



ISKCON Communications

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-*Acharya* His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Seeking Strength in Times of Crisis

A Statement of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, ISKCON
Ministry of Communications
Anuttama Dasa, Director
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As a Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition focused on uplifting human society out of suffering and helping us to connect with the Supreme, the ultimate shelter and source of peace, ISKCON members are distressed to see the world so deeply impacted by the turmoil of COVID-19.

We offer our prayers for the well-being of all those affected by the pandemic. We pray for those souls who have passed away, and for their family members and friends. We also pray for those currently ill and their loved ones. And, we pray for those millions of people who suffer from the financial impact of the coronavirus and who worry for the safety of their families.

We offer our gratitude to those on the front lines who are protecting both neighbors and strangers. We offer our deepest appreciation for the tens of thousands of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals who put aside their own safety to protect those in need. We also thank the police, government officers, bus drivers, grocery employees and the many “ordinary”—yet heroic men and women—who have put aside fear and personal comfort to provide for their brothers and sisters.

We are also inspired to see fellow believers in the Divinity, of whatever tradition, congregating in novel ways to keep their faith and their connections alive. We commend people of all faiths, now prohibited from ordinary avenues of communing, who still study holy books, pray, chant, and worship at home and in virtual forums both large and small. You give us faith that, as stated in the Vaishnava teachings, our devotion to God can never be hindered by any material obstacle.

It is said that the most difficult times bring out the best in people. The wisdom traditions of the world also give us strength, hope, determination and different perspectives on life that enable us to continue in the face of great evil and strife. Religion and spirituality throughout history have played an essential role to uplift us.

But why must we all suffer so? The prophets, avatars, saints and sages of the past often called into question the direction of human society. What is that direction today? It seems we are driven, almost against our will, primarily by one shared goal, one driving force: To exploit the resources of the earth in search of unending economic growth and unchecked consumerism, and a belief that temporal pleasures can fulfil the desires of the heart. Our planet, and now our health, have become collateral damage of this worldview.

Now, despite all our economic and technological advancements, we have been forced to slow down. Could it be that in the middle of this crisis of disease, we have the opportunity to awaken to our crisis of the spirit?

Times like these can bring us together to understand our vulnerabilities, our dependence upon each other, our planet, and God. Many individuals, communities, and organizations are responding with dignity and hope. We are making masks, singing concerts in quieted cathedrals, sharing kirtan in praise with friends and families across continents online. We are responding with compassion to ensure our neighbors survive. ISKCON is trying to do our part, too. In India, for example, ISKCON has fed over twenty-seven million free meals to those in need.

While our hearts break seeing the suffering all around us, the forced shutdown is revealing something. Our rivers are cleaner. Our air easier to breathe. We can hear birds again in our cities, we see mountains more clearly.

So, during this global time out, are there lessons to learn?

We now have time to be more attentive to our own bodies and the well-being of others. We should be careful to not minimize the corona threat, but take all reasonable precautions to protect ourselves and others.

Most of us have more time for ourselves. Time to read. To study. To meditate. To pray. To connect. To create. Having slowed down we can celebrate the gifts of family and friends—even at a distance. It can be a time to grow, to learn patience, and to learn to appreciate others and the sacrifices they make for us.

It is an opportunity to realize that we too are visitors in this world, passing through for a few years, days and hours. And while here, we are meant to learn to be respectful and responsible for each other, for the world, and for our own soul.

It is also an opportunity to question our choices. To realize that we need to act in more environmentally responsible ways. It is now confirmed that our pace of life is choking the planet. Once we slowed down, nature began to regenerate. Scientific evidence has shown that our abuse of animals in particular, including a meat-centered diet, not only contributes to pollution, heart disease, cancers, premature death, etc. but is a

significant causal factor of global pandemics. It is time to consider more viable and healthier options, including a vegetarian diet.

It is time to consider alternative behaviors that respect nature, life, our bodies, our planet, and the divine purposes we are called to. It is time to learn to measure progress not just by the Gross National Product, but by our collective health, happiness, peace of mind, and spiritual progress.

It is *not* the right time, nor is it ever, to succumb to fear, to strike out against those who are different, or more vulnerable, or those of other faiths, nationalities or ethnicities, or to increase racial or communal tensions. Viruses do not distinguish between people, neither should we. God gave this world to all of us, let us learn to share it as equals.

Our prayer is that at the end of this crisis we will be better human beings. More introspective, more appreciative, more open to connect with other people, and with God. And, humbled enough to realize that that way things have been—the high pressure, materialistic culture we've subscribed to—is not the way things must be.

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The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or ISKCON, is a Gaudiya Vaishnava (monotheistic) tradition within the broader Vedic, or Hindu, family of faiths. Founded in 1966 by Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in New York City, ISKCON has grown to a worldwide community of 600 temples, as well as eco-villages, educational institutes and schools, vegetarian restaurants, and food relief projects. ISKCON's publishing arm, the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, has published over 525 million books and magazines in dozens of languages teaching the culture of bhakti-yoga, or devotion to God.