



Spiritual Perspectives

Seeing the World through Spiritual Eyes

For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

January 2021

Values Matter

By Radha devi dasi

It is no secret that Western cultures have become increasingly secularized over the past 100 years. Moreover, this secularization, once the province of the United States and Western Europe, is spreading as other countries adopt the cultural trappings of the Industrial and Technical Revolutions. Secularization is a troubling trend even to materialists. Numerous studies show that religious people tend to be happier and more resilient than non-religious people. So, it is important to know why societies become secularized. A recent study on the causes of secularization has meaningful lessons about what societies value.

It is tempting to associate increased secularization with access to education and material wealth. Certainly, countries with high levels of education and income are frequently very secular. But a recent report from the American Enterprise Institute, tracked the history of religious belief, behavior, and association in the U.S. since its founding. Theories that religion has declined because urbanization is hostile to religiosity — or because modern, educated people are inherently skeptical of religion — get no support in the historic record.

It turns out that religiosity is determined early in life. The data suggest that children raised in religious households tend to stay religious. Conversely, children raised without faith in God tend to remain agnostic. Childhood religiosity is the most important indicator of an adult's religious participation.

In fact, higher educational attainment did not predict lower religiosity: More and less educated people are similarly religious. Nor did urbanization appear to reduce religiosity: A more urban and industrialized population is often associated with greater religiosity. The story of religious decline is not the story of adults consciously rejecting the faith of their forefathers. Instead, it is the story of each generation receiving a more secular upbringing than the generation preceding it. What accounts for this secularization of childhood over time?



It turns out it is not education per se that undermines religious faith. Rather, education's effect on religion rests on the values that education promotes. The mere study of religious teachings does not guarantee continued religious observance in adulthood. Where schools emphasize educational attainment and material wealth, those are the values their students will imbibe.

In order to increase a society's religious participation, we have to change the definition of success. In most schools, even in religious schools, success is defined by a student's grades and test scores. In the larger society, money, fame, and power define success. When we accept these definitions of success, we teach our children that the point of life is something other than developing their spiritual consciousness.

And this is the point at which Vaishnavas have something meaningful to contribute to the public discourse. In Vaishnava society, our heroes are those who spend their lives helping others develop spiritual consciousness. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself made it clear that there is something higher than material attainments. In establishing Himself as a preeminent scholar and teacher, He made His conversion to the *bhakti* path, at least in part, a statement about the value of *bhakti* over scholarship and wealth.

We have the chance to show how highly we value spiritual consciousness through the choices we make in our own lives. When we choose a pilgrimage over a new car or going out to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books over a relaxing weekend at home, we are showing our children what really matters. Equally important, however, is to define their success in these terms. We often talk about our children's academic or athletic prowess. But the true measure of success is the extent to which we give them the tools and motivation to deepen their relationship with the Supreme Lord. While we can only imagine a society built on such a definition of success, we can take steps that will make that vision a reality.

Beloved Pujari and Preacher Tungavidya Devi Dasi Passes Away

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON NEWS*, December 18, 2020
<https://bit.ly/3rEIBQI>

Her Grace Tungavidya Devi Dasi, a dedicated pujari and preacher who was much beloved by devotees, passed away due to acute cardiac arrest (reportedly a complication from COVID-19) on December 14th, 2020. She departed at 3:45am during the sacred Brahma Muhurta period on Samvit Amavasya in Sri Vrindavan Dhama, India.

Tungavidya Devi Dasi and her husband Trikalajna Das began their life in Krishna consciousness in 1979 at Bhaktivedanta Manor in the UK. During their time there, they participated in the well-known campaign to save the Manor from closure as a public temple.

In 1989, the couple moved to Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in Delhi, India, where Tungavidya served as the Head Pujari, while Trikalajna served as the temple president.

In 1997, they transferred to the Potomac temple in Washington D.C., where Trikalajna was again the temple president, while Tungavidya Devi Dasi served the presiding Deities of Sri Sri Radha Madan Mohan with deep love and dedication. She also brought many people to Krishna consciousness, and was a well-loved member of the D.C. ISKCON community.

In 2017, Tungavidya and Trikalajna moved to Vrindavan, India. There, Tungavidya served her home Deities Sri Sri Radha Govindaji, along with 116 Saligrams, Giridharilal and Lord Narasimhadeva, while her husband served at Krishna Balaram Mandir.

On December 14th, 2020, Tungavidya Devi Dasi passed away at the Rama Krishna Mission Hospital in Vrindavan amidst all auspiciousness. While she was taking her last breath, devotees at ISKCON Vrindavan were praying for her intensely;



Tungavidya Devi Dasi with her husband Trikalajna Das

they also chanted while her last rites were carried out on the banks of the River Yamuna.

Devotees around the world are requested to pray for her spiritual journey ahead, and for her to reach the lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha Shyamasundara.

“Tungavidya Devi Dasi was a very dedicated and sweet lady. She was always in a service mood, and she was a great lover of Vrindavan,” said Anuttama Das, ISKCON GBC for Washington D.C. “A few years ago when her husband was the President of ISKCON of D.C. temple, she was a, if not the, devotional pillar of the community. She served non-stop and was always friendly and enthusiastic, no matter what the challenge or service load. We will all miss her dearly. Our prayers go out to her husband, Trikalajna Prabhu, and her children Ramdas and Kulapriya, as well as her grandchildren Ganesh, Gaudiya and Jai Baladeva Chandra, and other family members.”

Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies Holds Virtual Cosmography Workshop

By: Prisni Devi Dasi, *ISKCON NEWS*, December 18, 2020
<https://bit.ly/2WT1125>

In 1976, Srila Prabhupada instructed the founding members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute “to build a model of the universe that could later be built full size at the future Mayapur Temple and Planetarium complex.” To help broadly facilitate Srila Prabhupada’s directive, the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies (BIHS) in Gainesville, Florida, recently hosted

its second cosmography workshop with the title, “Models and memes and maps: A modern journey through ancient cosmography.” It attracted participants online from around the world over the weekend of November 21-22, 2020.

The BIHS workshop was designed to facilitate intellectual discourse engaging *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5th Canto cosmograph-

Continued on page 3

ical models frequently discussed within ISKCON. The workshop explored historical and contemporary models along with new research that enhances the rich devotional culture engaging this topic. The Director of the BIHS, Brahmatirtha das (MS Geology), one of the founding members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute who participated in the original 1977 “Life Comes From Life” conference held in Vrindavan while Srila Prabhupada was present, explained, “We are striving to elevate the discourse to a level suitable for publication in appropriate academic circles so that the efforts of the many Vaishnavas can be appreciated by the intellectual communities while remaining loyal to our tradition.”

Following Brahmatirtha das’ welcome address, Pracarananda das (PhD, Geology) opened Session 1 with a presentation “On models, memes, and maps,” which helped set the workshop theme analyzing criteria for a productive model. The next speaker, Janakirama das (PhD, Religion), spoke about “Historical perspectives on cosmological complexities.” He argued that various cosmological passages in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* suggest meditative “complexity” coupled with a “spirit of discovery.”

Sthita-dhi-muni das (PhD, History of Science) wrapped up the opening session with a presentation on “The Legacy of Jyotir Veda” examining “jyotisha and Puranic cosmology discourse in a traditional context.” The presentation explained that textual passages historically identified with the tradition illustrate how various present-day concerns frequently expressed within ISKCON often involve “apparent discrepancies between esoteric descriptions” identified with the Puranas versus “exoteric accounts” drawn from mathematical astronomy that have also “proven a dynamic element of this ancient legacy.”

To put it directly, apparent dichotomies between celestial descriptions of an expansive *Bhu-maṇḍala* plane alongside with descriptions of an observable and mathematically quantifiable spherical earth, are likewise found in textual accounts firmly

rooted in classic Vedic civilization. Many of these works are attributed to noted jyotisa pandits recognized as leading figures in the global history of mathematics and astronomy. Examples of these texts date back well over a thousand years prior to the rise of the “new” sciences identified with European origin.

When considered this way, perhaps there is nothing new under the sun. Not only has this topic been thoroughly acknowledged by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura in his scholarly work promoting Sanskrit mathematical astronomy, but more recently within ISKCON, Sadaputa das described at length how both views can be found embedded within a unified tradition identified with Vedic literature. In the pioneering BBT publication, *Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy* (1990), Sadaputa argued that historical facts such as these invite fresh examination of the “proper understanding of the nature of space, time, and matter, as described in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, and a corresponding understanding of the Vedic approach to describing and thinking about reality.” (p. 3)

Participants in the afternoon’s Session 2 subsequently broke into working groups designed for considering fresh approaches intended to enhance the role of ISKCON scholars. Among the questions discussed by each group were, “What are the criteria for making a good model?” and “How can we make our voice relevant within ISKCON and its outreach?”

On the second day, Session 3 examined a selection of both historical and contemporary models active within ISKCON. Prishni devi dasi (BIHS secretary and Richard L. Thompson Archives) opened with a presentation on the “Standard Accommodation’ model as cultural legacy.” It offered a summary overview of what scholars have defined as the dominant model on the Indian subcontinent during the Middle Ages within jyotisa and Puranic discourse. Radha Mohan das (BIHS researcher and Bhaktivedanta Manor communications secretary) followed with an overview of “Richard L. Thompson’s 4 models, and beyond.” He introduced a variety of sub-models



<https://bit.ly/2WT1125>

The new headquarters of the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies in Gainesville, Florida, USA

Continued on page 4

drawn from Sadaputa's *Mysteries of the Sacred Universe* (2000), which offer potential for further appreciating the complexity encoded within Puranic cosmological descriptions. Pavaneshwar das (MS, Electrical Engineering) next spoke about his book, *Bhagavata Cosmology* (2018), offering a study of Fifth Canto cosmology that draws upon Vadiraja Tirtha Swami's treatise, *Bhugola Varnanam* (16th Century). Rsiraja das (MS Chemistry) offered an introduction to his influential work, *Mystic Universe* (2016), that highlighted the need to appreciate the theory behind the model which facilitates a conceptual understanding of the Puranic universe. Sulabha das ended the morning session with a video that compared *Puranic* descriptions of the *Bhu-mandala* earth-plane with a variety of identifiable geographic features similarly described in the *Puranas*.

The final session provided a platform for more recent research while facilitating peer-review feedback. Vrindavana Priya das's talk on "Consciousness and Cosmology" described a consciousness centered approach to understanding the nature of the cosmos that drew upon insights from Rsiraja's research. Prem Gauranga das (Mechanical Engineering) discussed his paper, "Mathematical Model of the Cosmos based on the *Bhagavata Purana*," which highlighted information embedded within the text verifiable through human experience. A research proposal by Vaishnav das (PhD Astrophysics) titled "Pravaha winds as the missing mass in the universe," explored the potential for testing this construct utilizing gravitational wave astronomy.

Three physicists from the BIHS research team closed the seminar with presentations in the final afternoon session. The topic "*Bhu-mandala* as the Horizontal Plane," presented by Murali Gopal das (PhD, Physics) examined the possibility of

a coherent narrative that would incorporate several features of *Bhu-mandala* as described by various models under consideration. Dvija Govinda das (PhD, Physics) discussed an "Investigation of connections between Puranic and Siddhantic sizes of the Universe." He proposed "proportionality" and "total distance traveled" as part of a framework illustrating correlations between the vertical dimension of the universe described in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and mathematically quantifiable data pertaining to cosmic distances. In the workshop's final talk, "An Embedded Time Dimension in the 5th Canto," Doug Watson (PhD Physics) proposed that 5th Canto spatial mapping of *Bhu-mandala* might not arise solely from a fixed point in time. Rather, time itself could provide an additional dimensional element.

Many attending the BIHS workshop expressed a desire to continue discussions in ongoing work groups intended to fine-tune analyses of Vedic cosmology. In his parting words to the international participants, BIHS Director Brahmattirtha Das offered his invitation to "visit our new BIHS headquarters... situated near the University of Florida in an historically preserved neighborhood. Be our guest and enjoy our 3000+ book library, gardens, and beautiful walking areas." Brahmattirtha concluded by gratefully acknowledging that the BIHS had been able "to secure use of this new facility with the generous support of Hridayananda Das Goswami."

To review a copy of the 2020 BIHS program brochure, please see: [bit.ly/BIHS Program Brochure 2020](https://bit.ly/BIHS_Program_Brochure_2020)

New Podcast "Sraavanam Diaries" Promotes Reading Prabhupada's Books

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, December 4, 2020
<https://bit.ly/2WSZaZJ>

An increase in the culture of reading Srila Prabhupada's books is in the air.

One of the catalysts for this was the 2017 Sanga for Gurus, GBCs and Sannyasis (SGGS) in Mayapur, West Bengal, at which it was felt that there should be a worldwide effort to increase reading amongst ISKCON members and leaders. Following this, ISKCON's Governing Body Commission made a resolution in February 2020 to introduce an annual "International Sraavanam Week." The week ran from September 3rd to 9th and featured online study groups, webinars and daily Zoom interviews about reading Prabhupada's books.



Sulalita Devi Dasi reads Srila Prabhupada's books for her podcast "Sraavanam Diaries"

Continued on page 5

Meanwhile, individual devotees are also spearheading their own efforts to promote reading. Among them is Sulalita Devi Dasi, a second generation Russian devotee who grew up in Moscow and has lived in Mayapur for the past eight years. Sulalita's podcast "Sravanam Diaries", in which she reads daily from Srila Prabhupada's books, is available on all major platforms and recently passed its 100-episode mark.

Attending Moscow's Bhaktivedanta Gurukula since the age of three, Sulalita was always surrounded by Prabhupada's books. After doing a variety of services in the arts, education and deity services over the years, in more recent times she has been maintaining the social media pages for her guru Bhakti Bhringa Govinda Swami.

When B.B. Govinda Swami gave his disciples the challenge to read all of Srila Prabhupada's books, Sulalita managed to do it in just two years, amazed that she had succeeded in completing a task she had always seen as massive and unattainable.

"One of the things that really helped me was audiobooks," she says. "Whenever I did housework, I would read by listening. It was so inspiring – I felt like if only I had read all of them ten years ago, then my *japa* would have been so much better, and different situations in life would have been dealt with in a different way."

To keep her own reading life stable amidst her busy services, to fulfill her guru's instruction to her to preach, and to inspire and help others to systematically read Prabhupada's books, Sulalita started a podcast.

During the early days of lockdown, she learned from Youtube how to professionally record and produce a podcast. With support and encouragement from her husband, Mayapur Community Hospital dentist Yasoda Jivan Das, the first episode, "The Original, Clear Consciousness," was released in July, and by mid-August episodes were being released on a daily basis.

"Sravanam Diaries" is relished by devotees, but is aimed more at the general public, who come across its intriguing titles – such as "Love and Faith are not Blind" and "How to Turn Time Into Our Eternal Asset" while searching for interesting podcasts.

"The first question every marketing specialist asks is, 'Who is the target audience?'" Sulalita says. "But I believe that Srila Prabhupada's books are universal – anybody can connect to them."

"Sravanam Diaries" is available on twelve main podcasting platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Stitcher, and Spotify. Episodes have been downloaded by people from about twenty countries. Each one is about ten to fifteen minutes long – an easily digestible size.

Throughout the podcast, Sulalita reads Srila Prabhupada's books systematically in a similar order to study programs like *Bhakti-Sastri*. She has started with small books, such as *The Perfection of Yoga*, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, *Beyond Birth and Death*, and *Raja Vidya: The King of Knowledge*, which she is currently reading.

So far, she has read 8 out of 52 volumes (or 80, depending on the editions) in Srila Prabhupada's vast bibliography. From the small books, she will move on to works like *Sri Isopanisad*, *The Nectar of Instruction*, and *The Nectar of Devotion*, before reading *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and finally *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*.

Although the podcast consists mostly of Sulalita simply reading Prabhupada's books daily – "I try to keep it less of me, and more of Prabhupada," she says – she does share some reflections.

"Pre-reading can help avoid some mistakes in podcasts, but I don't do that," she explains. "Because I want to have real, live reactions to what I'm reading. For instance, in the small books some of the analogies really struck me, and so I said a few words on how I find them genius, and how they apply to my life."

Listeners amongst the general public also relate to this sentiment, and some avail of the link to purchase the current book that Sulalita provides with every episode. One listener, after hearing a passage from Srila Prabhupada's 1955 book "Message of Godhead" about free will, commented, "This is brilliant, I bought the book!"

The podcast, according to Sulalita, will also serve as "Practical evidence that one can read all of Srila Prabhupada's books in less than five years, without spending many hours a day."

"And we should," she comments. "Prabhupada wanted us to know his books like lawyers know law books!"

In the future, Sulalita hopes to expand by interviewing senior ISKCON members, new devotees, and youth about their favorite book, how Prabhupada's books changed their life, their reading techniques, book distribution stories, and more. She also plans to use her graphic design skills to create illustrations depicting analogies from Prabhupada's books, which will be posted to the "Sravanam Diaries" Facebook and Instagram pages.

Meanwhile a website, www.sravanamdiaries.com, is under construction and is set to launch on December 25th, *Gita Jayanti* Day. The site will include all the episodes recorded for each book for convenient navigation, a catalog of Srila Prabhupada's books along with links to read and purchase them, introductory articles to ISKCON and Bhakti-Yoga, a countdown of the podcast's progress in reading all the books, book-related comics and sketches, interview videos and more.

"I hope listeners receive a connection with Srila Prabhupada," Sulalita says. "I hope that these books will change their lives, and will bring them closer to the association of Vaishnavas, and the lotus feet of Krishna."

* * *

Listen to Sravanam Diaries here: podlink.to/sravanam

Visit <https://www.facebook.com/sravanamdiaries>

and

<https://www.instagram.com/sravanamdiaries/>

On and after December 25th, visit:

<https://www.sravanamdiaries.com/>

ISKCON's GBC Remembers Yamuna Devi

By: the GBC, www.dandavats.com, December 20, 2020
<https://bit.ly/3o0zhmC>

With great sadness, the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of ISKCON, deeply mourn the departure of Her Grace Yamuna Devi. She dedicated the last 45 years of her life to the worship of Krishna and Srila Prabhupada. She was a mentor, guide, and friend to many and a beloved member and hero of ISKCON. At every ISKCON temple, her singing of "Govindam" greets the Lord.

Yamuna Devi was one of the most influential devotees during ISKCON's fledgling years. She was among a handful of people who established ISKCON's first. Those who came to ISKCON in later years joined an established society, but Yamuna Devi was one of the few who established that society.

Yamuna Devi explained something of her relationship with Prabhupada while addressing the GBC in 2000, "In both men and women, Srila Prabhupada observed our propensities and expertly dovetailed them in his preaching mission. For many years, in different countries and circumstances, I had the good fortune to render personal service to him. He trained me, urged me to accept more and more responsibility, and regularly asked me to lead kirtanas, give classes, arrange programs, manage departments, provide comforts for visiting devotees, meet with leaders, and actively promulgate Krishna consciousness. In ISKCON India, where previously no women were allowed, he sent me to various temples to learn cooking and Deity worship, and he repeatedly asked me to train others in the same."

Yamuna Devi was well known for her own caring and compassionate nature. Though famous in ISKCON and beyond, she was kind and unpretentious. She was always singing or chanting Hare Krishna, and had focused attention on whatever service she was doing. Her cleanliness standards were immaculate and she dedicated herself to following Prabhupada's instructions in her actions, words, character, and heart. Whoever met her experienced through her both Prabhupada's uncompromising standards and his love.

She published her own cookbook entitled, "Lord Krishna's Cuisine: The Art of Indian Vegetarian Cooking" which garnered multiple awards, including the International Association of Culinary Professionals Cookbook of the Year. She spent her time in recent years mostly in Saranagati,

a farm community in Western Canada teaching devotees by precept and example.

Yamuna Devi's mood can be appreciated in a personal offering to Srila Prabhupada in 2002, "Dear Srila Prabhupada, I remember how kirtan was so intense and joyous in your presence. How time and place dissolved in those kirtans. How your thumbs lifted off the surface of your kartalas as they sizzled in sound, and how your vocal cords and mouth vibrated and extended as you filled a space with hauntingly beautiful transcendental sound vibrations. I remember losing myself in that sound and wishing never to leave this space or your presence. In this connection, I pray, even if only one more time, to hold the microphone for you as you chant your favorite Vaishnava prayer—*Hari Hari Biphale* – as experienced that final time at Akash Ganga in Mumbai... I pray that one day in the future I may see you face to face again. This vision may be many lifetimes in front of me, but I do not see any goal worth achieving, however slow or difficult, or impossible this task may seem from my fallen position. There is nothing else more appealing. Please bless me with the perseverance to continue on the path to meet you."

Your eternal servant, Yamuna Devi

We lament the departure of our dear godsister and Srila Prabhupada's dear daughter Yamuna Devi from our material vision— and rejoice in her reunion with him as she desired.



<https://bit.ly/3o0zhmC>

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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Personal Message



Dear Disciples and Friends,

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

When I was 14, I encountered the phrase *caveat emptor*. A textbook said this meant “buyer beware.” In commerce, this means “without a warranty the buyer takes the risk.” “This,” Webster affirms, “is a reasonable approach for many consumers.”

A parallel exists today in ISKCON, particularly when newly-minted or interested persons walk into ISKCON bookstores. They are confronted with an array of alluring books. Potential customers tend to browse them, and some choose to purchase those which appeal.

The danger is that some of these publications are poison. Impersonalists, lapsed devotees, copycats, knock-off artists, con-men and other white collar criminals steal bona fide writings of Srila Prabhupada and his pure followers. The term bona fide was used many times by Srila Prabhupada in his teachings. Justice J. Leahy of the Queens Appeals court in New York used the phrase in his 1977 judgement affirming that ISKCON was authentic with “. . . roots in India that go back thousands of years.” Dictionary definitions for bona fide include: genuine, real, true, legitimate, actual, and without intention to deceive.

The problem ISKCON faces today is that people new to the Krishna consciousness movement are easily steered away from Krishna consciousness by reading counterfeit material. Some writings are printed by imposters; others are penned by entrenched impersonalist philosophers. Many of these writings so accurately mimic authorized material fully approved by Srila Prabhupada, the ISKCON global GBC, and the ISKCON BBT, that it is almost impossible to distinguish reality from illusion. Thus, in the name of ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada, and various bona fide *acaryas*, hundreds of books, booklets, pamphlets and other deceptive and unauthorized writings are finding their way into the hands of gullible individuals, all for the sake of prestige, money, and false egotism. In years to come, there will be hundreds maybe thousands more of such fraudulent and deceptive publications.

One such book, calling itself *Prabhupada Lilamrta As It Is* actually copied the BBT logo in order to give it authenticity. The cover carried a full-color, attractive photo of Srila Prabhupada. The author of this publication was deemed a “knucklehead” by a highly-placed BBT official.

An authorized approval insignia with appropriate wordings, stamped or published on all bona fide publications would go a long way toward keeping people on the right philosophical path.

Your well-wisher and servant,

Mukunda Goswami

