



Spiritual Perspectives

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

January 2020

When Religion is Divisive

By Radha devi dasi

Recent protests in India highlight a profound defect in material religion. Unlike spiritual understanding, material religion encourages us to form exclusive groups and to see each other's differences instead of the ways in which we are all connected to each other.

India's new Citizenship Amendment Act is a potent example of how a "religious" policy can actually undermine real religious principles. The Act provides legal protection for immigrants who have suffered religious persecution as long as they are not Muslim. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party of Hindu Nationalists have long advocated for policies that protect Hindus and disadvantage Muslims. Passage of the Act has triggered violent protests across the country.

Twenty-three people have been killed so far, and the government is cracking down on public gatherings. In parts of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and some areas of Karnataka state, police have imposed a colonial-era law banning the assembly of more than four people. Thousands of protesters defied the order, and were arrested in cities across the country. To further quell protests, Indian authorities have shut down phone and mobile internet in some parts of the country.

While many object to the law's anti-Muslim bias, the majority of protestors rail against its religious basis. They argue that the Act violates India's secular constitution, which guarantees everyone equal rights regardless of their religion.

As Vaishnavas, should we support a policy designed to protect Hindus? After all, we share many beliefs and practices with most Hindus. We certainly don't support secularism.

On the other hand, why should persecuted Muslims be denied protection available to other religious groups? While there is nothing wrong with protecting Hindus from religious persecution, singling out Muslims and denying them similar protections is not a spiritual policy.

At the root of the Citizenship Amendment Act is the belief that those who identify as Hindu are more worthy of help than those who identify as Muslim. But both of these are material designations. Real religious knowledge tells us that everyone is equally worthy no matter what religious label they wear.

As Vaishnavas, we favor policies that promote religious and spiritual practices. But the Citizenship Amendment Act does not encourage anyone to cultivate his or her relationship with the Supreme Person. Rather, it deepens the divide between groups, fostering violent conflict.

Given the many examples of egregious, religiously based persecution in modern history, Indian protesters are justified in their opposition to a policy that favors one religious group over another. As Vaishnavas, we have to see beyond the labels and remember that we are all children of the same Father, entitled to the same opportunity to advance in spiritual understanding.



Left: Protesters in Assam, Northeast India, fear the bill will encourage illegal migration to the region

History made in British Parliament — With *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*

By: Radha Mohan Das, *ISKCON News*, December 20, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2MDyCH9>

The reelected Member of the British Parliament for Harrow East, Mr. Bob Blackman made history this week. During the traditional swearing-in ceremony within Parliament's main debating Chamber, in his right hand he took a copy of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, along with the traditional *King James Bible*. Bob Blackman MP is a Vice Chair of the Parliamentary Group Conservative Friends of India.



British Parliament Member Mr. Rob Blackman swearing-in with a Bhagavad-gita As It Is and the King James Bible



Alok Sharma and Rishi Sunak

Meanwhile, two UK lawmakers Alok Sharma and Rishi Sunak took oath on the *Bhagavad-gita* while swearing in as members of the parliament in the new House of Commons on Tuesday. Alok Sharma is a minister in the British cabinet, Rishi Sunak is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Dream Made Reality: Owning New York's Bhakti Center

By: Contributor, *ISKCON News*, December 20, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2SBPa6e>



New York Bhakti Center located on the Lower East Side 25 First Ave, New York, NY 10003

After years of collective dedication in devotional service by the community, in December 2019 the management of New York's Bhakti Center made the final mortgage payment to own the 25 First Avenue building outright.

It was the community members' heartfelt contributions that have made it possible for the people of New York to find their spiritual home and enter the family of Srila Prabhupada, Sri Sri Gaurachandra, Sri Sri

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<https://bit.ly/2SBI7a6e>

Radhanath Swami offers the copy of the deed of the building to Srila Prabhupada and Sri Sri Radha Murlidhara and Gaurachandra while devotees join together in kirtan

Radha Muralidhara and the beloved community of devotees for generations to come.

The Bhakti Center's journey has been challenging and deeply rewarding. The community members are overjoyed to

celebrate this great moment as a point in history that marks the triumph of the Bhakti Movement in New York City



<https://bit.ly/2SBI7a6e>

Animal Cruelty Is Officially a Nationwide Felony in the US

By: Sophie Hirsch, *megaphone.upworthy.com*, December 5, 2019
<https://bit.ly/39maNNR>

“On Monday, November 25, Trump signed the bipartisan Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act into law, making it federally illegal to engage in cruelty to animals.”

The PACT act, which is an extension of a law that President Obama first passed in 2010, was first introduced earlier this year, and it recently passed in both the House and the Senate. For the past few weeks, lawmakers and animal welfare activists awaited the bill reaching Trump’s desk.

The bill’s authors, Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Fla., and Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla, seemed confident that Trump would sign the bill into law because it had unanimous support from both Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate — and luckily, their hunch was right.

The PACT Act makes “animal crushing” a nationwide felony in the U.S. Animal crushing is defined as when any “living non-human mammals, birds, reptiles, or amphibians is purposely crushed, burned, drowned, suffocated, impaled, or otherwise subjected to serious bodily injury,” according to the



<https://bit.ly/39maNNR>

official Congress website. The law also applies to those creating or distributing videos of animal crushing.

Read more: <https://megaphone.upworthy.com/p/animal-cruelty-nationwide-felony-pact-act-trump>

Devotees Spiritually Uplift Inmates at Haryana Prisons

By: Akinchan Priya Das, *ISKCON News*, December 20, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2ZuRzRK>



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

Devotees hand out Srila Prabhupada’s books to inmates and officers

The mission of ISKCON is to spread Lord Caitanya’s mercy to the fallen souls of *Kali-yuga* who find themselves perpetually imprisoned in the jail of the material world. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Chandigarh has been conducting spiritual programs in the jails of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh for the enlightenment of the inmates.

With the objective of making lasting changes in inmates’ behaviors by igniting the love for God in their hearts, Praghosh Das, Akinchan Priya Das, Akruranand Das, Hayagriva Das, Goranga Gopal Das and Ganga Priya Das

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



The melodious Harinam kirtan performed at the end of the program mesmerized all

from ISKCON Chandigarh visited the Central Jail of Chandigarh (UT) and Model Jail Ambala (Haryana).

Apart from distributing 800 copies of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* to jail inmates and officers, they also gave enlightening spiritual discourses on the importance of following the Vedic principles in our day to day lives.

“ The mission of ISKCON is to spread Lord Caitanya’s mercy to the fallen souls of Kali-Yuga who find themselves perpetually imprisoned in the jail of the material world. ”

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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



Inmates enthusiastically join in chanting the maha-mantra

Personal Message



Dear Friends,

We are an “in your face” philosophy.

We are convinced that everyone must have a living guru.

The philosophy of Krishna consciousness advocates taking shelter of, or getting initiated by, a guru. This means we can be certain we are correctly overcoming many obstacles on the path of bhakti.

It is essential that we study Srila Prabhupada’s books, but it is also mandatory that we take formal initiation from one of his followers. The word “initiation” means “beginning.” We don’t accept *diksa* in order to have a spiritual name or to be admitted into the inner circle of ISKCON devotees. These material motives are similar to the cronyism that is so much deplored in non-devotee society. Rather initiation should be seen as beginning on the path of bhakti, a start to deepening our understanding and realization of Krishna consciousness.

Taking formal initiation, one vows before the Deities, the sacred fire, assembled Vaisnavas and the *diksa* guru to chant 16 rounds every day, and to forswear meat, fish and eggs, illicit sex, gambling and intoxication, including tobacco, and products whose ingredients include caffeine. For many, this is a big step, because in addition to the joys of association, eating *prasadam*, singing and dancing (recreational pursuits no doubt), there is renunciation or prohibitions. Srila Prabhupada has taught us that with every positive instruction there must also be a negative order. In the case of formal initiation, the positive forces are the chanting and congregational singing and dancing, the company of exalted souls and the tasting of high-class food or *prasadam*. The negative instructions include the giving up of worldly pleasures.

This austerity becomes easier, when we consult with living gurus. A living guru might be compared to a university diploma as opposed to book learning without the certification of the educational institution. Looked at this way, a living guru is a sort of qualification that one is bona fide – that he or she has passed the test of realization, and that he or she can go forward with the confidence that all endeavors have the blessings and good wishes of other initiated Vaisnava souls.

The living guru can help us to find the truth when apparent contradictory orders are encountered. The guru becomes our beacon and torchlight of transcendental knowledge. A distant or deceased mentor may have cogent written or recorded instructions, but a living personal guide is crucial.

Your friend,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

