



Spiritual Perspectives

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

August 2020

Women and Children First

By Radha Devi Dasi

When it comes to women's rights, ISKCON has an important message for the world and a new forum for delivering that message. In 2016, after applying and going through a rigorous approval process, ISKCON Communications received membership in the UN's Economic and Social Council. This is the highest level a non-governmental organization can reach at the UN.

The Economic and Social Council serves as a primary forum for international discussion of economic and social issues, and formulation of policy recommendations. ISKCON is currently building a team to support its UN participation, headed by ISKCON Communications Director, Anuttama dasa and UN Multi-faith Advisory Council Co-Chair, Gopal Lila dasa. Because the United Nations regularly holds consultations with faith-based organizations on policies it plans to enact, participation at the UN will allow ISKCON representatives to attend UN events and give the Krishna conscious perspective on issues of the day. ISKCON recently added second generation Vaishnavas to its UN team and intends to include gender issues in its work.

When it comes to the role and treatment of women, international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank often focus on "empowering" women by increasing their economic and political participation in society. Countries with conservative views on women's roles often resist these policies. ISKCON's own discussion of women's roles in online forums often pits what is perceived as conservative "oppression" against "rampant feminism."

However, our philosophy and history give us a perspective on women's roles that is more nuanced than the typical liberal versus conservative debate. Srila Prabhupada taught us that there is an eternal equality between all souls. We are all ultimately of the same nature and value as children of God. But there is value in acknowledging important differences in the natures and biology of men and women.

Modern feminism is a reaction to the oppression and abuse that takes place whenever those with material consciousness are given power over others. Advocates for empowering women are motivated by the literal murder and torture of women. However, in advocating for more power, feminists have concentrated on

opening up traditionally male spaces to women. What they have failed to do is to change how societies value traditionally feminine spaces.

Nowhere is this failure more apparent than in the United States. Covid-19 related quarantines have forced millions of employees to work from home. Schools paused their academic year or switched to online learning at the same time. Parents working from home have had the double burden of childcare and home-schooling added to their jobs. Most of those adding these extra responsibilities are women.



<https://bit.ly/38GLZr>

Lebanese workers spray disinfectant in classrooms and halls of a school in the coastal town of Rmeileh in an effort to prevent a novel coronavirus outbreak in the country. AFP via Getty Images

And there is no end in sight. Even as quarantine orders have scaled back, most schools have announced online teaching methods for all or at least part of their teaching when the 2020-2021 academic year begins next month. Millions of American children will be learning from home. Even where schools intend to open in person, parents may fear exposing their children to Covid-19.

Unfortunately, employers' tolerance for child care related interruptions is waning. Last month, a major American university announced that employees will no longer be able to work

Continued on page 2

from home while caring for their children. Other employers are poised to follow suit. Parents who continue to care for their children face an impossible choice between losing an income or taking serious risks with their children's health.

This dilemma underscores how society sees raising children as an annoying intrusion into an employee's productive life. For years, modern economies have encouraged parents to rely on unskilled, low wage workers for child care. Teachers are typically underpaid as well. The fact is, "women's work," including providing care and training for children is seen as less important than traditionally male roles.



Both Bhagavad-gita and basic common sense tell us that good training is essential to a healthy society

Both *Bhagavad-gita* and basic common sense tell us that good training is essential to a healthy society. "Unwanted progeny," or children who are not valued by society and properly raised, become a disturbance in their communities. Instead of rewarding the parents (mostly women) who have had to pivot into full time child care, however, employers are now sending a different message. "You've had time to play with your kids," they seem to be saying. "Now get back to work."

ISKCON needs to remind the world that women's work is real work. Our engagement at the UN gives us the opportunity to explore and help implement policies that support mothers and homemakers. Even in traditional societies, women are often valued for the material wealth they bring to the family. But creating a spiritual home atmosphere and raising healthy children are also valuable contributions.

Internship Program Launched to Help Develop ISKCON at the UN

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 17, 2020

<https://bit.ly/30Uq3yf>

An internship program has been launched to help build a website and carry out important research for the still under-development project "ISKCON at the United Nations." After applying and going through a rigorous approval process, The Office of Communications for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) received ECOSOC status with the UN in 2016, the highest level at which an NGO can be associated with the UN. ECOSOC (The United Nations Economic and Social Council) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, and serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and formulating policy recommendations. Over 1,600 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been granted consultative status to the Council to participate in the



ISKCON UN Interns group photo, Top - Aditi Bhatt, Gopal Lila Das. Center - Keshav Agiwal, Ayushi Gupta. Bottom - Darshina Dhunoo

work of the UN, including, recently, ISKCON Communications.

At present, ISKCON Communications Director Anuttama Das has been formally designated as a representative to the UN, along with UN Multi-faith Advisory Council Co-Chair Gopal Lila Das, who will oversee ISKCON at the UN. According to Gopal Lila, there are three primary reasons for ISKCON to connect with the UN: (1) to have a platform to showcase the society's work (2) to engage with global decision makers on current issues like climate change, food security, poverty reduction and human rights, and (3) to better understand

the latest thinking and best practices on issues of the day, and to take these back to our ISKCON communities.

"For example, in the current context of Covid-19, the World Health Organization (WHO), which is part of the UN system, is coordinating and tracking the development of the

Continued on page 3

pandemic,” Gopal says. “In the future, it would be great to have ISKCON staff in Geneva who are regularly getting the latest information from the WHO and relaying it back to our temples and communities. Then we would also relay ISKCON’s best practices, and the lessons we’re learning from the pandemic, back to the WHO.”

To help build out ISKCON at the UN, Gopal Lila contacted The Sanga Initiative (TSI), an organization that supports and empowers young devotees to become leaders for future generations of ISKCON. With the TSI keen to pilot its own internship program, the two collaborated to bring on interns for ISKCON at the UN. Although the initial aim was to recruit only two, there were so many high caliber applicants that four were chosen. All the new interns are part of the TSI network, have been raised in ISKCON, and hail from North America, where the project is currently focused. Their college majors include international development, international relations, diplomacy, engineering and web development.

The internship program (being conducted virtually) is currently in its sixth week. One of the interns is building a website, un.iskcon.org, which will be ready by the end of the summer, while the remaining three are focusing on research and content creation. These latter have been gathering information about ISKCON’s work in five thematic priority areas – Covid-19; gender; climate change and the environment; youth empowerment; and food, or *prasadam* distribution – by reaching out to the relevant ISKCON projects.

Keshav Agiwal, 18, for example, is currently researching climate and the environment by contacting various ISKCON eco-villages and eco-farms around the world and learning about their different sustainable practices. Keshav, a second-generation devotee from New Jersey who is studying diplomacy and international relations with a minor in communications, says he was attracted to the internship because it was an opportunity not only to help ISKCON, but also to educate himself on what ISKCON could contribute to the global society.

“Given the unsustainable practices that the general population lives by, I think that the research that is being conducted by ISKCON at the UN in climate and environment is extremely important to shedding light on what the community can do to preserve Mother Nature,” he explains.

Meanwhile Darshina Dhunnoo, 21, from Edmonton, Canada, is researching ISKCON’s work in food relief and Covid-19, reaching out to projects like Annamrita in India, Krishna Lunch in Florida, and Food For All in the UK, who all together have served millions of free healthy meals to people in need and frontline workers during the pandemic.

“I was interested in this internship because I’m studying political science, and have always wondered how to pursue the field in a Krishna conscious way,” Darshina says.

The reports compiled by interns like Darshina and Keshav will be available on the ISKCON UN website, and will also be

used to showcase ISKCON’s work in the five priority areas when representatives attend UN events.

While the young interns are working on these projects, they are also attending a Zoom call each week with a different UN representative, ISKCON leader, or other faith leader working with the UN. These talks give them a holistic understanding on what it means to be an ISKCON member engaging with the United Nations, and on ISKCON’s role in the modern world.

UN representatives speaking to the interns include Charles McNeill, head of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative at UN Environment Programme, who has almost three decades of experience working on rainforest protection with the UN; and Bruce Knotts, UN representative for the Unitarian Universalist Association.

ISKCON leaders include Anuttama Das, Director of ISKCON Communications International; and Radha Dasi, ISKCON Vaishnavi Minister. Because the United Nations regularly holds consultations with faith-based organizations on policies it plans to enact, building ISKCON at the UN with this internship will allow ISKCON representatives to attend UN events and give the Krishna conscious perspective on issues of the day.

“That’s part of the work Srila Prabhupada really wanted us to do, which was to be the *brahmanas* – the thinkers of society – and to give advice to the decision makers on the global concerns we’re all facing,” says Gopal Lila.

Of course, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all UN conferences and events are currently taking place virtually online. But when the world situation eventually allows, ISKCON representatives will have the opportunity to attend events in person at the UN headquarters in New York City; at the world’s second-largest UN office in Geneva; in Rome, home of the UN World Food Programme; and in Nairobi, home of the UN Environment Programme.

“I think a new front for ISKCON’s work will need to be how we’re engaging with society at large, and how the values and philosophy that we have can apply to the whole world, not just to ISKCON members,” Gopal Lila says. “There have been other devotees and communities who have engaged with decision makers, or who have spoken at the UN. But this is the first time we’re attempting that on a global level. And I think this will open the eyes of many devotees to the fact that we have a contribution to make beyond the four walls of our temples – that actually, we have a major contribution on how to tackle the challenges of the world.”

In the long-term future, Gopal hopes to continue running the internship program every year, and to secure funding so that – Covid-19 allowing – devotee interns from all over the world can come to spend their summers in New York City, working for ISKCON at the United Nations.

“I feel that for many young devotees, these kinds of opportunities – connecting ISKCON with the broader society – are what they’re really craving,” he says.

Chief Minister of West Bengal Arranged the Smooth Return of Bhakti Charu Swami's *Vapu* to Mayapur

By: Administrator, *Dandavats.com*, July 17, 2020

<https://bit.ly/2P4v6GE>



<https://bit.ly/2P4v6GE>

It was the Ministry of West Bengal led by the Honorable Chief Minister Sushri Mamata Bannerjee who facilitated the final journey of the *vapu* (body) of ISKCON-guru Bhakti Charu Swami, who passed away on July 4th in Florida, back to Mayapur.

The Chief Minister also arranged a pilot car, and all the police stations from the Kolkata airport to Mayapur were alerted before Maharaja's plane landed. When Maharaja's *vapu* was traveling from the airport to Mayapur, a VIP corridor was formed, and the traffic was stopped in stretches, so that Maharaja's *vapu* could reach Mayapur without delay.

She tweeted about the passing of Maharaja on the morning of July 5th, and also sent a condolence letter to the ISKCON Kolkata temple the same day. Again, on July 13th, she had sent a representative all the way from Kolkata to Sridham Mayapur to garland Maharaja upon his arrival in Mayapur. The plane carrying Maharaja's *vapu* was given first priority in landing and transferred on the ground before others.

The Kolkata air traffic control on the day of Maharaja's arrival was in great anxiety because a storm and heavy rain had started in Kolkata from 7:30 p.m. and Maharaja's small plane had decided to fly directly to Kolkata without stopping

at Varanasi. So the plane was very low on fuel and could be in the sky for only one extra hour. The Kolkata Airport controllers (ATC) did not give permission to the other two airplanes to land and asked them to hover in the sky till Maharaja's plane landed. They kept updating the devotees every 5 minutes.

In the evening, devotees present outside the airport started chanting the Narsimha prayers. The ATC had said that the heavy rains would continue until 9 p.m., but suddenly about 8:10 p.m. the rain slowed down and the weather became suitable for the plane to land. Thus Maharaja's plane landed safely at 8:20 p.m.

The General Managers of the Kolkata Airport were all monitoring Maharaja's plane and when the plane landed, some of the senior officials put on their PPE suits and transferred Maharaja's *vapu* to the ambulance, which was already waiting next to the plane. The officials had all the papers ready and by 8:40 p.m. Maharaja's *vapu* was allowed to leave the airport.

The samadhi ceremony the next morning was well planned out, followed all the safety protocols and was performed with deep respect, love and dignity as Maharaja was loved by thousands around the world.

Food For Life Wales Receives Award From UK Prime Minister

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 11, 2020

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

ISKCON Cardiff temple president and Food For Life Wales Director Tarakanatha Das has received a Points of Light award from the UK Prime Minister's office, and has accepted it on behalf of the *prasadam* distribution organization.

The Points of Light award is presented to outstanding volunteers who are making a change in their community. On Friday, July 3rd, Food For Life Wales was recognized for its relief work during the Covid-19 pandemic. So far, the team of Cardiff devotees, along with 200 volunteers of other faiths and professions, have distributed over 40,000 *prasadam* meals during the crisis.

The award came with a personal letter from UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who said: "I wanted to write personally to thank you for your extraordinary efforts at 'Food For Life Wales' feeding tens of thousands of vulnerable people and our wonderful NHS workers.

"Your uplifting mission has brought nourishment and care to so many people and I am lost in admiration for the dedication of your army of volunteers who work tirelessly in the service of others."

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart also sent a personal letter, writing, "Tarakanatha and his team of volunteers have provided an inspiring service to ensure thousands of people across south Wales receive the meals they need during this crisis.

"I am humbled by Tarakanatha's story and the volunteers' achievements, and am extremely grateful for the hours of service they have contributed to benefit communities ranging from Barry to Pontypridd and Swansea."

Commenting on the award, Tarakanatha Das said, "I am very pleased, humbled and honored to receive this Points of Light award. I accept this on behalf of our dedicated team of volunteers, that includes the cooks, veg choppers, delivery drivers, route organizers, packing team and all of those who helped organize this fantastic effort. This just goes to show what we can achieve when we all pull together, together we are stronger. As the old adage says "the more you give, the more you grow."

Food For Life Wales originally started in the mid 1990s, running alongside restaurants like Govinda's café in Swansea.



Devotees cooking and packaging prasadam for delivery

More recently, it has been based at ISKCON Wales' headquarters in the capital city of Cardiff, alongside the Atma café, with devotees distributing three to four hundred plates of *prasadam* a week to refugees and homeless people.

After March 23rd, when the UK went into a strict lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the resident devotees of ISKCON Cardiff found their main sources of income and service – book distribution and the Atma café – put to a complete stop.

Looking for a way to continue connecting with people, they decided that *prasadam* was the answer. With full Covid-19 precautionary apparel and social distancing, they went door to door, dropping flyers through letterboxes of people's homes in the immediate vicinity of the temple. Straight away, they began to receive phone calls from isolated people.

"We started with thirty to fifty meals a day," says Tarakanatha. "We were reaching some people, especially the elderly, who practically hadn't eaten for two to three days! They were really appreciating that we had found them."

Inspired by the response, the Food For Life team reached out to the National Health Service (NHS) and began providing meals for frontline workers. Soon, the small group of about twenty devotees were distributing four to five hundred meals a day – at least as much as what they had previously been taking a whole week to do.

"The operation was growing at a rapid rate, and we had no income coming in, and not enough volunteers," Tarakanatha

Continued on page 6



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

Bhakta Ben delivers meals to a GP surgery in Cardiff

says. “We put out a call for volunteers on social media, and applied for funding with government agencies.”

Food For Life was approved, receiving six months’ funding from the Welsh government. Meanwhile, local people showed up to volunteer in droves.

“They came from all walks of life,” Tarakanatha says. “We’ve had priests of all faiths, magistrates, PCSOs from the police station, even rugby players. Wales is famous for its rugby, it’s like a religion here – so when these big strong rugby players came to help distribute *prasadam*, it really inspired others to do so too.”

He adds: “Everyone was feeling useless in lockdown; they wanted to do something. So we were channeling their energy and connecting them to service. Many volunteers told us that they were in dark days, and didn’t know what to do, but the devotees and their association were therapeutic. They were really appreciating devotees and *prasadam*.”

Food For Life volunteers were, and still are, distributing *prasadam* six days a week during the pandemic, working twelve-hour shifts from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and at one point delivering up to one thousand meals a day. Because the ISKCON temple kitchen is too small, head cook Prajanya-gopa Das and his helpers work from a large kitchen kindly provided by the local Swami Narayan temple.

Volunteers are meticulously organized by Gopi Gita Dasi and Bhaktin Kim. To protect against Coronavirus, social distancing is employed, with tables set two meters apart. Hand sanitizer is used, and gloves, masks and aprons are worn. Vegetable choppers and *prasadam* packers are assigned their jobs, and delivery drivers are sent out on pre-mapped routes.

Prasadam meals of rice, subji, a savory such as pakora or samosa, and cake have been delivered to police stations, prisons, over twenty hospitals, thirty doctor’s surgeries, and over thirty

care homes across South Wales – including Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and the surrounding valleys. Volunteers have also fed many cancer patients, who were just home from chemotherapy and were too weak to cook for themselves.

As well as the *prasadam*, devotees have been delivering “Meditation Care Packages.”

“The idea came about just after the lockdown began, and people were completely uncertain about the future, with so much fear and anxiety,” says Tarakanatha. “With all the pressure the frontline workers were under, we decided to reach out to them first. The Meditation Care Packages consist of a set of *japa* beads, one of Srila Prabhupada’s books, a *maha-mantra* card, and a link to a video clip of a devotee explaining how to chant. The idea was to give them a spiritual perspective of what was going on, as everyone was completely bewildered.”

Early on, over 300 frontline workers – such as radiologists, doctors, nurses, care home assistants, and mental health professionals -- along with some cancer patients, all registered online for the free care package.

Devotees are now following up with these recipients with various specifically designed introductory aftercare programs. Among them is The Spiritual Fitness Program, a 21-day challenge to measure recipients’ progress with chanting, which also covers their physical and mental care.

Food For Life volunteers also follow up with everyone who receives *prasadam* from them, to check on their well-being.

“We really want to make sure that we are giving a proper service,” Tarakanatha says. “As they say, love is in the details. It’s not just a free food thing – this is our service to Krishna. So we really make that extra effort.”

This effort has been widely appreciated, with grateful testimonials pouring in from all corners. One woman, Nikki-lee, wrote to thank devotees for helping her father who had just come out of chemotherapy.

“On behalf of my Dad I would like to say a huge thank you for your kindness and food over these past few months,” she said. “The food and little interactions he had with your volunteers really helped him during these difficult times. I’m in Senghenydd and he is in Cardiff so it has been difficult to ensure he gets what he needs. But you guys have been amazing in ensuring he had a nutritional meal every day. Thank you all for your kindness and generosity . . . Great Friendly service that restores my faith in humanity.”

Other grateful people wrote, “You guys are REAL heroes in these times,” and “Where would we be without people/ organisations like yourselves, angels!” and “Thank you for the meals . . . They have been more of a lifesaver than you’ll know.”

Meanwhile Pontypridd MP Alex Davies-Jones tweeted, “It’s been so great to see our #communities coming together to support those who need help the most. Food For Life Wales is just one of the fantastic groups that is operating at the moment. They have been delivering free #plantbased meals to homes across #Pontypridd every Monday and Thursday.”

Continued on page 7

With restrictions now gradually easing in the UK, and volunteers set to start returning to work, Tarakanatha says Food For Life will have to start cutting back somewhat. But he's also certain that the new contacts, new opportunities, and vast goodwill incurred during the crisis so far will enable the food relief organization to continue at a higher level than before.

"When we eventually get back to whatever the new norm is, Food For Life will have increased its stature a lot," he says.

<https://bit.ly/2B4WYbU>



A devotee delivers "Meditation Care Packages"

ISKCON News Design Contest

By:ISKCON News Staff, *ISKCON News*, July 17, 2020

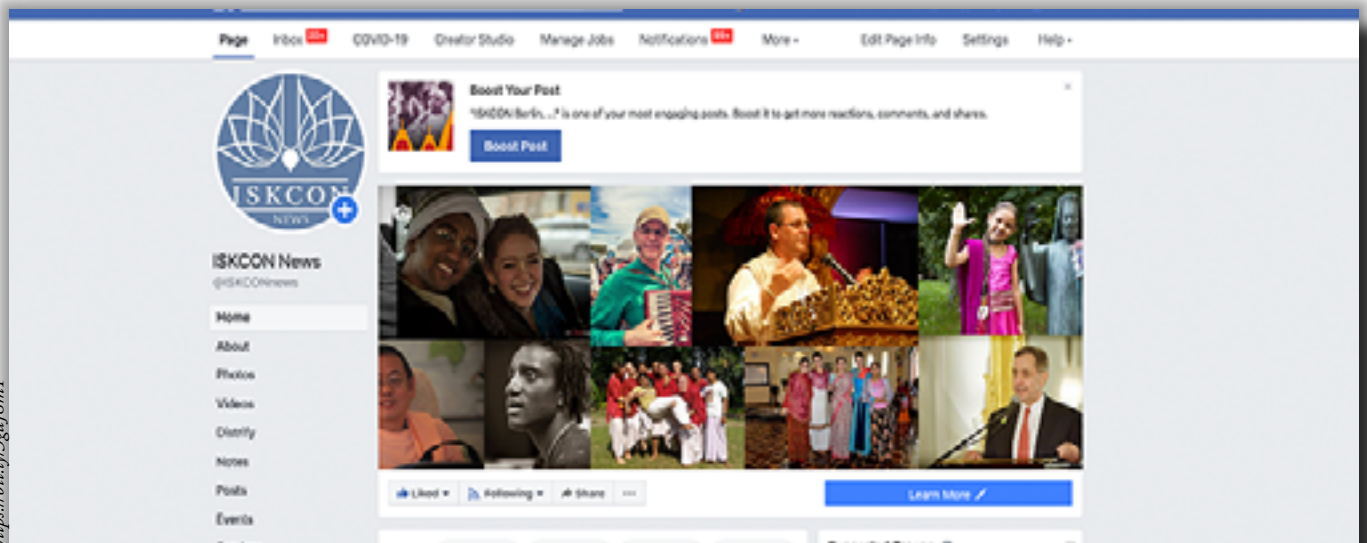
<https://bit.ly/3gaJ8m1>

ISKCON News is inviting talented designers from around the world to help redesign ISKCONNews.org and the site's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ISKCONNews/>.

Please send us a mock-up of a homepage and Facebook designs for ISKCONNews in png or jpeg format by August 15th. The top 3 designs and designers get featured on our page and the winner will get a cash prize along with the opportunity to work with the core ISKCONNews team.

Please tag your designer friends to spread the word.

<https://bit.ly/3gaJ8m1>



<https://bit.ly/3gaJ8m1>

Why do we write, print and distribute books? (video)

By: Administrator, www.dandavats.com, July 15, 2020
<https://bit.ly/2X59qi8>

Let us hear from HG Vaisesika Das as he reaffirms Purpose #7 of ISKCON (With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.)

About Vaisesika Das

Vaisesika Das was born in 1956. As a teen, he was an avid spiritual seeker. Soon after receiving a "Back to Godhead" magazine from a friend in the spring of 1973, he moved into the ISKCON temple in San Francisco at the age of sixteen and, with the blessings of his parents, became a disciple of Srila Prabhupada and a

full-time monk dedicated to the practice of Krishna *bhakti*.

Today he lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, Nirakula Devi Dasi, also a disciple of Srila Prabhupada. Together they have developed an ISKCON community of three hundred families in Silicon Valley, which is based on the study and distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books.

He is an initiating guru in ISKCON. He travels widely to teach the tenets of devotional service and the great art of distributing Srila Prabhupada's books.

[Click here to watch the video!](https://bit.ly/2X59qi8)

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Mukunda Goswami

PRODUCTION
MANAGER
Hari-kirtan das

EDITORS
Mukunda Goswami
Radha devi dasi

PROOFREADING & EDITING
Haridasa das
Padma malini devi dasi

GENERAL CONSULTANT
Devaprastha das

DESIGN AND LAYOUT
Raj Dutia

Articles published in this newsletter are not necessarily the opinion of *Spiritual Perspectives* or ISKCON.



Personal Message



Dear Friends,

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

Sometimes we have to “think on our feet.”

In late 1977, a short time before Srila Prabhupada’s departure from this world, Giriraja Swami asked Srila Prabhupada if the devotees followed their vows rigorously and attended the whole morning program would ISKCON continue. Srila Prabhupada said “yes.” However, as Giriraja Swami headed out of the room, he heard Srila Prabhupada say, almost as an afterthought, “and use your intelligence and organization.”

At the University of Osztryk in Poland in 1999, a devotee member of the Bhaktivedanta Institute spoke before a large audience. During the question and answer period, a man stood and challenged the concept mentioned by the devotee preacher that we are living in a heliocentric (sun-centered) universe. “Why should we believe everything that you say?” said the man in a critical voice. The ISKCON speaker then said he was surprised that in the homeland of the great astronomer, Copernicus, who advocated a paradigm shift from a geocentric (earth-centered) model of the universe to the sun-centered system, someone would take issue with the concept of a sun-centered universe. The man then sat down defeated and silent. The audience burst into applause.

On March 24, 1977 Srila Prabhupada gave a lecture in the Mumbai temple on the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Canto 2, Chapter 3, Verse 20. At the end of his talk, a man walked up to a microphone placed before the *vyasasana*, and asked in a challenging tone, “When chanting, you chant the name of Rama as well as Krishna. I do not see any photograph of Rama here. What is the thinking?” Srila Prabhupada then answered with this question:

“You do not see, but can you hear?” The challenger replied, “I do not see!” to which Srila Prabhupada rejoined, “But you do not hear!” The ensuing answers developed into a shout, and when finally checkmated by the unexpected intellectually penetrating outburst from the *sadhu* on the *vyasasana*, the soundly defeated challenger returned quietly to his sitting place. The audience erupted into applause. Giriraja then asked others to come forward with questions, but all were still.

These incidents illustrate that relying on scriptural evidence and strictly following spiritual rules can have limits. Sometimes we have to temporarily abandon Vedic knowledge and use our God-given intelligence to gain victory over opposing elements. The *sastras* do have all the answers, but mature preachers know how to think on their feet.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

