKCON classroom where Prabhupada is the primary teacher.

None of us who offer *diksa* in disciplic succession is a superman, such that we are the be all and end all of everything. To think this way is a misconception. To ensure that my disciples do not harbor this misconception is probably the main reason why I ask all my disciples to never leave ISKCON, even if I disappoint them, or even if there are things in ISKCON with which they disagree.

Many times in the past I have erred in not strictly correcting my disciples. Therefore, I ask to be forgiven for this oversight. I will try to correct it. Even though not on the topmost level of devotion, I do have a duty to connect all my disciples with the disciplic succession.

Hare Krishna!

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswam

