



Spiritual Perspectives

October 2019

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

The Worm at the Core

By Radha devi dasi

In the *Mahabharata*, Yamaraja, the lord of Death, asks Yudhisthira, “what is the greatest wonder in this world?” Yudhisthira’s answer highlights an eternal contradiction in human thought. Everyday we see that people around us are dying, he says, but still we hope to live forever.

It is human nature to ignore our pending death. Lacking spiritual knowledge, seeing the material world as ultimate reality, makes facing death especially traumatic. Psychologists have found that this need to deal with existential dread (the fear that we will cease to exist) actually drives a number of human behaviors. Because we do not understand the nature of the soul and our real relationship to the material world, we become even more attached to our own material identity and to different cultural and social groups. A world where we simply cease to exist is a meaningless and tortured experience for most people.

Psychologist Sheldon Solomon has been studying psychological reactions to the fear of death for a quarter of a century. In *The Worm at the Core*, Solomon and his co-authors describe innovative experiments conducted around the globe, conclusively showing that the fear of death and the desire to transcend that fear inspire us to buy expensive cars, crave fame, put our health at risk, and disguise our animal nature. The fear of death can also prompt judges to dole out harsher punishments, make children react negatively to people different from themselves, and inflame intolerance and violence.

Solomon’s research shows that fear of death drives people to develop a mental picture of the world that buffers the knowledge that death is inevitable. He describes this as an attempt to establish personal value in a world that has meaning. In other words, we want to believe that we are important within a group that will live on after us. As a result, being reminded of death results in two human tendencies. The first is a tendency to cling to our “tribes,” whether those be our religious groups, social groups, nations, or other affiliations. This tendency also causes us to reject people who act in ways that don’t fit with the values of our core group.

For example, in a study of municipal court judges, Solomon found that judges reminded of their mortality gave stiffer sentences than those in a control group. When punishing social deviancy (crime) jurists reminded of death felt that significantly more punishment was needed.



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

Similarly, when reminded of death, people tend to favor nationalistic political and social policies. A 2016 study found that potential voters in America showed an increased tendency to favor Donald Trump when reminded of the danger posed by Muslim terrorists and Central American immigrants. Solomon also found that when death and a secondary subject such as terrorism become linked in people’s minds, a reminder of the secondary subject alone can trigger destructive tribalism.

The second tendency that results from fear of death is the tendency to want to build up our self-esteem. Existential dread leads to the need to show that we are better than others – richer, smarter, more righteous, better looking, etc. Ironically, this tendency can even lead to behaviors that make us more likely to die. Israeli soldiers who prided themselves on their driving abilities tended to drive faster and take more risks when reminded of death.

This tendency to deny the inevitability of our own death leads to insane behavior. The debate over climate change shows how political and industrial leaders cling to the material wealth or nationalistic pride that allows them to avoid fear of death, ignoring the climate crisis that is actually bringing death nearer.

Srila Prabhupada famously asked of materialists, “Who is Crazy?” The refusal to face the inevitable fact of our deaths is a crystal-clear signal that material consciousness is both insane and self-destructive. But it is impossible to understand why death is not to be feared without spiritual knowledge. The world needs to know that the soul is eternal and that only spiritual advancement gives real meaning to our lives.

Vanipedia to Create Accurate Transcripts of All 2,400 Hours of Prabhupada Audio

By: Madhava Smullen, ISKCON News, August 16, 2019

<https://bit.ly/2oLTJ0H>



<https://bit.ly/2oLTJ0H>

Srila Prabhupada gives a lecture

With its new “Audio to Text Fidelity Project,” Vanipedia.org, a dynamic website of Srila Prabhupada’s words, is creating accurate transcripts of all Srila Prabhupada’s recorded audio. It’s an ambitious effort. In the 1980s, Srila Prabhupada’s tape ministry had just 700 hours of audio. In the 1990s, the Bhaktivedanta Archives expanded it with another 300 hours.

In June 2019, the Archives finally completed the release of all of the ISKCON Founder-Acharya’s audio files. Now, there are over 2,400 hours of audio in 3,804 files.

“This is a great victory for the devotees,” says Vanipedia director Visnu Murti Das. “We want to hear everything Srila Prabhupada said! Every morning during Guru Puja, we sing, ‘My only wish is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth.’”

This was supported by Srila Prabhupada himself. In 1968, when an interviewer asked him why devotees were always taping him, he responded, “We have got so many branches, they want to hear me, my singing, my speech, therefore they record it and send it to different branches.”

All these hours have already been transcribed by the Archives, but according to the Vanipedia

team there are still some errors in the transcriptions and there is some room for improvement.

Thus Vanipedia’s “Audio to Text Fidelity Project” has been launched to proofread all lectures, conversations and morning walks.

“Our mission is to preserve the integrity of Srila Prabhupada’s spoken words by creating a set of transcripts that are 100% true to what Srila Prabhupada actually said,” Visnu Murti explains.

The Vanipedia team will also be translating all of the Bengali and Hindi phrases that are intertwined within the English audio. And they need help.

“We welcome all devotees who love hearing Srila Prabhupada to join us in this mission,” Visnu Murti says. “You will be attentively listening to a lecture, conversation or morning walk of Srila Prabhupada, while reading the text and correcting any mistakes you see.”

Vanipedia’s goals in the project include creating a very transparent presentation of Srila Prabhupada’s audio teachings in text form; making the texts ready for translating in multiple languages; and making them ready for printing in hard copy.

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“By being part of the project, you’ll experience direct association with Srila Prabhupada as you proofread the texts of his words,” Visnu Murti says. “You’ll be offering a personal service for the pleasure of Srila Prabhupada. And you’ll experience the joy of serving with your Vaniseva devotee family in a dynamic project.”

The project was developed using Trello.com, oTranscribe.com and Google Docs, making the process easily understood for participants.

Transcriptions and audio files are taken from Vanisource.org, run through these platforms, and then placed back into Vanisource nicely proofread.

* * *

For more information, contact the Vanipedia team at info@vaniseva.org - or directly join the team on Whatsapp: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/HaVzzZWapIK8RL6NLJsscI>

You can also visit the project webpage at <https://www.vaniseva.org/audio-to-text-fidelity>

Govardhan Ecovillage Wins National Energy Globe Award

By: Madhava Smullen, ISKCON News, September 21, 2019
<https://bit.ly/30NPgYN>



<https://bit.ly/30NPgYN>

Deputy Director General of Advantage Austria Patrick Sagmeister (in gray blazer) presents Gauranga Das (beside him) with the National Energy Globe Award

Govardhan Ecovillage, ISKCON’s 100 acre farm in the foothills of the Sahyadri mountain range in Maharashtra, has won the 2019 National Energy Globe Award for India.

The Energy Globe Award was founded in 1999 by Austrian energy pioneer Wolfgang Neumann, and is one of today’s most prestigious environmental awards. Its goal is to present successful sustainable projects to a broad audience, to show that many of our environmental problems already have feasible solutions.

Every year, some 800 projects from all over the world that conserve and protect our resources, or employ renewable energy, participate. One award winner is chosen from each country.

This year, Govardhan Ecovillage won the award for India, and was recently invited to receive the Energy Globe certificate at a ceremony held in Mumbai. Presenting the certificate to Ecovillage Director Gauranga Das was Deputy Director General of Advantage Austria Patrick Sagmeister. Also in attendance were Dr. Robert Luck, Commercial Counsellor at the Austrian Embassy, and Austrian Embassy Director Ramesh K. Kalnawat.

Govardhan Ecovillage received the award in particular for two of its prime initiatives: Integrated Water Conservation, and its Protection Scheme in the tribal villages of Maharashtra’s Palghar District.

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Govardhan Ecovillage received The Energy Globe Award

“Govardhan Ecovillage is a model farm community established to showcase how to live in harmony and respect with people, nature and the divine,” says Director Gauranga Das. “We’ve implemented various green technologies on our campus and have been working with tribal villages to make them sustainable, while giving respect to Mother Earth.”

GEV is acting as a role model village by implementing green technologies for waste and water management, as well as water resource development (WRD) for irrigation and drinking water in tribal villages.

“We underwent a hydrogeological survey to establish a 10 million liter rain water harvesting pond to recharge ground aquifers and irrigate our fields,” Gauranga says. “We also set up a Soil Biotechnology (SBT) plant, which processes 100,000 litres of sewage water daily and is used for irrigating the field.”

GEV helps around fifty tribal villages by providing lift irrigation and customized irrigation practices. Nineteen hundred farmers have benefited so far, while drinking water initiatives have benefitted 5,500 villages. By 2025, GEV is expected to help 14,400 villages through its water resource development initiatives.

Owing to the education and irrigation support by Govardhan Ecovillage, more than 1,100 farmers have adopted organic farming practices and planted over 131,000 horti-floriculture crops

in the last few years. This has increased their annual income by thirty to thirty-five per cent. In addition, more than 6,000 farmers from all over Maharashtra have been trained in organic farming through educational sessions.

GEV has also helped reduce poverty in tribal villages through various initiatives like empowerment of women, rural education, water resource development, rural health care and skill development for tribal youth. For all these initiatives, Govardhan has previously received the United Nations World Tourism Organization Award (UNWTO), and became affiliated with the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). The GEV project is also being studied by high level institutions such as Yale and Harvard Universities as a model for ecological sustainability and rural development.

When asked how he felt about receiving the new award, Gauranga Das says, “It is a wonderful opportunity to share the earth honoring teachings of our Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition with the world through the example of Govardhan Ecovillage. The crest jewel of all the Vedic Scriptures, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, teaches us that Mother Earth is the consort of Lord Varahadeva, and thus living a life of respect to her is an important principle of our tradition. So it’s wonderful to be rewarded for living by those principles, and to get an opportunity to represent ISKCON for the same.”

ISKCON's Biggest Gathering of Leaders – ILS 2020 – Leading ISKCON into the Future

Published Announcements, www.dandavats.com, September 27, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2IksZvB>



ILS 2020 promises to be the largest gathering of ISKCON leaders to date. Five hundred devotees attended ILS in 2012 and the numbers have been steadily increasing. This will be our 5th ILS gathering, and we are anticipating 1500 devotees from all over the world. Please be one of them! Those who

joined Prabhupada's mission in the 60's and 70' are anxious to see ISKCON's management and leadership transferred safely into competent hands. This was the message Srila Prabhupada gave to his followers when he reached his mid-seventies.



New Vaishnavi Regional Ministers Appointed

By: Radha devi dasi, ISKCON Vaishnavi Minister, ISKCON News, September 26, 2019

<https://bit.ly/2V9fioo>



Vaishnavi regional minister Krishnarupa devi dasi

Radha devi dasi, ISKCON Vaishnavi Minister, recently announced the appointment of Ekanga devi dasi and Sati devi dasi, both from Russia, as regional co-ministers for Russia and the CIS. They will serve as liaisons for the Vaishnavi Ministry in those regions, and also continue organizing sanga opportunities for Vaishnavis and communicating with local leaders on behalf of Vaishnavis in their regions.

Sati devi dasi is a disciple of Bhakti Tirtha Swami and served as his secretary and interpreter in Russia and the CIS. While working full-time and raising her son, she also serves as an interpreter for devotees visiting Russia and is a member of the SABHA Committee.

Ekanga devi dasi is a disciple of Prahlanananda Swami and serves as a mentor and guide for Vaishnavis. She is the organizer of Yearly Vaishnavi Forums in Russia and has fully dedicated her life to devotional service.

They join current regional ministers, Krishnarupa devi dasi in Australia and Govinda Priya devi dasi in North America. Krishnarupa devi dasi is a disciple of Srila Prabhupada who served in *Mayapur* for almost 20 years. In the 1980s, she and her family moved to Australia where she worked in publishing. She has edited and helped produce many devotional books. In 2016, the Australian National Council appointed her as Women's Minister for Australia. She is also a member of the SABHA committee.



Sati devi dasi

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Ekanga devi dasi

Govinda Priya devi dasi, originally from Mumbai, is a disciple of Radhanatha Swami. She previously served in New Vrindaban where she founded the Gopal's Garden school and was a member of the congregational development team. She currently lives with her family in California where she organizes local festivals along with Vaishnavi study groups and retreats. She has been the Vaishnavi Ministry's North American leader since 2018.

ISKCON's Vaishnavi Ministry currently has many service opportunities available, including regional organizers, website developers/managers, writers, and research assistants. Interested Vaishnavis should contact Radha devi dasi at radha16108@gmail.com.

We Would Appreciate Your Feedback

Please Send Your Response To :

feedback@mukundagoswami.org

Personal

Message...



Dear Friends,

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

The following passage is an excerpt from my publication, *Miracle on Second Avenue*. In a sense, it is the origin of the sixteen rounds vow we initiates in ISKCON all took when we received diksa from our spiritual master. The conversation with Srila Prabhupada took place in the Paradiso, California house we rented for Srila Prabhupada in the summer of 1967. I thought to include it in this edition of “Spiritual Perspectives,” because it kind of sets the scene for one of the most important aspects of ISKCON – the personal japa meditation we all vow to follow, as we sit before the Deities, the sacred fire, the Vaisnavas and the spiritual master at the time of first initiation. Here it is:

“Mukunda, come,” he called. He gestured toward the chair opposite him. “So,” he said a little playfully, “what is your definition of Krishna?”

I was pleased, because a philosophical discussion meant he was feeling somewhat better.

“Krishna is God,” I answered. “He is the Supreme Being, and our duty is to worship him.” It wasn’t exactly a philosophically penetrating answer, but he seemed happy with it. He looked hard at me for a long time.

“You must chant sixty-four rounds every day,” he said finally.

I was shocked. He must not have liked my answer after all.

“Chanting that much – eight hours every day – would be impossible,” I thought. I wasn’t sure if I was being singled out because of spiritual deficiency or if this was going to be a new requirement for everyone, but I knew it would be unattainable for me. I had enough problems just trying to get sixteen rounds done every day.

The Swami saw my hesitancy. “Then you must chant at least thirty-two rounds,” he said.

That was a consolation, but even thirty-two seemed like an awful lot. The Swami stared hard at me.

“Well, OK,” I mumbled, looking at the floor. There was a long pause.

“You must chant at least sixteen rounds a day,” he said.

“Yes, Swami,” I said loudly, looking up. I was so relieved! This I knew I could do, but I felt like I was reconfirming my earlier promise to him. I understood now that sixteen rounds was only a quarter of the ideal sixty-four. Even though I knew it was all I could handle for now, I rededicated myself to chanting at least sixteen rounds daily without fail.



Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami