



SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

AN ISKCON COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATION
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

Varnasrama and Violence

By Radha devi dasi



The recent upsurge in domestic violence in India has the potential to undermine attempts to re-institute *varnasrama* dharma. Srila Prabhupada requested his followers to develop communities based on “simple living and high thinking.” He envisioned spiritual enclaves where traditional agrarian life replaced material desires with spiritual values. Traditional Indian village life has many of the characteristics of the ideal simple life that Srila Prabhupada described. Drawing from Indian rural traditions, ISKCON has various farm communities that promote cow protection and eschew heavily industrialized, artificial lifestyles.

While these rural lifestyles can exemplify a positive alternative to heavily materialistic urban life, one flaw has the potential to limit the extent to which spiritualists and people in general will be willing to accept such a model. That flaw lies in rising reports of violence against women in the Indian communities we hold up as examples. The number of reported cases of domestic violence in India rose 134% in the ten years between 2003 and 2013. Some commentators have attributed this to the increasing westernization of Indian culture. Experts in the field agree, however, that the increase is due to better reporting and record-keeping. In other words, India’s rising rate of domestic violence reflects a problem that has existed for some time. The BBC news service recently called this issue “India’s failing.”

Although violence against women is an international problem, the correlation between traditional gender roles and domestic violence, honor killings, and rape used as a tool of control or weapon of war is compelling. Where women lack power or access to justice, they become vulnerable to abuse. Where traditional cultures accept this abuse as part of the norm that women deserve, the abuse can escalate to horrific proportions.

It is tempting to ignore this phenomenon as a secular problem outside the scope of our influence. However, it is difficult to accept that a return to a traditional “Vedic” agrarian lifestyle is desirable when that return appears to come hand in hand with forced child marriages, dowry deaths and other tragedies. There is no reason why a more traditional lifestyle has to be associated with increasing violence against women. But according to the evidence, that link is strong.



Traditionalists may reject the western model of increased public participation for women as being in conflict with the *varnasrama* dharma that Srila Prabhupada desired. However, that argument misses an important point. The western model of expanded roles and opportunities for women also provides women with more resources in the face of family violence. Over the last forty years, the U.S. and other countries have made tangible progress in addressing issues related to protecting women from violence. If we want to urge a return to cultural values rooted in India’s past, we must show that we are aware of the potential pitfalls of that model and have plans for dealing with them. Otherwise, even those sympathetic to our message may find it difficult to accept.



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16 Million People in the US are Now Vegan or Vegetarian!

By Heather McClees, *TRFW News*, October 9, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1A37F5c>



Vegan patties with potatoes and salad

In 2009, a tiny one percent of the US population reported eating vegetarian or vegan. Now, 5% of the United States population is vegetarian and half of those people are vegan. The rates have skyrocketed over the last five years and studies show the rates are climbing. So why are people continuing to go veg? The reason seems to involve a mix of various factors, with the largest impact coming from how much we have learned about commercial farming and animal treatment over the last five years.

Why the United States is Going Veg...

To think that 16 million people in this country eat absolutely no animal products is pretty amazing, considering the degree to which meat has an impact on most of our culture. Approximately 42% of those who do not eat animal products say that they went vegan after they saw an educational film. Sixty-nine percent said they chose to eat a vegan diet to support the ethical treatment of animals. Forty-five percent say they transitioned into veganism over time and of all those who are vegan, 52% say they have been eating vegan for less than 10 years. This could be an indicator of the way the country has become more knowledgeable about our food supply over the last five years.

Which Other Factors Are Involved?

Of all these vegetarians and vegans, the vast majority are women. In fact, in 2009 when only 1 million people were vegan, a whopping 79% of those were women at the time. Now, out of 5% of the population, one million people report eating

vegan and the rest vegetarian. Women still make up 79% percent of the vegan group and 59% of the vegetarian group.

But veganism isn't just for women. Many men have made the change as well and as of 2012, meat consumption was down a massive 12.2% from 2007. In fact, people aren't just eating vegan, they're also more curious about this way of life too. Google reported a three-fold increase in vegan searches from 2007 to 2014! A search for "vegan 2007" showed over 1,600 results while a search for "vegan 2014" showed over 24,000 results!

Celebrities also make up a significant portion of those who are vegan or vegetarian. Athletes, talk show hosts, millionaires, and even political figures are now turning to a veggie-based diet or a completely vegan diet. Restaurants are also changing by either offering a vegan or vegetarian entree and many new exclusive vegan restaurants are open now that weren't around five years ago. Supermarkets now cater to vegans and offer more vegan or vegetarian products and the online raw vegan food industry has been thriving the last five years and only continues to grow. In fact, it's now estimated that by 2050, America may be a "vegan country," at least by a large percentage!

No longer is veganism the diet for hippies and health nuts; according to statistics, it's now just a smart way to live that can help decrease our ecological footprint and works our compassion muscles. Kale, anyone?

How the World Loved the Swastika — Until Hitler Stole It

By Mukti Jain, *Campion BBC News*, October 24, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1rQs0Rc>

In the Western world the swastika is synonymous with fascism, but it goes back thousands of years and has been used as a symbol of good fortune in almost every culture in the world. As more evidence emerges of its long pre-Nazi history in Europe, can this ancient sign ever shake off its evil associations?

In the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, swastika means “well-being”. The symbol has been used by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains for millennia and is commonly assumed to be an Indian sign.

Early Western travellers to Asia were inspired by its positive and ancient associations and started using it back home. By the beginning of the 20th Century there was a huge fad for the swastika as a benign good luck symbol.

In his book *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?* US graphic design writer Steven Heller shows how it was enthusiastically adopted in the West as an architectural motif, on advertising and product design.



<http://bit.ly/1rQs0Rc>

A Coca-Cola pendant from the early 20th century US

“Coca-Cola used it. Carlsberg used it on their beer bottles. The Boy Scouts adopted it and the Girls’ Club of America called their magazine *Swastika*. They would even send out swastika badges to their young readers as a prize for selling copies of the magazine,” he says.

Medical Study Confirms Vedic Viewpoint: Life Exists After Death

By Purushottam Kumar, *ISKCON News*, October 16, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1Ecrsxv>



<http://bit.ly/1Ecrsxv>

The world’s largest medical study on Near Death Experience (NDE) and Out of Body Experience (OBE) carried out by the scientists of University of Southampton discovered that “Life Exists After Death.” 2060 cardiac patients

were closely examined during the experiment for 4 years before the scientists published their research in the journal *Resuscitation*.

In one of the cases, a fifty-seven year old man who was clinically dead for three minutes - his heart had stopped beating and the brain was shut down - later after coming back to life was able to recall in minute details the activities of the nursing staffs and the doctors who were treating him during the three minute period. He said that he was observing his resuscitation from a corner of the room. Now this is not just interesting but it proves that life continues even after the body perishes.

The man’s brain had stopped functioning, his eyes were closed and he had no consciousness in his body. Then who was the “conscious being” who was observing everything from the

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corner of the room? That “conscious being” was able to see, hear (he clearly heard the bleeps from a machine that makes noise at three minute intervals) and was able to store all the observed information. Here we see that the locus of the consciousness had also shifted. He did not perceive things from the bed but instead he was observing everything from the room’s corner, in fact he was observing his own body. And the person was not hallucinating else he would have not been able to provide accurate information.

The Vedic literatures explain that “conscious being” is the atma (soul) which has an independent existence. As long as the soul remains in control of the physical body the body functions and the moment the soul’s connection with the body ceases the body becomes lifeless. As per the karmic quota a soul is bound to a physical body, when the quota is exhausted the soul leaves for a different destination.

In the case of this man, the soul was temporarily displaced from the physical body but since the karmic quota wasn’t exhausted, the soul remained emotionally connected and finally returned back into the body bringing back life into the clinically dead body. This was not the only case like this; the team of researchers found that of the 2060 cardiac patients who were examined, 330 survived and 140 of them spoke about some sort of awareness when they were medically dead and being resuscitated.

For the students of Vedic literatures and spiritualists in general, this scientific revelation isn’t surprising. Vedic books contain many logical explanations, with examples, about the relationship between the soul and the physical body.

For example *Srimad Bhagavatam* narrates the story of King Citraketu whose little son came back to life after being dead. The king

was inconsolable upon seeing his dead son, so sage Narada, just to educate the king about the ephemeral nature of the physical body, temporarily brought the child’s soul into the lifeless body. The moment the soul entered, the dead body began exhibiting all the symptoms of life. And the soul through the body of the boy spoke to the king. To the king’s disbelief the boy said that the king was not his only father, and that he had had many fathers and mothers in the past because since time immemorial he had been occupying different bodies including those of humans, animals, aquatics, and plants.

This new scientific research complements Vedic understanding. The scientists who are trying to uncover the mysteries of life through experimentation can also refer to Vedic literatures to understand the science of the soul and how the soul animates the body. The soul’s existence is not physical but is metaphysical. In *Bhagavad-gita* (2.20) Krishna asserts that the soul is eternal and in no circumstances can die. Krishna further explains in *Bhagavad-gita* (2.22), “As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.”

Dr. Jerry Nolan, Editor-in-Chief at *Resuscitation* said, “Dr Parnia (who led the experiment) and his colleagues are to be congratulated on the completion of a fascinating study that will open the door to more extensive research into what happens when we die.”

If we think scientifically and honestly and without any prejudice then we can understand our life, this world and most importantly our relationship with God. As acclaimed scientist Louis Pasteur, the founder of microbiology, says, “Little science takes you away from God but more of it takes you to Him.”

How You Think of God Impacts Prayer’s Effect on Mental Health

By Rick Nauert Ph.D., Senior News Editor, Source: Baylor University, August 14, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1wrd5mH>

New research suggests that individual expectations appear to influence how prayer impacts mental health.

For example, when it comes to easing symptoms of anxiety-related disorders, prayer doesn’t have the same effect for everybody. Baylor University researchers found that what

seemed to matter more was the type of attachment the praying individual felt toward God.

Those who prayed to a loving and supportive God whom they thought would be there to comfort and protect them in times of need were less likely to show symptoms of anxiety-related disorders — symptoms such as irrational worry,

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fear, self-consciousness, dread in social situations, and obsessive-compulsive behavior — than those who prayed but did not expect God to comfort or protect them.

The study is published in the journal *Sociology of Religion*.

“While previous research has shown that people who have a secure attachment to God are more satisfied with life and less depressed and lonely, little attention has

been paid to psychiatric symptoms,” said researcher Matt Bradshaw, Ph.D.

“For many individuals, God is a major source of comfort and strength that makes the world seem less threatening and dangerous. Through prayer, individuals seek to develop an intimate relationship with God,” Bradshaw said.

“Those who achieve this goal, and believe that God will be there to protect and support them during times of need, develop a secure attachment to God.”

In this context, prayer appears to confer emotional comfort, which results in fewer symptoms of anxiety-related disorders.

“Other people, however, form avoidant or insecure attachments to God — meaning that they do not necessarily believe God will be there when they need Him,” he said.

“For these individuals, prayer may feel like an unsuccessful attempt to cultivate and maintain an intimate relationship with God. Rejected, unanswered, or otherwise unsuccessful experiences of prayer may be disturbing and debilitating — and may therefore lead to more frequent and severe symptoms of anxiety-related disorders.”

For the study, researchers analyzed data from 1,714 of the individuals who participated in the 2010 Baylor Religion Survey. The study focused on general anxiety, social anxiety, obsession, and compulsion.

Teachings of Christianity and some other faiths use the parent-child imagery to depict the relationship between God and an individual, with one researcher describing God as “the ultimate attachment figure.”

The Baylor study findings are consistent with a growing body of research indicating

that a person’s perceived relationship with God can play an important role in shaping mental health. In theory, people who pray regularly may be inclined to live out their religion more faithfully, which may lead to less stress, such as marriage and family conflicts, researchers wrote.

People who pray often may have more of a sense of purpose in life or have more supportive personal relations. And many people use prayer as a coping strategy.

When it comes to personal prayer outside of religious organizations, however, findings by previous researchers have been inconsistent — and puzzling. Some studies indicate frequent praying has positive effects on mental health; others report no effect — or even that people who pray more often have poorer mental health than those who pray less frequently.

“At the present, we don’t know exactly why the findings have been so inconsistent,” Bradshaw said. “Prayer is complex.”

Some possible explanations for varying findings:

Individual expectations — Some scholars suggest that “if you expect prayer to matter, it just might,” Bradshaw said. In several studies of older adults, people who believe that only God knows when and how to respond to prayer fare well when it comes to mental health; those who think their prayers are not being answered do not.

Style of prayer — In general, meditative and colloquial prayers have been linked with desirable outcomes, including emotional well-being, while ritualistic prayer actually has been associated with poor mental health outcomes.

Perceived characteristics of God — such as loving, remote, or judgmental — affect the relationship between prayer and mental health. “Our previous work has found that prayer is associated with desirable mental health outcomes among individuals who believe that they are praying to a God who is close as opposed to remote, and the results from the current study are largely consistent with this finding,” Bradshaw said.

Differences in study design and sampling.

“These are all important considerations, but a comprehensive understanding of the connection between prayer and mental health remains elusive,” he said. “We still have a lot of work to do in this area.”

President Obama's Diwali Message 2014

Posted by Kiran Ahuja and Ashley Allison on WhiteHouse.gov on October 22, 2014
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/10/22/president-obama-extends-warmest-wishes-diwali>



<http://bit.ly/1rQx9Zi>

US President Barack Obama lit a traditional diya to celebrate Diwali

WASHINGTON: Highlighting the universal message of Diwali of “victory of light over darkness, hope over despair,” US President Barack Obama lit a traditional diya to celebrate Diwali at the White House.

President Obama: I want to wish a Happy Diwali to all those who are celebrating the festival of lights here in the United States and around the world. For Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, lighting the lamp—the diya—is a chance to remember, even in the midst of

darkness, that light will ultimately prevail. Knowledge will defeat ignorance, and compassion will triumph over despair. Diwali is also a reminder that we must each do our part to achieve that victory, by dedicating ourselves to service to others. If we affirm our commitments to one another and strive to lift each other up, then together, we will continue moving closer to that brighter future we all seek.

America is a great and diverse nation, strengthened by the contributions of all our people. I was

proud to host the first Diwali celebration at the White House back in 2009. Since then, we’ve continued to mark this holiday to honor the rich traditions that define the American family. And I know Michelle and I will never forget the wonderful time we had celebrating Diwali in Mumbai with food, dancing, and the company of friends.

So, to all the families gathering together this Diwali to reflect on all the blessings of the past year, I wish you a joyous celebration and Saal Mubarak.

Putting Faith to Work Linked to Job Satisfaction

By RICK NAUERT Ph.D., Senior News Editor, Source: Baylor University, June 23, 2014
<http://bit.ly/1yPOwiQ>

Regular attendance in a church that stresses faith as a component of work is associated with high job satisfaction and employment commitment.

Baylor University sociologists discovered the influence depends in part on how involved that person is in the congregation, not merely on occasional attendance.

“We already knew that about 60 percent of American adults are affiliated with congregations, but we wanted to delve into whether that carries over from weekend worship services to the work day,” said Jerry Z. Park, Ph.D.

“It turns out it does make some difference in their attitudes at work. That means it has a

potential ‘payoff’ not only for employers, but for employees themselves.”

Researchers asked a random sample of full-time employees if they attended a place of worship, and if so, they were then asked whether their congregation emphasized integrating their faith in the workplace through “sacrificial love” to their co-workers, sensing God’s presence at work among others.

What seemed to make the difference, researchers found, was frequent attendance at a church that stressed a merging of faith and work. Simply being at such a congregation — or just attending any church — did not result in greater work satisfaction or dedication.

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The study is published in the journal *Sociology of Religion*.

Researchers' analysis was based on the National Survey of Work, Entrepreneurship, and Religion, a 2010 Web-based survey of 1,022 full-time workers. Their findings concentrated on three areas:

Job satisfaction: Full-time workers who regularly attend a congregation that emphasizes integrating their faith at work report higher job satisfaction;

Job commitment: Full-time workers who regularly attend a congregation that emphasizes integrating their faith at work report higher commitment to their place of employment;

Entrepreneurship: People who are actively involved in congregations that promote integration of faith with work are more likely to describe themselves as entrepreneurial, Park said.

However, attendance seems to impede entrepreneurship — perhaps because time and energy spent in entrepreneurial endeavors leaves less time for church attendance.

“How religion affects job satisfaction, commitment to one’s job and entrepreneurship was measured by researchers using a 15-item Congregational Faith at Work Scale,” Park said.

That scale includes such items as whether respondents

sense God’s presence while they work;
view their work as having eternal significance;
view co-workers as being made in the image of God;

believe they should demonstrate “sacrificial love” toward co-workers, and;

believe God wants them to develop their abilities and talents at work.

Workplace attitudes such as job commitment also were evaluated by a variety of items

that asked how much participants felt like “part of the family” at their organization, how efficiently they get proposed actions through “bureaucratic red tape” and whether they “went to bat” for good ideas of co-workers.

Max Weber, an early social theorist, argued that Protestants who lived strict, simple lives — such as the Calvinists of the 16th and 17th centuries — viewed their worldly employment as service to God, so religion added significance to labor. Success in business was viewed as confirmation of salvation.

“Religious participation is an active part of life for millions of Americans, and it is relevant in other domains,” the study concluded.



A church congregation

<http://bit.ly/1yP0wiQ>

**Please send your
Thoughts, Opinions, Questions,
Comments, Concerns to:
feedback@mukundagoswami.org**

Personal Message...



Dear Friends,

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

In July of 1975 Srila Prabhupada was lecturing on the first chapter of *Bhagavad-gita As It is*.

Often this chapter is baffling even to sincere seekers, because it appears to be as list of warriors, and there is little philosophy there.

So for people who read books from beginning to end, the initial chapter of this one can be a stumbling block.

I know of one devotee, a university graduate, who carried the book around with her for years, because she couldn't get past that first chapter.

During Srila Prabhupada's first visit to Bhaktivedanta Manor, he gave some philosophical insights that are buried within the first chapter of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Following is an excerpt from one of those lectures:

“Then Duryodhana, first of all he pointed out the military strength of the opposite side. This is intelligence. One should take calculation of the opposing elements or the enemy's side. In fighting the first thing is to take estimation of the enemy's side, how much they are strong, how they have arranged. Then one should calculate how to counteract, how to fight with them, this is intelligence. Without taking any calculation of the other side, if you are not prepared, then how you can become victorious? This is sane proposal, that is, *upayan cintayet prajño apayan ca cintayet.. A prajña*, an intelligent man, not only think of the bright side on this business, or this fight, or this any..., so many things we have to deal with. Simply we should not calculate the brighter side. There is darker side also. We should always think, 'If there is some thief, if there is some rogue, they cheat us, then what precaution I am going to take?' This is intelligence. If I simply calculate that 'In this business I will make so much profit.' In the meantime, somebody comes and cheats me and go away, then... Therefore *upayan cintayet prajña apayan ca cintayet*. Darker side also should be thought of. That is intelligence. Just like they are doing. After calculating the darker side—enemy means darker side—they can defeat me at any moment. That is darker side.

So after calculating their strength, then Duryodhana is speaking about his own strength, *asmākaṁ tu viśiṣṭā ye.*”

So my point is that we shouldn't always look on the bright side.

your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

For lectures go to: <http://mukundagoswami.org/lectures>

