



ISKCON
Congregational Development
Ministry

Founder Acarya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Congregational *Development*

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What the Future Holds for those Born or Grown in ISKCON?

By Kaunteya das –Congregational Development Co-minister

Professor Rodney Stark, a leading academic in the field of sociology of religion, in his paper “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail” identifies ten reasons of why some religious groups grow and survive for generations while other groups dwindle and disappear.

He expresses one of the ten elements: “They [the successful religious movements] socialize the young sufficiently well as to minimize both defection and the appeal of reduced strictness.” In other words they know how to integrate the youth born or grown within the group to ensure that:



Contd... “What the Future Holds...”

- The young continue to identify with the group’s teachings.
- The young adopt the lifestyle espoused by the group.
- The young remain or become active in the group.
- The young don’t promote lower standards; they don’t attempt to water down the practices of the group.

Integrating young people born or who have grown up in a particular religious group is, in one sense, more challenging when the group demands high levels of commitments. Most of the active devotees in our movement are, to use a sociological expression, “new converts.” In other words they adopted the philosophy and the practices as adults, as a personal choice of identity and affiliation.



On the other hand for the boys and girls, the men and women who were born or grew up in our movement, the dynamics are often different; they might or might not have chosen to be dedicated followers, or they

might or they might not have chosen at what level of dedication they want to practice Krishna consciousness. In some cases they might not have yet identified the service they wish to offer; in other cases what they want to do as an occupation or where they want to live might also not be clear.

Srila Prabhupada’s disciples are obviously getting older; some have already left this world. In the highest roles in the Society – such as GBC members and *diksa-gurus* – they are being gradually but inexorably succeeded by disciples of disciples of Srila Prabhupada. Nonetheless the presence of ‘home-grown’ youth at the helm of various projects – local, national or international – is very scanty, mostly conspicuous by its absence, despite the fact that thousands of children have been born in ISKCON, starting in the ‘60s, some of them being well into their forties.

It’s beyond the scope of this short article to deeply analyze the reasons, manifestations and ramifications of this difficulty in the ‘passing of the torch’



from one biological generation of devotees to another.

In his paper Prof. Stark writes: “It may be useful to note that each successful movement for which data exists finds important things for young people to do on behalf of their faith—ways in which youth can exhibit and build commitment. Hence, movements get more from their young people to the extent that they ask more of them.”

Let’s face it: We have not been able to integrate the youth of ISKCON *at the level envisioned by Srila Prabhupada*. Few positive examples here and there don’t tilt the scale of the statistics to the side of success.

In trying to gain an understanding of the situation we could discuss the influence of the materialistic culture on the expecta-



tions, plans and dreams of the younger generations. We could talk about the performance of parents as role models or about the parents' educational choices (and the scarcity of devotional choices available to them). We could talk about the inadequate (or, in some cases, non-existent) systems for taking care of householders who would wish to dedicate themselves to a life of full-time missionary or administrative activities in ISKCON. We could study how some of the elders cling to their posts due to lack of alternative maintenance. We could explore the reasons for the lack of trust the seniors may feel about the juniors. We could argue about the levels of faith different individuals possess. We could focus on topics as diverse and far-reaching as previous-life impressions, free will, self-sufficient communities, *bhakti* and *varnasrama*, and so on. And especially we could talk about how to avoid the mistakes we have made. How to prevent the future generations from ha-

ving to face the same level of challenging experiences as in the past? When (new convert) devotees have children, they might assume that their children will make the same choice and also decide to become 'serious devotees.' Nothing, though, indicates that this is an obvious choice. It's not uncommon to see a one-year old child saying, in broken words: "Paphupa, Paphupa," while his starry-eyed parents jubilantly announce, "See, he is saying 'Prabhupada!'" They may naively take the baby's innocent behavior as a sign of spiritual excellence or as a guarantee of continued dedication throughout his life. But, who knows what will happen when the child hits puberty and the teenage years? Who knows what that child will be thinking, feeling and doing at fifteen or at eighteen? What can we do to inspire that child to

keep steadily walking on the progressive path of developing *bhakti*?

ISKCON is about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2016; with some events starting this year, 2015. At fifty we can still consider ourselves a young movement, solidly within the initial learning curve of history. But, are we really learning the lessons from the past half century? Are we having serious, open dialogues on how to best facilitate the progress of souls who have taken birth or grown in devotees' families? Are we discussing how to pass on the 'burden of love' of missionary responsibilities to younger devotees (and not only to new-converts)? Hopefully we can focus on honestly exploring the present situation, studying the causes of the challenges we faced, the failures we experienced, with the aim at finding a way to a better future.



The Success of a Youth Program

Interview with Manorama Das, ISKCON Youth Minister

How would you suggest devotees engage the youth?

It often starts with developing friendships, relationships with the youth in your community. If you are in a leadership capacity at your temple and you are wondering how to inspire and engage the community youth, you'll likely need to invest some time in gaining their trust, becoming their friend, spending quality time together first, before commanding anyone to go and clean the kitchen. Go on a camping trip or two with your youth on a weekend. Have some adventures together. Create a bond between them as a group, around devotional adventure activities, and develop a relationship of care and real friendship. And look far into the future. Don't just see the youth as cheap labor to clean the kitchen after a festival, or pick up the trash... two common services that temples like to engage our youth in. Look at this young person standing in front of you as a future leader of our society. How would you engage him or her? How can you help facilitate and encourage them to give their best effort to becoming serious about Krishna consciousness in this lifetime, to become a lover of Krishna and to share that love with others?

Why do you think your bus tours inspire the youth?

Youth love to travel and experience the world, see new places. There seems to be an innate curiosity within each of us that drives us to

want to explore what's outside of our village, outside of our state or country. Combine that interest with a deep longing for friendship, community, acceptance within a peer group, along with a desire to have Krishna conscious immersive experiences at festivals, on Harinamas, and when visiting temples, and you have an attractive formula. I'd say that youth come back from a tour having made lasting friendships with other devotee youth, establishing strong bonds that will carry them through good and bad times in the future. Devotee friendships are important sadhu sangha for the rest of their lives. Of course, serving the Holy Name and the Vaishnavas on these tours is what transforms our hearts and gives us that spiritual high experience that we long for and want more of whenever we get home from a bus tour.

In what areas of ISKCON would you like the youth to participate more?

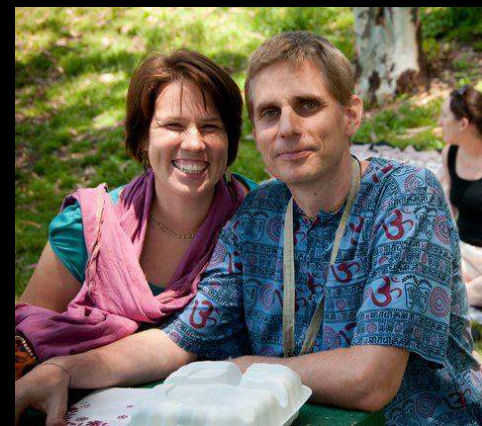
We are a Sankirtana movement, from a lineage of "kirtananandis" who want to broadcast the glories of Krishna to every town and village. Srila Prabhupada and our parents' and grandparents' generation of devotees took great pains to establish Krishna consciousness around the world, to start the temples we now visit and take for granted.

Our parents are getting old. Many of the stalwart leaders of ISKCON are in their mid 70s, reaching their 80s.

There's an urgency now more than ever for our young people to become serious. There's an opportunity here for each one of you to do something wonderful for Lord Chaitanya. Help



expand the Krishna consciousness movement just a little bit, within your lifetime. Start a Bhakti-yoga club at your college or university. Start a weekly or monthly gathering at your home, if you live far enough from the nearest temple where there are other friends and co-workers who could benefit from regular Krishna conscious get togethers. Consider devoting some of your time living as a missionary, working full-time at an ISKCON temple, for a year or two or more. You could serve in so many different capacities such as a gardener, pujari, Harinama Sankirtana leader, temple commander, temple president. We now have 500+ temples around the world, and many of them are in need of your help. And why not be bold and open new temples? Pick your favorite tourist destination in the world and open a temple or a prasadam restaurant. Do something wonderful. Become a moon for Lord Chaitanya.



Manorama prabhu and his wife , Jay Sri Radhe , run yearly bus tours in the USA and Mexico for young devotees. For more information, please visit: <http://youthbustour.com/>

Right from the source

Gradually more and more ISKCON Youth are involved in taking leadership, in pushing on the Sankirtan movement. Here, we feature an interview with one of such young devotees:



Mcklein (Madhava) Javeri is a gurukuli from Vrindavan who is currently living in Brisbane, Australia. He has completed a Business and Drama dual-degree in 2014 and moved on to work in management consulting after graduation. He has been involved with organising a number of festivals in Brisbane including Janmastmi, Ratha Yatra, Holi Festival of Colours, and occasionally directs Krishna Conscious plays.

Please tell us about some of your service engagements in the Brisbane yatra.

In the past many years, the main service for the “Brisbane Youth” (we are a little older now!) has been to organise some of the major festivals and public events like Janmastamis and Golden Moon Festivals, so I’ve been fortunate to keep engaged there too.

A significant milestone was achieved earlier in June when we celebrated Brisbane’s first Ratha Yatra Festival right in the middle of the city – in front of the town hall. That was a proud moment for ISKCON Brisbane and a nice offering to Srila Prabhupada.

Late last year, I was also involved in hosting Brisbane’s first major Holi festival – Spring Flare - which will soon become a hallmark event in Brisbane’s event calendar being supported by the local and state government.

How did you come about organising festivals as your main service?

Somehow that has always been a service that has excited me. Even in gurukul, I was elected as the Festival Coordinator on the student council. Here in Brisbane, I’ve fortunately found myself in some great association and continued in that engagement. I think it actually star-

ted off with the “Maha-Kirtans” which was initially a youth-driven festival initiative that rode the global kirtan-wave as it happened around five years ago. We built solid relationships through kirtan and just as we were deciding that it was time to take on some major services, the opportunity to organise Janmastami at our new temple property came up. I feel that was somewhat a turning point for our yatra which had just gone through tumultuous times. To see the youth pull-off such a successful festival re-ignited everyone’s enthusiasm.. I feel incredibly fortunate to be around some really fired-up individuals and we’ve just fed off each other’s energy to do more and more since then.

What have you learnt? Any realisations that you would like to share?

Heaps! Firstly, it is sometimes difficult – actually – it is always difficult to take on such services, but the difficulties are paltry in comparison to the sense of fulfillment in being able to serve Srila Prabhupada in some little manner; he who took on unlimited troubles for us. In the intensity of organising festivals our relationships (the youth) took a bit of a hit and so we are now learning to rebalance and reconnect through kirtan, which we found wasn’t happening anymore. It is important to continue cultivating those relationships outside of the service.

Secondly, take some risks for Krishna! Spring Flare was a dream but also a hairy monster of an ambition to materialize. Leading up to the event it seemed that the impossible was at every corner but somehow things would just happen. A lot of perseverance, prayer, and ultimately surrender was to be found on that journey. The thing that kept me going the whole time was an instruction from Shyamsundara

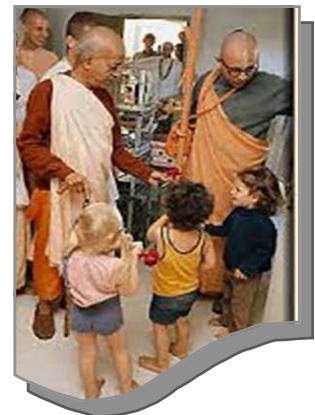
Prabhu in his Memories of Srila Prabhupada video. He spoke of all the incredibly impossible things they were achieving during the early days of the movement and asked for us to also just put our necks out on the line for Krishna and watch him do the miraculous. I can personally attest to that experience and hope that I may continue to serve in such a fashion onwards.

Finally, association is everything! You can’t do much on your own and if it wasn’t for the Brisbane crew, I don’t know where I might be.

What is your vision for the future?

Personally, I want to strengthen my own spiritual life by getting back in tune with the basics – chanting, reading, and associating. I know that I’ve neglected these aspects which becomes quite revealing as you look at the transformations (or lack of) which should be happening within.

I also hope to connect with others in our generation from around the world. I know some friends like Manu (Radhadesh), Gopinath (Washington DC) and Prem Naam (London) are heading up some great projects and take a lot of inspiration from their service. At some point in the future the responsibility of seeing this Krishna Conscious movement flourish will fall squarely on our shoulders. I know that collectively we can take the available guidance and beg for empowerment from the previous generations of ISKCON devotees, Srila Prabhupada, and predecessor Acharyas to ensure that things go on nicely. It behoves us to do no less.



Who are the Pandava Sena?



Pandava Sena is an organization of strong inspired young people who empower, enliven and fire up others to serve Sri-la Prabhupada's mission.

This ISKCON Youth group, based in the UK, is about each person as an individual: finding their own answers to their questions and thoughts. There are many people who think deeply about life, but have no means to share their thoughts in real life. This society provides a platform by which people can connect, interact, and discuss relevant life issues with like-minded people.

They preach to university students by showing how our scriptures provide cutting-edge tools for modern day life. They are able to show this by their diversified group and acquaintances which include bankers, lawyers, doctors and social leaders from different

backgrounds and all walks of life who use these techniques to make their lives successful, and more importantly, happy.

They organize many programs, kirtans, and sangas that bring youth together to inspire, en-



courage, and motivate each other to be happy and productive in their Krishna Consciousness. Their website (www.psenasena.com), on the media section will present you with videos of their annual retreats to different European temples, which are made up of students and young working people. As a regular feature of their programs, they invite senior devotees such as Sacinandana Swami, Kadamba Kanana Swami, BB Govinda Swami, Bhakti Caru Swami and other well known kirtanias to facilitate and inspire the group members.

When the we, the ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry, approached them about creating a world-wide network of ISKCON Youth programs, Sadhbuja Caitanya Das, one of the main coordinators wrote back, "I sincerely pray and hope that this is the start of a wonderful service relationship between yatra's which will please the devotees and Lord Caitanya!" – (letter to Mukunda Murari Das/ CDM Youth Coordinator).

We encourage those interested in knowing about successful Youth programs to contact these wonderful young devo-



tees, who apart from all their amazing services, are very generous in sharing their wealth of knowledge and experience.



How I came to Krishna Consciousness

By Vraja Gopal Das

I was born in Bogota, Colombia in a catholic family but most of my uncles were aspiring devotees. I was baptized and had the first communion but never was strictly a follower. At age 8 my mother joined the devotees and got initiated into ISKCON. At age 11 we moved to Alachua Florida to what seemed to be a spiritual oasis.

There I got my first full exposure to how wonderful Krsna consciousness was. I had a wonderful childhood going to a devotee school and participating in KC activities as well as traveling in the summer trips with H.H. Rtdadvaja Swami.

When I got to High school I got self-conscious of my "religion" due to high school peer pressures and eventually got into a party lifestyle that most teenagers live throughout high school. I got distanced from the Krsna conscious lifestyle that I had enjoyed so much before. Luckily my mother never gave up on me and stayed very much grounded spiritually and always led by example by always being engaged in devotional service.

After much partying, confusion, and pain that the such lifestyle comes with, I somehow got exposed to Krsna again and one of my friends invited me to go to the Festival of India. There I would meet my spiritual master H.H. Radhanatha Swami.



During that year I again got inspired towards devotional service and Krishna consciousness. When I got back home I tried to apply Krsna into my life more and more every day. Even though it was hard and I still had one foot in and one foot out of the party life, I finally decided to go to another Festival of India tour.

This time I got more inspired and decided I wanted to dive more into Srila Prabhupada's books. I moved into the LA temple for 3 months where for the first time in my life I was experiencing Krishna all day every day. I was doing service in the kitchen, book distribution, and some studying. Shortly after that I got invited to go to Australia and help with the Prasadam distribution program there. I did that for two months which landed me in NYC to help at the Bhakti center with their mission to distribute prasadam.

I have been here in NYC doing full time service for two years now. In October of last year we opened the restaurant for business. We have a boutique with Sri-

la Prabhupadas books and many other KC items. We also distribute hundreds of plates of Prasadam a week.

In July of 2014 I had the great fortune of being accepted into the Parampara by taking initiation from H.H. Radhanatha Swami. I received the name Vraja Gopal Das (previously Mathura).

Ultimately I decided to move to NYC because I heard from many devotees including my Guru Maharaja about how important NYC is for preaching purposes and how much potential there is for people to learn about Krsna. It has been a pleasure to see how many people are attracted to Krsna and how easy it is to engage them, all due to the mercy of Srila Prabhupada coming here to introduce this very wonderful opportunity of service to the Lord.



CDM Youth Report

Around a year ago, ISKCON Congregational Development (CDM) Minister, Jayapataka Swami, on a phone call requested our central office in Mayapur to produce a report on Youth initiatives in our movement around the world. "We don't have enough staff, or funds to take care of the youth" was the answer that we gave him. Calmly and after explaining the scope and areas that he wanted to be covered, Jayapataka Maharaja concluded, "...have faith, Krishna will provide". Within a few days Mukunda Rico ("Muki"), from Alachua, came to our office asking for service. Without much prelude he was entrusted with the task of "taking care of the youth". Accepting this service at heart, he went on collecting data from yatras around the world and created a network to share resources in the area of youth



preaching. Not only did his service go to far and distant temples but locally -here in Mayapur- he organized a dynamic youth



program with the Sri Mayapur International School, supported by the local management. He also visited Bali, Kuala Lumpur and Penang encouraging local young devotees to take more responsibility within our movement. Being an ex-gurukuli and a pupil of Manorama dasa, ISKCON Youth Minister, Muki requested Manorama prabhu to come to Mayapur to help youth initiatives to get more momentum. They both presented seminars on Youth engagement and leadership in Sridhama Mayapur during the Gaura Purnima festival to the GBC and to other young devotees and leaders.

Although Muki is returning to the USA, he will continue his service from abroad and will be the Youth Project Coordinator for the Congre-

gational Ministry. He is currently organizing a strong presence for youth presentations during the next ISKCON Leadership Sanga (ILS) in 2016 and we hope many of the young leaders will benefit from such event.

From the CDM office in Mayapur we extend our gratitude for Muki's dedication to his service. We are confident that his endeavours, assisting the youth, are a great service to Srila Prabhupada's movement.



"Our Society is like one big family and our relationship should be based on love and trust. We must give up the fighting spirit and use our intelligence to push ahead."

-Srila Prabhupada; letter to Upendra (August 6, 1970)

ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry
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