



Spiritual Perspectives

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

March 2021

The Loneliness Pandemic

By Radha devi dasi

Loneliness has been a growing problem in modern life for some time. Modern technologies allow us to accomplish things alone that would have required teamwork in the past. In addition, new social rules stemming from the current pandemic have exacerbated loneliness and led to new thinking about its causes. Psychologists have long known that isolation is not the same as loneliness. Loneliness is a subjective experience that can occur even in the midst of a crowd. We understand that loneliness rests more on how we feel connected than mere physical proximity. But COVID-19 has pushed loneliness further into the public conversation as terms like “social distancing” and “self-isolation” become part of our lexicon.

Doctors and policy makers are concerned because loneliness leads to poor mental and physical health. Loneliness has been linked to anxiety and depression as well as higher levels of stress hormones, insomnia, and dementia. The heightened risk of death from loneliness equals that of smoking 15 or more cigarettes per day or being an alcoholic. Loneliness has worse effects on longevity than obesity. Losing connections with others is literally life-threatening.

The material mindset is often impersonal, making it hard to form real bonds. We are outcome focused, interested in tangible results and measure our worth by our material wealth. This world view exacerbates loneliness as we substitute frantic activity for real connection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted another aspect of loneliness, and that is “existential loneliness.” Jeremy Nobel, of Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public health, notes that people need to feel connected on a scale beyond personal relationships. We ask ourselves, he says, “Do I fit into the universe? Does my life have any meaning, purpose, or mission?” The current pandemic has not only isolated us from others, but has also significantly disrupted our daily activities and routines. The result is that we have time to think about the meaning of life and our place in it.



For those with a material mindset the answers to these questions can be bleak. Most of us choose careers and life partners without giving the meaning of life much thought. If we have not consciously considered existential questions, we have built ourselves a life without purpose. By disrupting normal life, the pandemic has highlighted this lack for many people. Combined with increasing social loneliness, this experience can have devastating effects on mental health.

At its root, however, existential loneliness is the hunger of the soul for connection with the Supreme. We long for something bigger than ourselves because we are made to serve that Supreme Person. This world is designed to force us to grapple with the existential questions so that we are motivated to turn from the material to the spiritual. The COVID-19 pandemic is, in some sense, a blessing in disguise. As we recognize our longing for meaning and connection, we have the chance to find that meaning and connection. Ultimately, the cure for every problem is the same. We have to learn to look to the Supreme for our support and satisfaction. The current pandemic makes that need glaringly obvious.

Hare Krishna Festivals Podcast to Virtually “Tour” the UK

By: Madhava Smullen, ISKCON NEWS, February 11, 2021

<https://bit.ly/2Oi0Uuq>

The Hare Krishna Festivals program, started by the late Tribhuvanatha Dasa on the instruction of his guru Srila Prabhupada, has organized festivals in halls all over the UK to share Krishna consciousness, attracting many to spiritual life.

Continued by Giridhari Das after Tribhuvanatha's passing in 2001, the program has put on festivals for 34 consecutive years starting in 1986. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, 2020 was the program's first year without festivals.

The Hare Krishna Festivals team has been doing what they can to continue their mission in creative ways. They've showed videos of past years' festivals on their Facebook page, published a book of Tribhuvanatha's introductory talks on Krishna consciousness, chanted live online for Glastonbury music festival's virtual edition GlastHomeBury, and had a socially-distanced, masked kirtan on a boat down the Paddington Basin through Wembley.

With 2021 unfortunately again looking unlikely to allow festivals in the old model, the team has now decided to start a weekly video podcast, “Hare Krishna Festivals UK Tour,” which will “travel” virtually around the UK. Host Narada Das aims to chat with unsung heroes and highlight smaller, lesser-known Hare Krishna communities and projects beyond London. The Festival team will also launch a support program for (now virtual) Namahatta groups and *sangas* around the UK, offering them resources like online kirtans and talks.

Like the Hare Krishna Festival program, the podcast will be designed to reach not only ISKCON devotees but also the general public, using an accessible approach and language. It will be pre-recorded and available to watch on Fridays from 7pm GMT on the Hare Krishna Festivals UK Facebook and Youtube pages. Episodes will run from 30 minutes to an hour.

“We have 20,000 followers on Facebook, and 8,000 subscribers on our Youtube channel,” Narada says. “So if at least 500 watch the podcast every week, that's equivalent to a big festival.”

The first episode, which will be posted on Friday, February 12th, features James, a newcomer to the Hare Krishna Movement from Warrington, a town located between Liverpool and Manchester. James, 28, will talk about what attracted him to Krishna consciousness, and what it's like developing one's spiritual life in the midst of a pandemic, when in-person association isn't possible.

Other future podcasts will virtually “visit” devotees such as Namahatta or *sanga* leaders in Canterbury, Brighton, Reading, Preston, the Cotswolds, and Loughborough near Leicester.

The podcast will also showcase their efforts during the pandemic such as online kirtans and food relief.



The “Hare Krishna Festivals UK Tour” podcast will be available on Fridays from 7pm GMT on the Hare Krishna Festivals UK Facebook page

“For instance Hare Krishna Canterbury has been doing a lot of *prasadam* distribution, and ISKCON Reading has been distributing mantra meditation packs free of charge,” Narada says. “The devotees in Cardiff have teamed up with the local Swami Narayan temple and are distributing about 1,000 meals every week to people. And ISKCON Birmingham is doing a two-hour online family *sanga* every Sunday with something for children and adults.”

Narada will also be speaking to devotees such as Srila Prabhupada disciple Srikama Dasi, a member of the Hare Krishna Festival team, and Padmalochana Das, an immunologist, about being part of the Hare Krishna Movement for many years.

Conversations will be down-to-earth and relatable – James, for instance, chats about how he suffered from depression, and how chanting helps him.

“I hope the podcast will show the public that these Hare Krishna people are normal people,” Narada says. “I also hope it will bring to devotees a sense of awareness of what's happening around the UK – that the UK yatra is big, diverse, and active.”

With October 2021 set to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Tribhuvanatha Dasa's passing, Narada sees the podcast as a way to help keep the Hare Krishna Festival brand he started alive.

“It's a great opportunity to serve Srila Prabhupada,” he says.

Watch the Hare Krishna Festivals UK Tour podcast on Fridays on Facebook:

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

Or on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/HareKrsnaFestivalsUK>

Unsung Heroes: Jagadisananda Das Serves Prabhupada's Books for 45 Years

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON NEWS*, February 5, 2021
<https://bit.ly/2PvSssj>

What has kept the International Society for Krishna consciousness going for 54 years now, “systematically propagating spiritual knowledge to society at large” as Srila Prabhupada wrote when incorporating the movement in 1966?

Much has been due to the steady efforts of quietly dedicated devotees, doing their services day in and day out for decades – the *pujaris*, the teachers, the mothers, the cooks, the cleaners, the maintenance workers, the accountants, the book editors, the congregational preachers. It's important to celebrate and appreciate these devotees who have given so much of their lives to Srila Prabhupada's mission.

One of these dedicated soldiers of Prabhupada's is Jagadisananda Das, who has facilitated the service of book distributors and worked in the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust's (BBT) mail order department at ISKCON Los Angeles for an incredible forty-five years now.

Born in 1952 and growing up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Jagadisananda lost his father, a World War II veteran, to cancer at two years old. With his mother suffering from mental illness and alcoholism, he was brought up by his grandparents.

“They were both born around the turn of the 20th century,” he recalls. “So it was like I wasn't really growing up in the '60s – I didn't take part in any of the counterculture stuff that was going on. I was a conservative and studious kind of person; I played in the band and did really well in school.”

Although he had high grades and was accepted into the University of Minnesota engineering school, the transition from a small school in the suburbs to one with 40,000 students proved too much for Jagadisananda, and he dropped out after a year.

Soon after, in December 1972, at the age of twenty, he found himself drafted into the US Army. One of the last draftees of the Vietnam War era, he missed the war by a hair. Still, the experience – he served as an MP, guarding the stockade – wasn't easy for the sensitive young man.

“It was bad enough having those drill sergeants cursing you day in and day out,” he says. “I thought I was in hell.”



Jagadisananda and his wife Karuna Dharini Dasi distribute books at the Los Angeles Rathayatra in 2016

But a ray of light appeared when a friend in the army who was part of the counterculture movement told him about the *Bhagavad-gita*. “I'm reading this far out book,” he said. “You gotta check it out!”

It was the beginning of his journey. While visiting home during breaks in his term of military service, Jagadisananda met ISKCON devotees at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport (Which Srila Prabhupada once said should be renamed O'Hare Krishna airport) and received several *Back to Godhead* magazines.

At first he simply left the BTGs on his bookshelf without reading them. But even that, he is convinced, had an effect.

“I'm proof positive that if you get Prabhupada's books and just keep them on your shelf – you don't toss them – then you gradually become pious, so you can understand what Prabhupada is saying,” he explains.

A few months after leaving the army, Jagadisananda picked up an issue of *Back to Godhead* and began reading. As soon as he did, things began to happen fast. He found the early purple abridged edition of Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* in his local library, began corresponding with Swarup Das in the BBT mail order department in Los Angeles, read the entire *Kṛṣṇa* book, and started cooking vegetarian meals and chanting.

Jagadisananda didn't consider himself a religious person, but was attracted to Prabhupada's presentation of Krishna consciousness as a science. “I thought religion was just some social club, and I wasn't interested,” he says. “But Prabhupada gave us

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the essence of *Dharma* – that the inseparable quality of a living entity is to serve – and a framework in which to do that.”

About six weeks after starting to read about Krishna consciousness, Jagadisananda got into his car one night without telling anyone, and drove across the country to Los Angeles to join the ISKCON temple on Watsika Avenue.

Arriving right in the middle of the 1975 Christmas book distribution marathon, being placed in the ashram and waking up at 3:30 in the morning was an intense experience for Jagadisananda.

“I was like, ‘Wait a minute, I thought I just got out of the army!’” he laughs.

Initiated by Srila Prabhupada in 1976, Jagadisananda didn’t find it in his nature to do street book distribution. “I’m an analyst and mathematician,” he says, joking, “I don’t want to be at the forefront of anything.” But from the very beginning, he felt comfortable supporting and facilitating the service, explaining, “If I wasn’t in the middle of book distribution, I wouldn’t feel right.”

For nearly twenty years after joining ISKCON, Jagadisananda was “the *sankirtana* servant” at the Los Angeles temple. He learned how to fix cars and maintained the book distributors’ vehicles. He worked in the book room, ordered books from the BBT, and loaded the *sankirtana* devotees’ cars with books. He also organized a team who kept books stocked in the lockers one could rent at the airport terminals, so that they were ready for the book distributors when they went out every morning.

On the day in 1977 when it was announced that Srila Prabhupada had left this world and the devotees were plunged into grief, it was in the book room that Jagadisananda found solace.

“I felt the most connection with Prabhupada being with his books,” he says.

Jagadisananda even married a book distributor, Karuna Dharini Dasi, whom he met in 1985, and who is now a regular contributor to *Back to Godhead* magazine. The couple have one daughter, Gaura Sundari. Jagadisananda continues to be impressed by his wife’s ability to distribute books on the street.

“I find it terrifying to go out and meet people, whereas she’s completely in her element. Sometimes I go with her, and I’m just like, ‘Oh my God, who is this person?’” he chuckles, agreeing that opposites attract and complement each other.

Jagadisananda sees maintaining a good, lasting marriage as one of his services to Prabhupada. From 1994 to this day, for the past twenty-six years, he has also managed the LA BBT mail order department. That has included processing both whole-

sale and small orders of Srila Prabhupada’s books, arranging for shipping, and organizing the devotees doing the warehouse work and answering phones.

In the early days of his BBT service in the mid 1990s, Jagadisananda also used his computer savvy to install a network in the BBT offices and get everything computerized and every-one online. He played a major role in establishing the first ISKCON page on the Internet, harekrishna.com, in 1995, at a time when he says people would respond to talk of the World Wide Web with “the worldwide what?” He also helped establish the LA temple audio broadcast in 2002.

Today, Jagadisananda continues to be part of the backbone of the Los Angeles Bhaktivedanta Book Trust branch along with trustee Svavasa Das, accountant Sura Das and production manager Arcita Das.

Despite the pandemic, he still feels very enlivened in his service and explains that book distribution has only increased.

“There’s a lot happening here,” he says. “You would think that with Covid things would have slowed down, but the past year was 12 per cent bigger than the year prior. The *sankirtana* devotees are so incredible how they can adjust to any situation. And what they’ve done in 2020 is nothing short of amazing.”

For his part, Jagadisananda says he simply tries to be a servant and facilitator of the devotees. He overcomes challenges in his service by “trying to be expert at what I’m doing” and using “intelligence and organization,” as Srila Prabhupada advised Giriraja Swami when asked how the movement would continue after he had gone.

He stays inspired by listening to Srila Prabhupada’s classes and reading his books, chanting the *Sri Narasimha Pranama Mantra* every night before going to sleep, and associating with devotees. He also tries to stay in the present moment, and not be depressed about the past or worried about the future.

“If you can do that, and add the Hare Krishna mantra, you can actually be relatively peaceful, even in the midst of the big chaos that we’re in right now,” he says. “It’s an art.”

Feeling extremely fortunate to be doing the service he’s doing, Jagadisananda says it’s a miracle he’s still here after forty-four years.

Despite his fascinating life and considerable contributions and achievements, he’s humbly self-deprecating.

“I’m not a very interesting person,” he says. “My life is pretty mundane. I like it though. I like being part of Srila Prabhupada’s *sankirtana* army. I don’t care that I’m just a cog. A cog is good.”

Please Send Your Feedback To:
feedback@mukundagoswami.org

ISKCON receives the 7th IGBC Green Champion Award

By: Administrator, www.dandavats.com, February 19, 2021
<https://bit.ly/30asM6o>

By Gauranga Das

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) stands appraised and recognized with one of the highest honors nationally — “IGBC Green Champion Award 2020” during the 18th edition of ‘Green Building Congress’ organized from 29th–31st October 2020. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), was unanimously chosen as a winner of the 7th IGBC Green Champion Awards under the category of ‘Pioneering Institution in sensitizing the masses by going green’.

The award was granted in the presence of Mr. V. Suresh, Chairman Indian Green Building Council; Mr. Jamshyd N Godrej, Chairman CII Godrej GBC; Mr. Gurmit Singh Arora, Vice Chairman, IGBC; Mr. Syed Mohamed Beary, Chairman, IGBC Bangalore Chapter; and Mr. Shrikant Bapat, Country General Manager and Managing Director, Johnson Controls (I) Pvt. Ltd.



Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) is India's premier institution accrediting green buildings and offering specialized services like Green building auditor training programs. There are 26 chapters of the organization operating nationally. During IGBC's annual flagship event called Green Building Congress, the IGBC Green Champions Award are recognized for major

achievements towards green practices. The Green Champions are recognized for their valuable contribution towards inspiring millions of people with their environmental advocacy. Because of IGBC, India stands among one of the top 5 countries in the world with a green footprint of 7.61 billion square feet.

ISKCON's 2 projects namely ISKCON's Govardhan Eco-village and ISKCON Chowpatty Mandir in Mumbai have achieved the Platinum level IGBC green certification. ISKCON also plans to design, construct, operate and certify their upcoming University of Bhaktivedanta Research Centre as a green campus. The international green committee of ISKCON is closely working with IGBC to develop a framework for ISKCON temples across the world to be developed as Green Places of Worship. On behalf of ISKCON, Gauranga Das, Director – ISKCON Govardhan Ecovillage and Global Duty Officer of ISKCON received the award.

ISKCON leaders and well-wishers from across the world expressed their gratitude during the event. His Holiness Gopal Krishna Goswami, ISKCON Governing Body Commission Member, mentioned, “I would like to thank IGBC for promoting the urgent need for having a green building project. The Vedic message for having a peaceful, stress-free life is to keep God in the center and practice simple living and high thinking. ISKCON's Founder-Acharya Srila Prabhupada took this ancient message around the globe. We are grateful that the IGBC has recognized ISKCON for promoting this message.”

His Holiness Jayapataka Swami, ISKCON Governing Body Commission Member expressed, “Thank you for the Green Champion Award on behalf of Śrī Māyāpur Candrodāya Mandir, our world spiritual headquarters. We are committed to

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preserving the planet through our various green initiatives, such as our Zero Waste, recycling project and others.”

His Holiness Radhanath Swami, Founder Govardhan Ecovillage expressed, “The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that yoga is the art of living in harmony with the body, the mind, the soul, all living beings, God and nature. All of nature is God’s gift and to see the presence of God’s grace in nature is an inherent teaching of *Bhagavad-gita* and it is very much foundational to the principles of ISKCON. We are hoping and praying that more and more of the world will understand the need for this truth to be practiced.”

Mr. Alfred Ford, Trustee Ford Motors and Chairman, Temple of the Vedic Planetarium shared, “We are very much in sync with the green agenda and we hope that there will be more success along this line. We are coming up with the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium (TOVP). The temple is larger than the Tajmahal, it’s going to have one of the largest domes in Asia, it’s 350 feet high. The kirtan hall will hold 10,000 devotees at a time all chanting.”

Anuttama Prabhu, Global Communications Director for ISKCON, mentioned, “Our Founder-Acharya Srila Prabhupada instructed us that we should follow the principles of ‘Simple Living and High Thinking’ included within that is care for the environment. In all of our 700 temples around the world, we are trying to promote this principle of sustainability and learning how to protect the Earth. This award honoring us for those efforts is really appreciated.”

Gauranga Das shared, “Ancient Indian tradition and culture has always emphasized the importance of balance with nature along with sustainability. Spiritual wellness along with the health and well-being of all the devotees and our staff are of supreme importance to us. Especially in light of the current scenario, places of congregation like temples need to further enhance their green quotient. With help of IGBC we wish to enhance the overall well-being of lakhs of devotees and temple authorities.”

New Book Recounts History of Building Srila Prabhupada’s *Samadhi*

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON NEWS*, February 19, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3073NRE>



The interior of Srila Prabhupada's samadhi in Vrindaban

“The Rising Sun: Vrindaban Samadhi Diary” by Alfred Valerio (Bhaktisiddhanta Das), now available on Amazon Kindle, recounts the story of how the Vrindaban *Samadhi*, or mausoleum, for ISKCON’s Founder-Acharya Srila Prabhupada was built.

Author Bhaktisiddhanta Das, a seasoned professional in bronze casting, fiber-glass and mixed media sculpture, assisted in the design and construction of both the Vrindaban *Samadhi* and Mayapur *Pushpa Samadhi* of Srila Prabhupada. He also cre-

ated sculptural panels and oil murals for the ISKCON Delhi Glory of India Museum, and has been assisting in the design of the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium in Mayapur.

His book covers Srila Prabhupada’s final moments, and tells the history of his Vrindaban *Samadhi*, starting with the beginning of construction in 1978 and ending with the recent installation of new bronze panels in 2016, including all the setbacks, difficulties and successes. Along the way, paintings show each stage of construction.

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The book describes how the late Surabhir Abhipalayantam Das, who was tasked with constructing both Srila Prabhupada's Vrindaban and Mayapur *samadhis*, conceived the design.

"The original design was his creation," Bhaktisiddhanta says. "In the very beginning he gave me some rough ideas and I put it all together in a finished drawing of the front view as it looks today."

Meanwhile Murti Das was responsible for most of the working drawings, while Mayesvara Das refined the accounting system and worked out the practical applications of the construction.

More recently, Bhaktisiddhanta created two new bronze panels for the *Samadhi*, depicting Srila Prabhupada bringing the spiritual world down to the Earth planet, and Prabhupada at the New York City Ratha-yatra.

"Right from the beginning, following the departure of Srila Prabhupada, I felt that this *samadhi* construction was the most important project on earth so it had to be documented, and I promised Surabhir that I would do this book as he was the man behind the whole idea," Bhaktisiddhanta says.

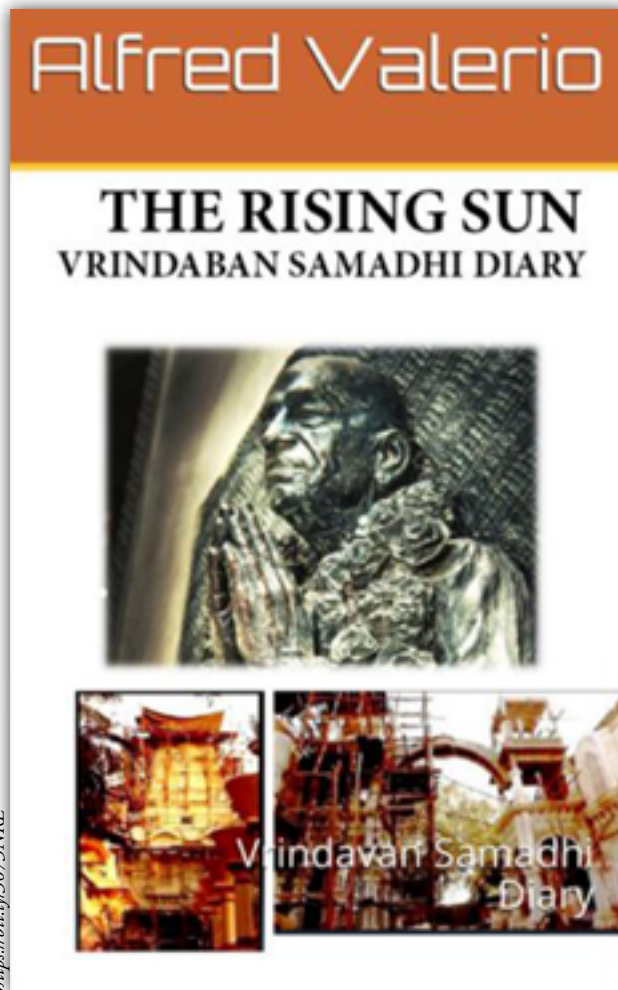
He feels that the Vrindaban *Samadhi* will stand for many years to come "as a shining tribute to our eternal spiritual master and also to the many devotees who gave a helping hand in the construction."

"My hope is that this book will kindle more interest in learning about Srila Prabhupada," he concludes.

Find the book here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Rising-Sun-Vrindavan-Samadhi-Diary-ebook/dp/B08TTTPRFK>

<https://bit.ly/3073NRE>



The Rising Sun: Vrindavan Samadhi Diary front cover

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The exterior of Srila Prabhupada's samadhi

Personal Message



Dear Friends,

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

Srila Prabhupada has often talked about liberation. The word “liberation” is a bit curious as it stems from liberty or freedom. The French people have a saying (it’s their national motto) “Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite” which translates as freedom, equality, and brotherhood. When I was about 16 we had to read a book in school titled “Democracy in America” by Alexis de Tocqueville. The French have always been rebellious and they tended to identify with violence not unlike the people of the USA. As with the Revolutionary War, the right to bear arms became a key principle for Americans. The founder of the Mormon religion, Joseph Smith, was murdered with a rifle in 1844 in public near Chicago, because he was different.

The government of France donated the Statue of Liberty to the government of the United States. The statue today stands iconically in the New York Harbor. It is 150 feet high and weighs approximately 400 tons. It is made of copper and is a replica of the Roman goddess Liberte. Because of its copper content, it’s covered with a green patina. Srila Prabhupada often called the governmental form of democracy “demon-crazy.” Nonetheless he appreciated it, because in the USA he started ISKCON. On the other hand, he often vilified Marxist Communism because of its patently atheistic nature. In the USA, there were many facilities not available in his home country. Therefore he took advantage of these facilities, especially in the realm of book production.

In the recent insurrection that took place in Washington, DC, some in the protesting mobs had firearms. This demonstrated that Americans, like their French brothers and sisters, have a rebellious streak in them. The French nation is famous for its many revolutions.

It is interesting to note that over 70% of the people of the USA do not believe that people should have the right to bear firearms. However, the gun lobby in that country’s law-making region is so powerful, that they have made it dangerously easy to possess firearms.

One could say that Srila Prabhupada took gold from a filthy place by starting the Hare Krishna movement in the United States. That nation has been blessed with affluence, power, religiousness (of a kind) and open-mindedness. In a sense, it became the launching pad for a movement that has revolutionized the way the world’s thoughtful people think about the true nature of God.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

