



Spiritual Perspectives

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

April 2021

Whose Job Is It?

By Radha devi dasi

The suspected abduction and murder of a young London woman as she walked home has dismayed Britain and revived a painful question: Why are women too often not safe on the streets? The fate of 33-year-old Sarah Everard is all the more shocking because the suspect charged Friday with abducting and killing her is a UK police officer.

Everard's disappearance and killing has caused a nationwide outcry, with thousands of women sharing experiences of being threatened or attacked — or simply facing the everyday fear of violence when walking alone. The incident sparked protests and widespread calls for Britain to do more to improve women's safety in public places.

Everard, protestors have pointed out, was doing everything she was supposed to do to stay safe on the streets. She took a longer route that was well-lit and populated. She wore bright clothes and shoes she could run in. She checked in with her boyfriend to let him know when she was leaving. But that was not enough to save her life.

Everard's murder has set off a social movement that feels, somehow, different from those that have come before, the "New York Times" reports. Women from all walks of life are demanding safety from male violence — and demanding that the police, the government and men collectively be the ones to bear the burden of ensuring it.

For most women, the dangers of walking alone at night, or even in daylight in dangerous areas, is well known. College coeds are given training on staying safe while walking on campus, many women take self-defense training and all women modify their behavior to at least some extent in order to stay safe. And these dangers exist around the world, not just in the UK.

Do our governments bear responsibility for criminals who, by nature, break the law and ignore social policy? In fact, the suspect in the Everard murder is a law enforcement officer. Clearly, knowing that his actions were illegal and grounds for a life sentence did not deter him from a heinous crime. What,



Sarah Everard's family described her as "bright and beautiful - a wonderful daughter and sister"

exactly, can the government do when its own officers embody a threat to women?

Srila Prabhupada tells us that it is the duty of the government to protect the vulnerable, including women. While it is the duty of parents to protect their children and husbands to protect their wives, our Vaishnava values hold that the government is responsible for overseeing this duty of protection. In other words, the government bears some responsibility when women are attacked.

This need for protection is often used as the basis for limiting women's autonomy — the ability to make independent choices. Women are unfairly blamed for putting themselves in danger. It is clear that basic common sense, if nothing else, should nudge women into carefully considering whether the choices they make are safe ones. But, as the secular protestors in the UK are pointing out, putting the burden of ensuring our safety solely on women is not enough.

There are plenty of situations in which women are forced into vulnerable situations. In rural India, for example, the lack of toilet facilities leaves women vulnerable, especially at night. There have been plenty of cases of rape and murder of women in such situations. In more developed countries, women's financial

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needs may force them to take risks to get to and from their jobs. Many women are assaulted, even killed, by the very family members who are supposed to protect them.

We only add to the problem when we blame the women who are assaulted or killed for their actions and fail to hold the actual (male) criminals accountable. Should a trip home from work, or even a last-minute decision to walk alone at night be punishable by death? There is definite room for improvement in keeping women safe.

We have to start, however, with the willingness to invest in justice policies, physical facilities and social systems to make the

world less dangerous for women. And that willingness requires a cultural shift in how we view the responsibility for women's safety. Our scriptures tell us that keeping women safe is a shared duty. We are all responsible to some extent for responding to assaults on women. We may meet this responsibility in training our daughters in situational awareness or training our sons on the need to intervene or offer aid when others mistreat women. But we can also help bring about change by sharing our knowledge that investing in women's safety and holding criminals accountable for harming women is firmly within the government's sphere of duties.

ISKCON at the UN Organizes Interfaith Panel on Women's Empowerment

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON NEWS*, March 12, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3fjLyRB>

ISKCON at the UN and the ISKCON Vaishnavi Ministry have organized an interfaith panel discussion entitled "Shared Stories: Culture, Religion & Women's Empowerment" which will take place virtually on March 21st as part of the NGO Commission on the Status of Women Forum. The panel, which will take place from 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm EDT, is co-sponsored by Muslims for Progressive Values and ACT Alliance, a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organizations engaged in humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

Every March the UN hosts the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a two-week conference with hundreds of events discussing gender equality, the empowerment of women, and the issues facing women globally. While the CSW usually takes place in person in New York City, this year's conference

will be held virtually due to COVID-19, from March 15th to 26th. Representatives of Member States, UN entities and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will sponsor the events. The interfaith panel is open to all who register for free, and ISKCON members are encouraged to attend.

So how did ISKCON become involved with the UN? Back in 2016, ISKCON Communications received ECOSOC accreditation, the highest level at which an NGO can be associated with the UN, and Anuttama Das was formally designated as a representative to the UN. To support and assist this effort, Gopal Lila Das, who has been working with the UN since 2015 in various capacities, was asked to oversee the "ISKCON at the UN" project by ISKCON Communications.

ISKCON at the UN has identified five thematic focus areas to engage with the United Nations on: climate change and the

environment; gender; health; youth empowerment; and food, or *prasadam* distribution. Through Gopal Lila's existing work with the UN and Govardhana Eco-Village, engagement on the environment is already taking place. And now, for the past six months, ISKCON at the UN has been working with Vaishnavi Minister Radha Devi Dasi and Prema Vilasini Devi Dasi from New York to engage with the UN on gender issues.

The March 21st event will be a part of that effort, and will explore the idea of women's empowerment from different cultural contexts and

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

The virtual poster for the interfaith panel discussion entitled "Shared Stories: Culture, Religion & Women's Empowerment"

faith traditions. It is described as “A fireside chat followed by a panel discussion, which brings together women from the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Muslim and Christian religions to explore the interconnection between religion, culture and women’s empowerment.”

The speakers are Ani Zonneveld, Founder and President of Muslims for Progressive Values; ISKCON Vaishnavi Minister Radha Devi Dasi; and Gladys Nairuba, Co-Chair, ACT Alliance Africa, Gender Community of Practice.

“ISKCON faces a unique challenge as a global movement,” says Radha Devi Dasi, who originated the topic. “How do we approach issues like women’s empowerment in a way that is sensitive to differences in culture without sacrificing any religious principles? We also invited other faith groups so that we’re not just looking at it from the standpoint of Gaudiya Vaishnavas. And everyone is really excited about this topic. I think it resonates with every religious group. Because every religious organization has some extent to which cultures differ from place to place. And we’re all wrestling with how to accommodate that without sacrificing the faith tradition.”

In the panel discussion, each speaker will begin with a story from her personal life or faith tradition that illuminates a principle of women’s empowerment they wish to highlight.

Radha Devi Dasi, for instance, will cite the story of Asvatthama’s punishment from the first canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. In this story, Asvatthama, the son of Drona, beholds the five sleeping sons of Draupadi at the end of the Kurukshetra war, and Draupadi’s voice is solicited in deciding how to punish him. “They [Krishna, Bhima and Yudhistira] aren’t going to make a decision without hearing from her,” Radha says. “And she brings certain concepts into the discussion that are important, generally speaking, to women, such as community, and relationships.”

She adds: “We will also talk about inclusion – how women can have a voice, express their leadership, and inspire.”

The panel will end with a question and answer session.

According to Radha Devi Dasi, “ISKCON has something important to add to the global discussion about women’s em-

powerment, in terms of the necessary balance between male and female.”

“For us,” she explains, “God manifests not just as male, but male and female. There is always a partnership between male and female. And so this is an important thing to consider – we don’t want just men’s voices speaking in a space; we don’t want just women’s voices speaking. We want both voices, so that there’s balance.”

An internal follow-up discussion with ISKCON Vaishnavis, expanding on the topics discussed at the UN interfaith panel, will also take place on April 18th, and will be announced on the ISKCON Vaishnavi Ministry Facebook page. Featuring Vaishnavis like Kishori Jani and Sri Radha Govinda Dasi, it will continue the conversation about women’s empowerment.

Gopal Lila Das, who oversees ISKCON at the UN, comments, “I think that Srila Prabhupada wanted ISKCON to engage with global thought leaders, and contribute to global discourse on contemporary topics. Issues around gender, women’s empowerment, and gender equality are high up in people’s priorities today. So it’s important that ISKCON share our perspective with global policy makers, to try to contribute to creating a better world. And at the same time, it’s important for us to hear and understand what other people are saying. To understand what are the concerns in the world around gender, and use such learnings to improve our communities as well. It’s a two-way dialogue.”

To attend the “Culture, Religion and Women’s Empowerment” panel discussion and other events that are part of the NGO CSW65 Forum, you must be a registered Advocate on the platform. You can register for free here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ngo-csw65-forum-advocate-registration-tickets-137312871495>

For information about the follow-up discussion on women’s empowerment with ISKCON Vaishnavis, please visit the Vaishnavi Ministry’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Iskcon-Vaishnavi-Ministry-748463408608318>

ISKCON Desire Tree Launches New Satellite TV Channel

By: Radha Rasikraj Das, *ISKCON NEWS*, February 26, 2021

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

Started in 2002 on Nityananda Trayodashi, ISKCON Desire Tree has been serving the Vaishnava community with various offerings:

- launching and maintaining 50+ websites,
- creating 100+ mobile applications
- hosting an audio website with 250,000+ audio files

- attracting 10,000+ visitors every day
- Hare Krsna TV’s YouTube Channel has more than 28,000 videos and around 1.4 million subscribers, with around 200,000 views every day.

Now the same team of devotees, under the able guidance and leadership of Dr. Vaishnava Seva Dasa from Mumbai,

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HARE KRṢṂA TELEVISION

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

has ventured into sharing Krishna Consciousness via a satellite TV Channel, reaching out to more than 50 million homes across India.

This free-to-air TV Channel is licensed from the Government of India and is now available 24 hours 7 days a week. Unlike other channels, it is free from any advertisements.

Hare Krsna TV telecasts live *Aratis*, lectures, kirtans, recipes, inspirational and motivational talks by eminent ISKCON-teachers and much more.

According to Hare Krishna TV-managers, the initial response has been immense. "People from remote villages and small towns and cities alike are the ones who are appreciating it the most."

Appreciative testimonials and more details about the channel are available on harekrsnatv.com

Hare Krishna TV requests all content creators of ISKCON to share good quality videos for broadcast.

Contact on:

vaishnavasevadasa@gmail.com

or Call/WhatsApp on

+91-9321164690 / +91- 8767 845 845

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Why I Decided that Getting Vaccinated Against COVID-19 Was the Right Choice for Me

By: Vaisesika Dasa, ISKCON NEWS, March 12, 2021

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

(The article in this section does not necessarily express the position of ISKCON News, they are the personal opinion of the authors.)

While getting vaccinated against COVID-19, I remembered these words from Ayurvedashastra: *aushadhi cintayet visnum*. When taking medicine, one must remember Vishnu because ultimately He is the active ingredient that makes any medicine potent.

More prominent in my mind, however, was my recollection of Srila Prabhupada's mood when it came to vaccinations, or for that matter, his approach to life in general. Srila Prabhupada once nonchalantly commented "All right, let us have," when getting vaccinated against the Hong Kong flu. Perhaps he got vaccinated due to his need to travel internationally for preaching, or perhaps at the behest of his disciples. For whatever reason, he got vaccinated and moved on with his mission.

In his approach to life, Srila Prabhupada meticulously followed his guru, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who emphasized preaching over building temples, solitary *bhajana* and sometimes even over following some of the details of devotional practice. For example, he once told a disciple to honor *maha-prasadam* on *Ekadashi* so that the disciple would have sufficient strength to go out preaching. This mood is consistent with that of Srila Rupa Gosvami, who taught us that rules and regulations should not be the masters but the servants of devotional service.

Srila Prabhupada followed this mood. In America, when ISKCON's book distributors began traveling town-to-town in vans to distribute books, a controversy arose. These traveling preachers were buying food in grocery stores and offering it to pictures of Srila Prabhupada and Krishna in their vans. An ISKCON leader wrote to Srila Prabhupada complaining that these devotees were not eating *prasadam* because their *bhoga* was not offered directly to the Deities in the temple. However, Srila Prabhupada not only sanctioned the simple in-van offerings but also noted that these offerings would be consumed in the transcendental sacrificial fire of *sankirtana*. Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta prioritized preaching and therefore accepted practical and readily-available means to keep the preaching moving and expanding. Both of these *acaryas* were at



Vaisesika Dasa

times criticized for their utilitarian approaches to spreading the *sankirtana* movement.

One may ask why take any precaution at all since we are devotees and Krishna protects His devotees. Srila Prabhupada answers this question in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.9.19, a verse in which Sri Prahlada says that without the Lord's sanction, a doctor's treatment cannot help a sick patient, parents cannot protect their children, and a boat on water cannot protect a drowning man. Srila Prabhupada writes, "One should consequently depend fully on the causeless mercy of the Lord. Although as a matter of routine duty one must of course accept other remedial measures . . ." We depend fully on the causeless mercy of the Lord. And yes, we also accept other remedial measures.

All of us in this material world are in an awkward situation. Although we are wholly spiritual beings, we are ensconced in matter. In his purport to *Sri Isopanisad* 11, Srila Prabhupada explains how to balance our spiritual practices with the material aspect of our lives: "To make the best use of a bad bargain is the appropriate expression. The culture of spiritual knowledge necessitates the help of the body and mind; therefore maintenance of the body and mind is required if we are to reach our goal."

Still, even as we strive to make the best use of this bad bargain, our decisions must facilitate the successful execution of our devotional service. As Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* 18.48

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“Every endeavor is covered by some fault, just as fire is covered by smoke.” And Srila Prabhupada comments in his purport that “one should not give up his natural occupation because there are some disturbing elements. Rather, one should be determined to serve the Supreme Lord by his occupational duty in Krishna consciousness. That is perfection. When a particular type of occupation is performed for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord, all the defects in that particular occupation are purified. When the results of work are purified through their connection with devotional service, one becomes perfect in seeing the self within, and that is self-realization.”

Our Vaisnava *shastras* give us numerous examples of great souls who were confronted with difficult decisions while executing their devotional duties. Lord Shiva was asked to save the world by consuming an ocean of poison. Dadhici Muni was asked to donate his bones. My favorite example is when Arjuna was momentarily stymied after receiving contradictory advice about killing Asvattama. While Draupadi pleaded for Arjuna to spare Ashvattama’s life, Bhima insisted that he be killed. Meanwhile, Krishna tested Arjuna by telling him that he had to satisfy both Bhima and Draupadi by the result of his decision. Srila Prabhupada writes, “Contradictory orders of different persons are impossible to carry out. Therefore, a compromise was selected by Arjuna by his sharp intelligence . . .” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.7.55, purport) Krishna inspired Arjuna

from within to spare Asvattama’s life and to cut only the jewel from his hair, accomplishing the intentions of both sides.

Contentiousness abounds in this world. Indeed, *Ayurveda-shastra* sometimes prescribes the use of poison or ordinarily forbidden animal products in its remedies. Historically, pandemics, such as smallpox and Spanish flu, have aroused a special brand of contentiousness. COVID-19 and the ways people deal with COVID-19 are no exception.

During the process of considering whether or not to get vaccinated, I received conflicting advice and remembered Arjuna’s dilemma. Although I am no Arjuna, I decided to follow his lead by basing my decision on my master’s example and precepts. Srila Prabhupada, who famously described the entire material world as “a colossal hoax,” got vaccinated on at least one occasion and went on spreading the *sankirtana* movement.

My heart goes out to those who are agonizing over getting or not getting vaccinated. Because so many devotees have personally written or called me, asking what I think about this issue, I have written this short essay to explain my own choice.

When I was sixteen years old, I chose to follow Srila Prabhupada. Now I’m 64 and still rise early each morning to follow Srila Prabhupada’s example throughout the day. In getting vaccinated, my intention was simply to follow what Srila Prabhupada did as he pushed on the *sankirtana* movement in the mood of his spiritual master.

Difficulties In Devotion: A Blessing in Disguise?

By: Administrator, www.dandavats.com, March 18, 2021

<https://bit.ly/2P9FlgB>

By Bhaktisiddhanta Swami

We can study the example of a topmost Vaishnavi, Queen Kunti, who prayed for a calamity to remember her Lord again and again. Of course, she is the personified zenith of devotional dependence, but we can greatly benefit by trying to at least get a glimpse of her mood.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.8.25

*vipadah santu tah sasvat tatra tatra jagad-guro
bhavato darshanam yat syad apunar bhava-darshanam*

“I wish that all those calamities would happen again and again so that we could see You again and again, for seeing You means that we will no longer see repeated births and deaths.”

Firstly, obstacles and impediments are an ongoing agenda on this plane, whether in personal relations, management, or the communication field.

Srila Prabhupada, our most noteworthy example, established an international society amidst overwhelming physical

handicaps or apparent setbacks that became a precursor to a worldwide society. Then there are his sincere followers, who through tests and trials amidst obstacles have had valuable realizations by trying their best to fulfill his will.

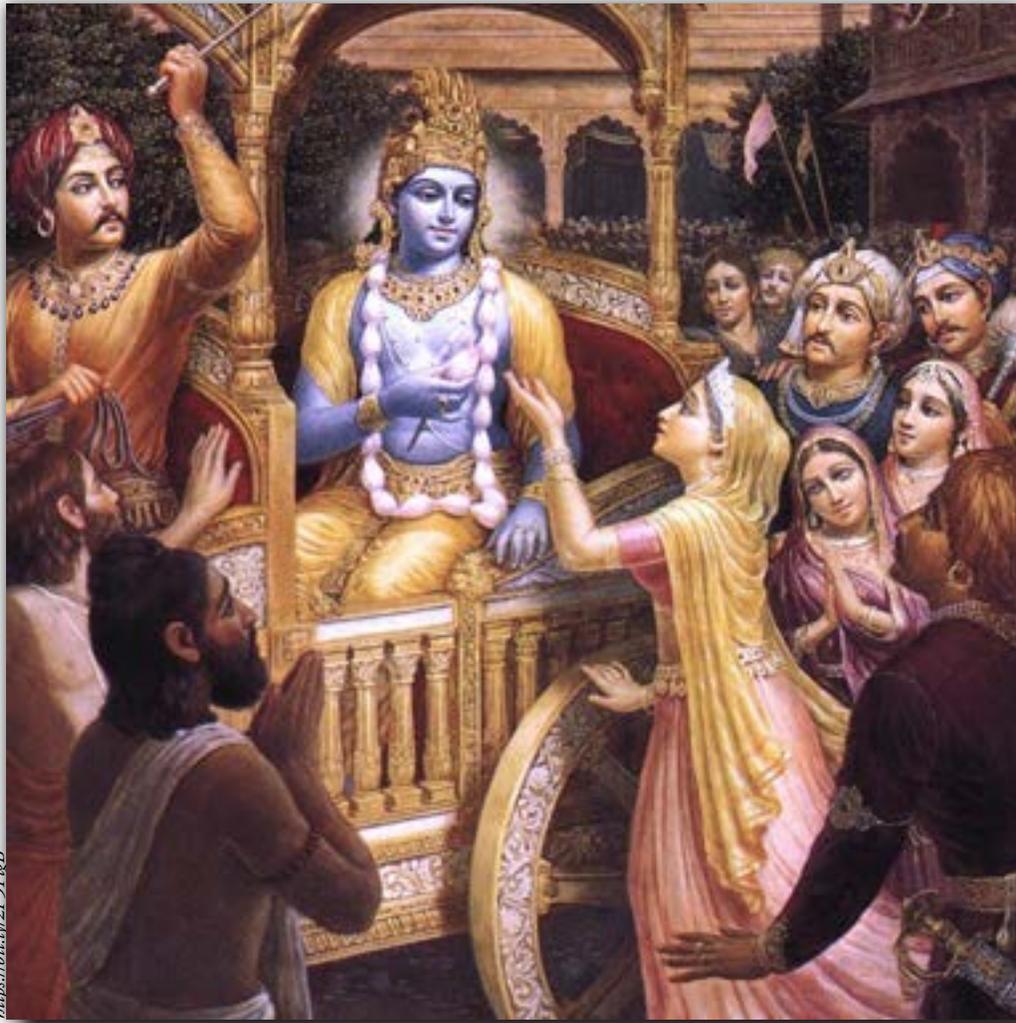
Apart from what should be a ‘main concern’ of positives; victories, *satsanga*, kirtans and good times, let us examine the difficulties that we may individually/collectively undergo as we traverse the path of devotion in this present field.

We may have an ax to grind with regard to an individual, guru, management, or society. Possibly we may feel taken advantage of, manipulated, abused, and used within arenas that proclaim spiritual values, but where material agendas have sadly arisen.

Have politics pushed us into the background? Has our response to various scenarios been accommodating or reactionary? Do we focus on the grains of sand of ‘an event’ rather than the instructing panorama of the Lord’s arrangement with regard to an individual or collective?

Sometimes, due to infatuation with the comic strip of temporal incidents, we forget the larger picture, the mind and plan of the presiding ‘Overseer’. Amidst our sincere attempts, within

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<https://bit.ly/2P9FlgB>

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

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changing governments or administrations, have we supported various phases of assumed spiritual backing, representing the Supreme?

Whatever it may be, by appreciating Queen Kunti, her mood and appeal, we can at least understand what has come our way to be perfect and complete. For her, the tests are a barometer of the Lord's love, and an opportunity to live more selflessly for others.

In our case, as we operate from a platform of mixed *samskaras*, the difficulties in devotion may force us to digest a painful 'blessing in disguise', a correction, a direction, and hindsight bringing us together, closer to the mark. The question is, "Are the struggles part of a learning curve in devotion or ignored historical repeats?" Surely, we are also being tested in

'our response' to these unforeseen events, which are a foundation to our future.

How to move closer to this transcendental mood of Kunti, to become immune to happiness or distress, fearlessly relishing the 'God sends' within the roller coaster of time?

As the various forms of blessings come our way, may we always be 'mindful' to be 'seen by Him', then 'we can truly see', reflect, and remember, as we have become dependent on the Lord in all circumstances.

Best Wishes

Your Servant,
Bhaktisiddhanta Swami

Please Send Your Feedback To:
feedback@mukundagoswami.org

Personal Message



Dear Friends,

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

The *Caitanya Bhagavata* says that when Lord Caitanya was approximately 9 years old, he was extremely adept at Sanskrit grammar and other forms of literary pursuits.

When young Nimai's elder brother, Visvarupa took sannyasa and left home, His father, the learned Jagannatha Misra, felt that Nimai should give up His studies and stay at home, becoming an "illiterate brahmana." This was not to the liking of his mother who opined that young Nimai could never marry, because no parent would give their daughter to an uneducated man.

Jagannath Misra replied saying, among other things, that "Even if one has great material wealth, one's future is determined entirely by Lord Krishna's desire." He also told her, "Do not bother yourself thinking about your son's maintenance. I can assure you that Lord Krsna will look after Him . . . there is no need for Nimai's studies. Let my son remain in the house as an illiterate." Jagganatha Misra then told his son, "I promise you that from today You are relieved of all studies."

The Lord was disappointed . . . and day and night the Lord of Vaikuntha and his friends performed endless pranks. There was no limit to Lord Visvambara's mischievous deeds, yet his father never corrected him.

One day, while his father was away, He sat upon some unwashed pots. In Hindu society at that time this was considered unclean. The Lord's mother asked him to get down from his perch on the unclean cooking utensils and said to him sternly that it was wrong to sit upon the dirty pots. The Lord countered, saying that it was impossible to know the difference between clean and unclean because he was not educated. His mother protested, saying that his father would be home soon. She then forcibly pulled the Lord off of the pots and bathed him.

Shortly thereafter Sacimata was assailed by her neighbors who asked, "Why do you forbid Nimai to continue His education? After that, Jagganatha Misra returned, and the neighbors said to him, "You are truly fortunate that your son wants to learn of his own volition." And on and on they went. Jagganatha Misra ultimately replied, "You are all my dearest friends, whatever you decide I must consent to."

Then, with His father's permission, Sri Caitanya joyfully resumed His studies.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

Mukunda Goswami

