



Spiritual Perspectives

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

Valuing Dissent

By Radha devi dasi

Criticism can be hard to take. Most of us have an instinctive, defensive reaction to being told that there is something we could improve. At the same time, one cannot fix a problem until one acknowledges its existence. Thus, criticism is both essential yet painful to hear. Understanding this dynamic is vital to spiritual growth and most of us learn to gracefully accept some less than positive feedback.

It is much harder, however, to cultivate an open-minded attitude when the criticism is aimed at our beloved ISKCON. For many of us, criticism of ISKCON feels like criticism of Srila Prabhupada. We worry that even hearing such criticism may be offensive. We deflect that criticism by labeling critics as “demons.” Are we missing an opportunity for improvement?

A similar dynamic is at work in American politics these days. President Trump recently confronted four junior Congresswomen over their criticisms of the current administration by telling them to go back where they came from. His message, loudly repeated by his followers, rests on the idea that there is no room for criticism of America in American politics. Nor is this a new concept in the U.S. “America, love it or leave it” has long been a popular slogan.

Political writers reacting to Trump’s “go back where you came from” message were quick to point out its inherent racism. Doubling down on his position, Trump then explicitly declared that no one should criticize the United States.



<https://bit.ly/2Kg3HPp>

Other commentators pointed out that dissent has value. Patriots, they write, can love their country and still want to see it improve. Former Princeton University President, William Bowen, argues that democracy requires dissent. Critical thinking and active debate, he writes are “the best ways of pursuing truth, correcting old errors, and developing new ideas.” The U.S., in fact, has enshrined freedom of speech. Criticism of the country, the government, its policies and practices are all protected by the

U.S. Constitution.

On the other hand, current American politics also highlights one of the pitfalls of allowing open dissent – factionalism. The U.S. Congress is currently at odds with both the President and itself. Democrats and Republicans alike have shown a willingness to shut down the government, leaving millions of Americans without needed paychecks and government services, rather than allow the other side even the possibility of a “win.” Polls show a large number of Americans are frustrated by both the right and the left over this failure to work together.

How does an institution allow for dissent without succumbing to factionalism? The answer comes down to how we handle the impulses of our lower nature. Politicians, and people in general, are driven by the modes of material nature and the false ego. Thus, democratic debate becomes merely a chance to score points against the other side. Solutions to very real problems such as climate change, refugee crises, poverty and crime take a back seat to earning political capital with one’s supporters.

Vaishnavas should take this lesson to heart as we debate our own controversial topics. Listening to understand rather than to win is essential. Acknowledging at least the possibility that the other side has valid points to make helps us see where we can improve things. We should pray for open hearts and open minds as we endeavor to apply Srila Prabhupada’s teachings to new situations. Most importantly, we should remember that if we “win” rather than work together, ISKCON as a whole loses.



<https://bit.ly/2Zr25bY>

Gurukula Student Overcomes Brain Tumor, Enters Third Year of University at 17

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 27, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2YA2Rs>



Vraja Kishor (left) with his brother Nitai Pran after winning State in the Lincoln Douglas Debate

After graduating from gurukula, a student of TKG Academy in Dallas has been accepted into the Eric Jonsson School of Engineering & Computer Science at the University of Texas at Dallas, at just seventeen years old.

Vraja Kishor Schomaker has also been awarded a Comet transfer scholarship, and is entering his third year of college with over seventy-five credits. All this despite a terrifying battle with a brain tumor in 2017 that left him temporarily unable to read.

His mother, Gopi Gita, who serves as the Vice Principal at TKG Academy, sees his achievement as proof that when done right, Srila Prabhupada's gurukula system can positively shape students and give them both deep spiritual lives and successful academic and professional careers.

When Vraja Kishor was born, Gopi Gita and her husband Rupa Madhurya Das, both gurukulis themselves, heard about Aruddha Dasi in Boise, Idaho. Aruddha had homeschooled her sons Radhika Ramana and Gopala Hari using primarily the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, and the two had been accepted into college at a very young age.

Wanting the same for her children, Gopi Gita called Aruddha, who advised following the tenets of Krishna consciousness and focusing heavily on reading, writing and math to help increase comprehension. Gopi Gita took up her suggestions and homeschooled Vraja Kishor at Laguna Beach, before moving in 2007 to Dallas, where she became a teacher at TKG Academy and her son started kindergarten.

Diverting somewhat from Aruddha's system, TKG Academy taught the regular private and public school curriculum, but integrated the contents with Srila Prabhupada's books.

"It's really incredible how the higher levels of philosophical thought that take place when you discuss *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* with children, bring out their metacognition and critical thinking skills, even at second and third grade," Gopi Gita says.

Teachers at TKG also use methodologies of practice and discovery, facilitating children to figure things out for themselves rather than rote repetition. And they ensure that kids have fun learning. "When you have fun doing something, you're so much more motivated, and your mind is more activated," says Gopi Gita.

Parental involvement is an important element too. "When parents ask specific detail-oriented questions about what their child is doing at school," Gopi continues, "and when they connect with their child on education at home – for instance, practicing multiplication tables in the car, or weighing groceries at the store – the child comes to school much more confident and motivated."

Other Krishna conscious parts of the puzzle include chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* daily.

"The Holy Name has the side effect of removing ignorance," Gopi Gita says. "When children



Vraja Kishor, pictured with his brother Nitai Pran, mother Gopi Gita Dasi and father Rupa Madhurya Das, graduates from Gurukula

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come to school in the morning, it can be hard to get them to wake up and be bright and alert. But when we start our day with chanting, prayers, and stories of Krishna, it immediately removes that. I can almost feel it! So that's a very powerful factor in getting our kids to work intelligently."

Finally, teachers try to embed in students a Krishna conscious attitude toward academic study. "They know that, "The goal of my education isn't just to make my parents happy and get good grades – it isn't just for some material ambition or success,"" says Gopi Gita. " 'But rather, I have a higher purpose in life, to serve Krishna and to serve humanity. And this work that I'm doing right now will help me get to a place where I can serve according to my nature.'"

All of this is so effective that 60% of TKG Academy students are in the top ten percentile in national standardized tests. And Vraja Kishor, Gopi Gita's son, started dual enrollment in college at age 14.

"When that happened, we were so happy because my life goal has been to prove that Krishna consciousness and high academics can go side by side," Gopi says. "We thought if we can do this with our own kids, the system works."

But in February 2017, Vraju, as he is known, came home from school and began throwing up. At first, his mother thought he had a stomach flu. But then he called her from the other room: "Mom, I think there's a problem. I can't read." Alarmed, Gopi Gita took him to the hospital, where doctors found three tumors in his brain. Although they were benign, one had burst and was causing inflammation in the Wernicke's Area, a part of the brain important for language comprehension.

The next few weeks, Gopi Gita says, were the worst of her life. "I was in constant pain – it felt like my skin was burning," she recalls. "I would be pouring milk into a bowl of cereal, and it would just overflow because I was completely somewhere else. Fortunately, my father, mother Urmila, Rtdhvaja Swami and all my friends were a great support system."

Finally, during a nerve-racking six-hour brain surgery, doctors removed the burst tumor. But they warned Gopi-Gita and Rupa that at first Vraju may not be able to speak at all or even recognize them. So when he opened his eyes, and immediately said, "Hey mom," a wave of relief washed over his family.

"It was miraculous," Gopi Gita says. "I think the prayers of all the devotees really helped."

After being discharged from hospital, Vraja Kishor began working with his mother on his comprehension, and within two months, he was able to read again. He still struggles with Ps and Qs, and makes small mistakes when reading aloud, but is expected to reach full capacity.

Amazingly, none of this was able to divert him from his goals. After studying for two more years at community college, Vraju was accepted on July 16, 2019 into the Eric Jonsson School of Engineering & Computer Science at UTD at seventeen years old. The achievement came with glowing recommendations from his community college professors, which served to reinforce the effectiveness of gurukula education integrated with study of Srila Prabhupada's books.

"Vraja Kishor Schomaker is one of the most astounding students that I have met in my teaching career," wrote his Adjunct Instructor of Mathematics. "He is brilliant, sophisticated, soft-spoken, cerebral, thoughtful, and caring ... I was impressed by the breadth of his argumentation and critical thinking skills, as well as his analytical fluency."

His Professor of Philosophy and Religion added, "Vraja is an exceptional communicator ... his style of participation is thoughtful and mature... [he] exhibits exceptional skills in abstract reasoning ... it is my assessment that Vraja's talents rank him among the top 5% of students whom I have taught."

Vraja Kishor is set to get a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science and a Master's in Big Data within the next three years. After that he hopes to work in Big Data, which is useful for, among



Gopi Gita with TKG Academy students

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many things, finding cures for illnesses. Vraja is passionate about the field, writing in his entrance essay, “The world opens up like a blooming rose of information just by evaluating data.”

Vraju doesn’t like to be praised, feeling like he is nothing special and is just doing what he needs to do. His mother also points out that while she is proud of him, she is not sharing his story to praise her own son. Rather, she is doing it to glorify the education he received at Srila Prabhupada’s school.

“95% of the kids who went to gurukula with my husband and me in the 1970s are not even interested in Krishna consciousness anymore,” she says. “I want to show that gurukula can be something good – that students can have happy lives and regular careers, integrated with Krishna consciousness.”

As well as ensuring her own children have such lives, Gopi Gita is trying to do the same for

the rest of the students of TKG Academy. The school has a strong Pre-K to Eighth Grade, as well as a high school program that provides a good path to college. As of this summer, it also has a dual enrollment program where college courses will be offered for free with TKG Academy. While not all students will choose the same path as Vraja Kishor, they will all have the education, care, love and guidance they need to thrive on their own journey.

“Rather than feeling that they’re different, ostracized, or not able to fit in, we want to enable them to be confident spiritually, materially, academically, and intellectually, and to be able to work with others in the outside world,” Gopi Gita says.

First Krishna Homeschool Convention

By: Sri Radhika devi dasi, *ISKCON News*, July 27, 2019

<https://bit.ly/2OufGt3>

Forty four adults and nineteen children came together in the home of Sri Sri Kishore Kishori in Chicago during the weekend of July 13 and 14 to participate in the first-ever Krishna Homeschool Convention. The registrants came from 12 states across the USA, namely Utah, Missouri, Colorado, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Massachusetts, California, and Illinois. Many are currently home-schooling, while others are exploring homeschooling as an option for their children.

Homeschooling pioneer and author of “Homeschooling Krishna’s Children,” Aruddha devi dasi set the stage with her sons, Radhika Raman das and Gopal Hari das by opening the seminar with a “Homeschooling Basics” presentation. They shared the nuts and bolts of homeschooling, including how to create a conducive home environment, using Srila Prabhupada’s *Srimad-Bhagavatam* as the basis of the entire curriculum. Then, multiple devotees who have experience homeschooling shared their perspectives and experiences via interactive sessions and presentations. Vidharbha Suta devi dasi from Maryland shared her experience homeschooling a single



Forty four adults and nineteen children came together in the home of Sri Sri Kishore Kishori in Chicago

child. Anand Vrindavan devi dasi from Silicon Valley presented her nine year-long homeschooling journey with two delightful boys. Varsana devi dasi from San Diego, who is a certified Waldorf teacher brought a fresh new perspective with how she incorporates Waldorf principles into her home-school. Atulya devi dasi from Boston showed how one can make homeschooling work when both parents are working and homeschooling together. The Menon family from Chicago and Taraka devi dasi from Denver shared their very simple yet effective homeschooling models. Radhika Raman das led an interactive session on the “Role of the Father in Homeschooling.”

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Participants reported more enthusiasm to try homeschooling. One said, “I heard lots of success stories at the convention. It has really given a boost to my enthusiasm to start homeschooling.” Another echoed, “This gives me confidence to start homeschooling.” Those who were already homeschooling also gained from the convention. One participant reported, “I feel inspired and rejuvenated to continue homeschooling my children. I would love to see this happen every year and possibly at different

temples.” Another stated, “I got lots of ideas and encouragement in the process of homeschooling.”

To keep up the enthusiasm generated, the presenters will be making themselves available to the participants via a monthly conference call.

Real education means character development. By exploring models of education based on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, may we be empowered to create a ‘truly educated’ generation of soldiers for Srila Prabhupada’s army!

40th Anniversary of Prabhupada’s Palace to Honor Devotees Who Built It

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 26, 2019

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

A Palace Reunion Festival, commemorating forty years since the official opening of Srila Prabhupada’s Palace in 1979, will take place in New Vrindaban, West Virginia from September 27th to 29th.

Devotees began building the Palace themselves back in 1973 as a residence for Srila Prabhupada, when he expressed a desire to retire to New Vrindaban and translate his books. Young and inexperienced, they trained themselves in construction and artisanal skills. Although the building began as a simple house, their love for their guru saw it become more and more elaborate.

Srila Prabhupada reciprocated. “Regarding New Vrindaban I was very happy when I was there,” he wrote in 1974. “I am expecting very soon to go there and live in my proposed palace at least for some time.” And when he visited the site, he personally thanked the devotees working on it and referred to them as “my jewels.”

After he left this world in 1977, the Palace became a Smriti Samadhi, or memorial shrine to ISKCON’s Founder-Acharya; a monument to his astounding achievements; a place where he resides in spirit through his instructions; and a major attraction for pilgrims and tourists.

About 200 devotees, both local and from around the U.S., are expected for the reunion festival. In particular, those who participated in building the Palace and developing New Vrindaban from 1975 to 1985 – a period of nonstop marathons – will be invited and honored for their selfless service. (Finishing work on the Palace continued after the 1979 opening.)

“Please come give us your association and allow us to express our heart-felt gratitude,” reads the invitation letter. “Our hearts have been forever

bonded by the experiences we shared in building the New Vrindaban community and Srila Prabhupada’s Palace.”

Among the guests will be Varshana Swami, who cleared the land for the Palace; Soma Das, who served as head of the construction department; Sudhanu Das and Rupa Rameswari Dasi, who both worked in the mold shop; Nityodita and Jada Bharata, who laid marble; Tejomaya, who did plastering work; and Marudeva, who did the metalwork for the gates.

Also attending will be Girindra Mohini Dasi and Vijaya Dasi, who took care of the children so that other devotees could work on the Palace; Vedamata Dasi, who distributed books to raise money for the construction; and Bimbadhara, Jalakolahali, Gaura Shakti, and Chandramauli Swami, who helped with support activities, concrete work, brick laying, wall building and marble setting.

Then there’s the reunion festival’s organizer, Sukhavaha Dasi, who was the construction supplies manager, and of course many, many more.

The festival will begin on Friday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. with a welcome ceremony and meet and greet at Prabhupada’s Palace. Devotees will then carry Srila Prabhupada’s murti on a palanquin ride around his Palace, accompanied by enthusiastic kirtan. In the evening, there will be dinner and a movie about the early days of New Vrindaban.

Saturday and Sunday, the main event days, will be packed with storytelling, with two 3-hour sessions in the morning and afternoon on both days.

At the beautiful yogashala on the lake and at Prabhupada’s Palace, devotees will share stories of small miracles during the building of the Palace; of the high level of teamwork and cooperation; of how

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they worked long hours and sacrificed so much; and of the camaraderie, excitement and exhaustion.

“For example, I remember the intensity of the last day, trying to get ready in time for the press to arrive,” says organizer Sukhavaha Dasi. “As the film cameras were coming into the temple room, the painters were just finishing up and carrying their ladders out the backdoor! We’ll tell lots of stories like that, that recreate the experience and make it alive and real for people who weren’t there.”

The stories will also be live-streamed online at newvrindaban.com for those who are not able to attend.

Free accommodation will be offered to former residents who served at New Vrindaban from 1975 to 1985, along with their spouses, and three prasadam meals will be served every day.

“Our aim is to really honor and appreciate the sacrifices of so many devotees,” says Sukhavaha. “And to bring a lifetime in service full circle – forty years ago we were just kids, and this may be the last time we see each other all together like this. So it’s a coming to completion, a healing, a reviving.”

The event is likely to be powerful for many, based on the reaction to last year’s reunion for New Vrindaban’s 50th anniversary.

“We have so many testimonials of people who were hesitant to come,” says Sukhavaha, “But when they did they said things like, ‘I am so glad I came – I feel so validated, I feel like what I did was not all for naught. And I feel proud to have contributed.’”

The Palace Reunion festival is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience as it may be the last reunion of its kind in New Vrindaban. But the Palace itself, the fruit of the devotees’ sacrifice and love for Srila Prabhupada, will remain an important place of pilgrimage long into the future.

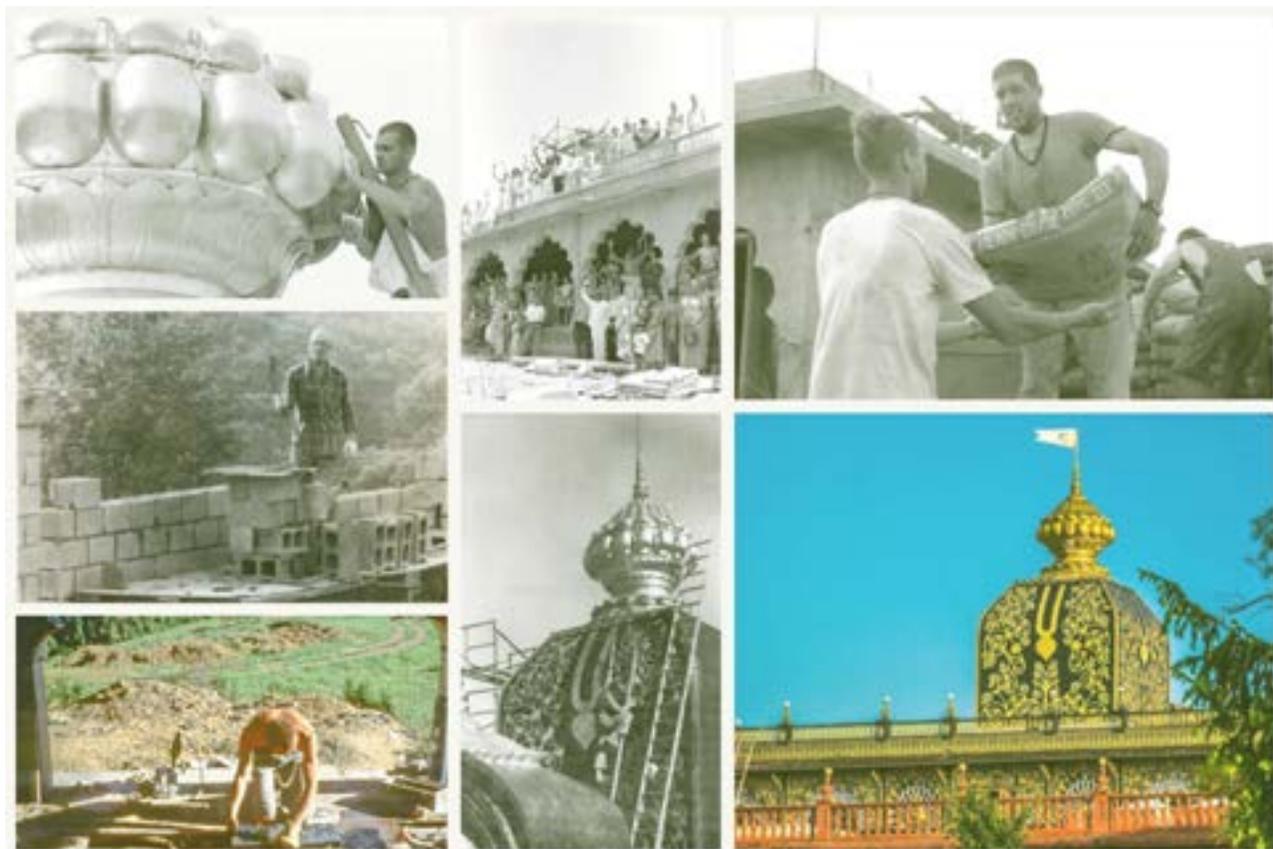
“It’s the only Samadhi that Srila Prabhupada actually visited,” Sukhavaha says. “And his presence is still felt there. Worship still goes on there daily, with devotees gathering in the morning for his mangala aratik. It’s a very special place.”

* * *

For more information, please email Sukhavaha at PalaceReunion@gmail.com

The live stream will be viewable during the festival at

<https://www.facebook.com/newvrindaban108/>



Photos Top Left to Right: Kuladri Das applies gold leaf to the dome in 1978 or 1979, Group photo at the construction site in the mid 1970s, Soma Das heads up construction in the mid 1970s, Gaura Shakti building the Palace Wall in the late 1970s, Hrishikesh working on the Palace dome in 1979, Rsi-Kumar Das lays marble in 1976, Prabhupada’s Palace of Gold today

Anniversary of the Incorporation of ISKCON

By Mukunda Goswami, www.dandavats.com, July 26, 2019

<https://bit.ly/31gVyRj>



Left to Right: Bhakti Marg Swami and Mukunda Goswami

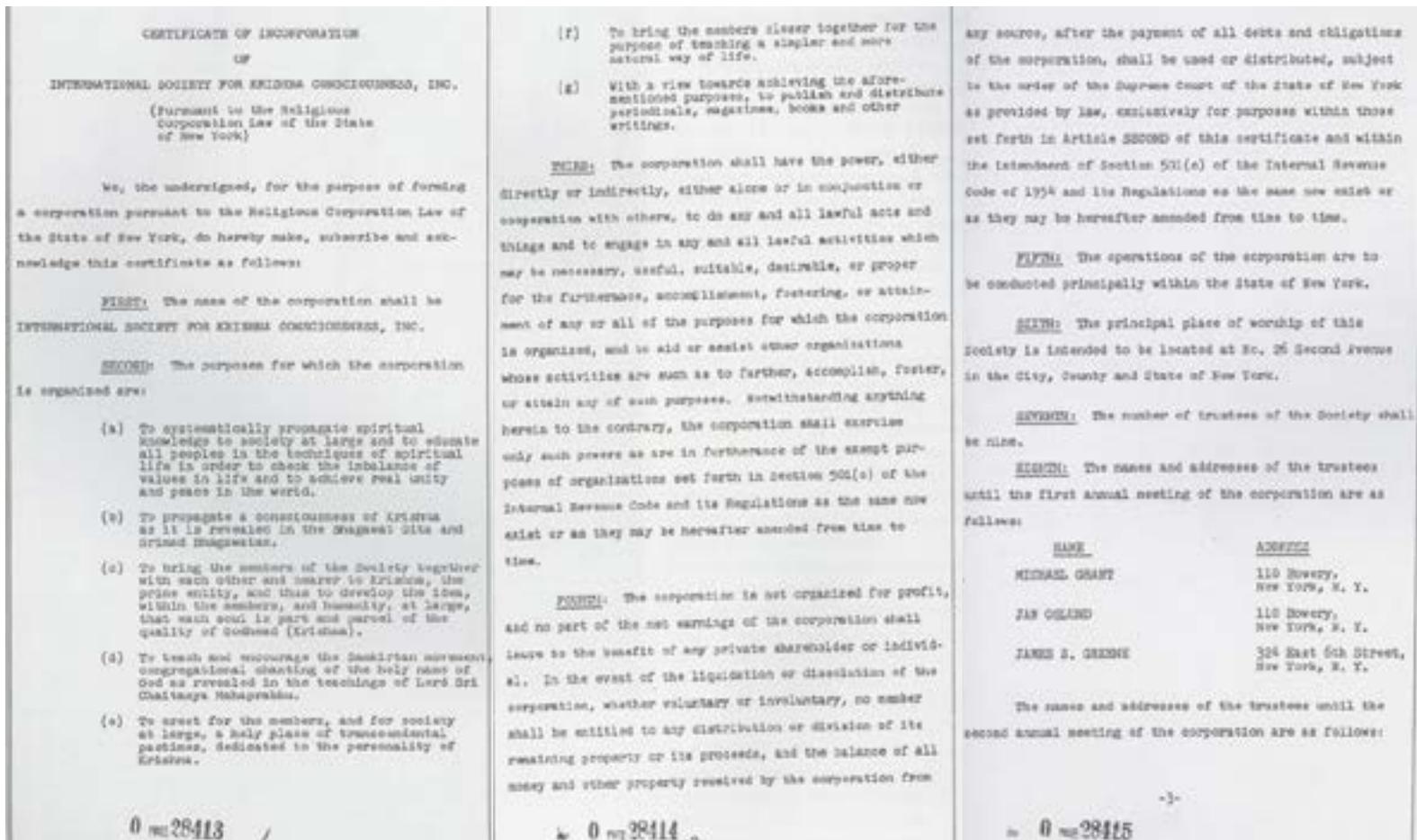
ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) was incorporated in New York City, in the State of New York in the U.S., on 13 July 1966, around 53 years ago. This first incorporation of ISKCON was executed at Srila Prabhupada's behest – then known to his followers only as 'Swamiji' and to others as A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

The lawyer under whose aegis the fledgling movement was officially instituted was Mr. Steven Goldsmith, an attendee at Srila Prabhupada's Second Avenue lectures. I don't know for sure,

but I suspect Mr Goldsmith's legal fees were low or non-existent.

One early (for me) morning in July of 1966, I was awakened and asked to sign papers pertaining to the incorporation of ISKCON. As a US citizen and resident, my signature appeared to be necessary. So I rather perfunctorily signed the document, thinking at the time it was a sort of 'flight of fancy' of Srila Prabhupada's. Later I was instrumental in getting ISKCON incorporated in the State of California (US), as well as in England and India.

The constitution of these other three corporations was based on that of the original New York corporation. I've drawn the conclusion that Srila Prabhupada's vision in doing this was for ISKCON to endure in the face of his own and his followers' inevitable physical disappearances. "Built to last" was a slogan that wasn't lost on Srila Prabhupada's institution. In pursuance of Srila Prabhupada's vision, as far as I know, the highest administrative levels of ISKCON have been discussing and examining the "culture of succession" principle.



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SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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The names and addresses of the trustees until the third annual meeting of the corporation are as follows:

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ROBERT LEFKOWITZ	1847 89th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

ELEVENTH: All of the subscribers to this certificate are of full age and all are members in good and regular standing of the church seeking incorporation through the filing of this certificate by admission with full membership thereto in accordance with the rules and regulations thereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have made, subscribed, and acknowledged this certificate of incorporation this 13th day of July, 1966.

A. Bhaktivedanta

Carol Becker

Raymond Marais

0 28416 -4

STATE OF NEW YORK) SS:
COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

On the 13th day of July, 1966, before me personally came A. U. BHAKTIVEDANTA, SWAMI, RAYMOND MARAIS and CAROL BEKER to me known and known to me to be the individuals described in and who executed the foregoing certificate of incorporation and they severally acknowledged to me that they severally executed the same.

Simon J. Goldstein
SHERIFF OF NEW YORK
State of New York
Department of Law
Telephone Number 212-312-1234

STATE OF NEW YORK) SS:
COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

SIMON J. GOLDBLUM, being duly sworn, deposes and says: that he maintains an office for the practice of law at Two Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, City and State of New York; that he is the attorney for the subscribers to the annexed certificate of incorporation of INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, INC.; that he has made diligent search of the records of the Clerk of the County of New York, and as revealed by such search, that no other corporation with the same or similar name as INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, INC. has filed a certificate of incorporation in New York County. The undersigned affirms the veracity of foregoing.

Simon J. Goldblum

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0 28419 7

The preceding photos are of the original "Certificate of Incorporation of International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Inc" in the state of New York, USA dated the 13th day of July, 1966. To view the full size images visit: <http://www.dandavats.com/?p=11701>

Personal

Message...



Note: This Message to Friends was published in a previous issue (July 2013) of *Spiritual Perspectives*.

Dear Friends,

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

ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) was incorporated in the city of New York, in the State of New York in the USA on July 13, 1966, about 47 years ago. This first incorporation of ISKCON was done at the behest of Srila Prabhupada, then known to his followers only as “Swamiji” and to others as A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The lawyer under whose aegis the fledgling movement was officially instituted was Mr. Steven Goldsmith, an attendee at Srila Prabhupada’s Second Avenue lectures. I don’t know for sure, but I suspect Mr. Goldsmith’s legal fees were low or non-existent.

Once, Mr. Goldsmith asked Srila Prabhupada, why, if Krishna is so kind, is He sending so many American young men to be killed in Vietnam. Unhesitatingly Srila Prabhupada answered by saying that so many cows were being slaughtered every day, that God is asking American fathers and mothers to send their sons to the slaughterhouse.

One early (for me) morning in July of 1966 I was awakened and asked to sign papers pertaining to the incorporation of ISKCON. As a citizen and resident of the USA my signature appeared to be necessary. So I rather perfunctorily signed the document, thinking it was a sort of flight of fancy of Srila Prabhupada. I didn’t read the papers very carefully or maybe I didn’t read them at all, but I felt duty-bound to sign them, as I wanted to help Srila Prabhupada. Shortly afterward I forgot all about the signing.

Later, at the request of Srila Prabhupada, I was instrumental in getting ISKCON incorporated in the state of California (USA), in England and in India.

The constitution of these other corporations was based on that of the original New York corporation. The Indian corporation was based on the British corporation, which was slightly different from the USA one. The British papers were drawn up by a law firm called Goodman and Derek, the legal office that represented Mr. Harold Wilson, then the Prime Minister of England.

I’ve come to the conclusion that Srila Prabhupada’s vision in establishing these entities, was that ISKCON would be able to endure in the face of his own and his followers’ inevitable physical disappearances.

“Built to last” was a slogan that wasn’t lost on Srila Prabhupada’s institution. After Srila Prabhupada’s disappearance, ISKCON continued, although imperfectly, despite this grievous loss.

In pursuance of Srila Prabhupada’s vision, and as far as I know, the highest administrative levels of ISKCON have been discussing and examining the “culture of succession” principle.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

