

Forcing Change



Visiting India in Utah **A PICTORIAL JOURNEY**

By Carl Teichrib (www.forcingchange.org)

“When you came in, the smells and sights caught your attention, yes?”

“Yes,” I answered, “the food was *very* tasty.”

After a second helping of Saag Paneer, a wonderful Indian dish made of spinach and paneer cheese, the guru had me sit down for a talk. His wife and assistant joined us, and others filtered in and out of the conversation.

“Why here, why Utah?” I asked.

“Krishna directed us to this place,” the Hindu teacher said.



Index:

Visiting India, P. 1.

Transhuman Worldview, P. 7.



Carl Teichrib, Editor

I knew there was more to the story than simply “Krishna directed,”¹ but as my time was limited and my host’s English was difficult to follow, I listened more than I asked.

Since 1998, the Sri Sri Radha Krishna Temple - also known as the Lotus Temple - has been a landmark in the predominantly Mormon community of Spanish Fork, Utah. Located approximately 50 miles south of Salt Lake City, the Temple is comprised of gleaming white domes, over 100 arches and columns, a grand outdoor staircase and upper level walk-around patio. This edifice, set against a mountain backdrop, is visible from Interstate 15.

Established as part of the ISKCON network - the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, also known as the Hare Krishna Movement - the Lotus Temple’s spiritual heritage is built around the teachings of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (b.1896, d.1977). Thirty-nine other ISKCON temples and Vedic centers dot the United States, each one advancing the mission of Prabhupada.

Noted for his tremendous influence upon Western culture and his voluminous writings, Swami Prabhupada’s message was one of religious universalism and conscious transformation. “Actually, it doesn’t matter,” Prabhupada famously explained in 1974, “Krishna or Christ - the name is the same. The main point is to follow the injunctions of the Vedic scriptures that recommend chanting the name of God in this age.”²

The name chanted is Krishna - the avatar of the Hindu god, Vishnu - and in repeating the Hare Krishna mantra and through the practice of bhakti-yoga, the follower embraces the unity of religions. Prabhupada said it this way,

“To practice bhakti-yoga [loving service to God] means to become free from designations like Hindu, Muslim, Christian, this or that, and simply to serve God. We have created Christian, Hindu, and Mohammedan religions, but when we come to a religion without designations, in which we don’t think we are Hindus or Christians or Mohammedans, then we can speak of pure religion, or bhakti.”³

While I was at the Lotus Temple, the resident teacher explained to me how Hinduism is now evangelizing the West through yoga and the Holi Festival of Colors - a springtime celebration of good over evil and the triumph of devotion, as depicted through the legend of Holika.⁴

Keep in mind: Holi is culturally leveraged through the hugely popular 5-K color runs and the “color festivals” that happen across North America. Often, participants in these color events are unaware of the Hindu connection - for in many cases the religious aspect is buried, ignored, or stripped of context. This fact has angered some Hindus, who see it as an appropriation of culture and religion for commodification.

That yoga promotes Hinduism is relatively easy to understand, as the two are intrinsically linked (see *Forcing Change*, Vol. 9, Iss.7). But how do color runs and celebrations, and the Western embrace of the Holi festival, advance Hinduism? By providing an exciting and vibrant

experience that promotes social acceptance of Eastern customs, and be extension - implicitly or explicitly - Eastern spirituality.

It's true that the Hindu element can sometimes be overshadowed in Western color celebrations, especially the 5-K runs, which are typically advertised as a community party. However, the Holi Festival of Colors at Lotus Temple *vigorously* promotes Eastern spirituality. Krishna is front-and-center.

Each spring thousands of people flock to Spanish Fork, Utah, for the annual Holi Festival, billed as the largest in the United States [see picture below]. In 2015, approximately 65,000 people converged at the Lotus Temple for three days of music, yoga, and celebration. Fires burned in remembrance of Holika,⁵ Bhakti music and DJs energized the crowd, colors were tossed in the air and upon each other, and multitudes chanted the *Maha Mantra*; "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare..."

Since the Holi Festival began at Spanish Fork, the majority attending *have not* been devotees of the Hindu religion, even though the celebration venerates Krishna: they have been Mormons.

However, this Mormon interest extends beyond the Holi fest.

"Every Sunday," the Lotus teacher explained to me, "100 to 150 Mormons come to the temple for yoga and the Maha Mantra."

I was surprised by this, and yet I wasn't at the same time.

The West has traditionally viewed Hinduism within the bounds of ethnicity and culture. Because of this, official conversion to the Vedic-faith isn't a significant factor in North America or in Europe, although it happens. Rather, the shift comes through the social acceptance of the Hindu worldview and its message of "spiritual living" - packaged and sold through "celebration" and "health" - regardless of a person's belief system. That's why thousands of Mormons can feel comfortable chanting the Maha Mantra, and scores of Christians ease into yoga.



In other words, the West is being Hinduized *in-fact* but not necessarily *in-name*.

On the following pages, I've posted some pictures from my time at the Sri Sri Radha Krishna Temple. Take a look, as this represents the spiritual heartbeat of the new West.

The bottom-line: We as Christians need to recognize and understand the scope and range of the Eastern influence. It has evangelized us, and now we need to respond - first to our own community, and then outside it - with the truth and love of the real Jesus Christ. **FC**



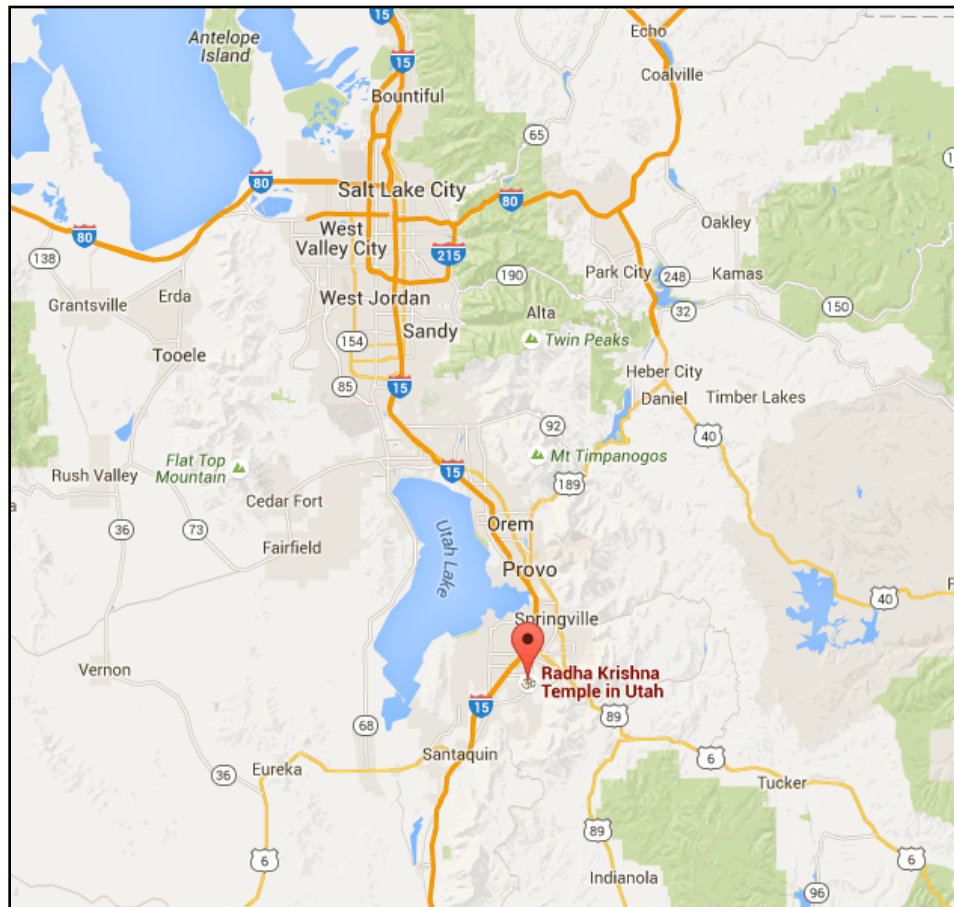
“Coming to a city near you.”
Lotus color truck at the temple.
The color supplies are located
behind the temple in a large
building.





Inside the temple: Shrines to Hindu deities and an alcove to venerate Swami Prabhupada.





Endnotes:

¹ For a short history, read the article, "Utah Krishna Pioneers," at www.utahkrishnas.org/utah-krishna-pioneers-2

² The full conservation between Father Emmanuel Jungclaussen and Swami Prabhupada can be found here: www.krishna.com/krishna-or-christ-name-same

³ See endnote #3.

⁴ The legend of Holika goes something like this: The demon king, Hiranyakashyap, wanted everyone on earth to worship him only. However, Hiranyakashyap's son, Prahlad, was a devotee of Lord Naarayana, also known as Lord Vishnu - a primary god in Hinduism. Because of this devotion, the father tried on many occasions to kill his son, but Vishnu gave protection to Prahlad. Finally, the demon monarch asked his sister, Holika, to murder the boy. Wearing a magical cloth that kept her safe from fire, Holika thus persuaded Prahlad to enter an inferno so that he could sit on her lap. What Holika didn't know was this: The cloth only protected her if she was in the fire alone. Meanwhile, Prahlad had entered the blaze chanting to Lord Vishnu. He was saved, and Holika burned to death.

Another legend associated with the Festival of Colors centers on Krishna, who, as a boy, was jealous of Radha's fair complexion. In a moment of mischief, Krishna colored her face to make her as himself.

In the Hindu festival of Holi, fires are lit to symbolically celebrate goodness over evil and the love of a devotee to Lord Vishnu. The next day continues with festivities, throwing colors (dyed corn starch) on each other, enjoying music and dance, and other activities.

⁵ See endnote #4.

A TRANSHUMANIST WORLDVIEW:

The Three Laws of Zoltan, and Other Dreams of Immortality

By Stacey Buhler

Editor's Note: Stacey Buhler wrote this paper as a student at Millar College of the Bible. She provides a review and summary of the transhuman desire for immortality and human-engineered deification, a topic explored in other editions of *Forcing Change*. Some editing has been done from the original to aid in the flow and better fit the *Forcing Change* format.

Introduction

Transhumanism is a concept that is becoming more apparent and desired in the world today.

The thought of transhumanism is very appealing to many people because without the hope of Christ, living on this earth forever seems like the best option there is. The desire not to die and to avoid pain is ingrained in human beings. Each person has a desire to live forever, to be immortal, and it would seem as though such a possibility is closer now than ever before, technologically speaking. However, is this actually feasible? Is it really desirable? Most importantly, how does this concept affect Christians, and how can we stand up against it?

These questions are important as we work to understanding transhumanism, and how to be a strong follower of Christ in the midst of it all.

What is Transhumanism?

Transhumanism is the belief and theory that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology.¹ The basic desire of a transhumanist is to become immortal, to become God, going so far as to say “there is no God but man.”² Of course, this is not really a new concept. The technology is new and the methods are new, but people have been attempting to become gods for thousands of years.³ Even in Egypt during the time of Moses and Joseph, Pharaoh was clearly trying to be the God of the universe. Unfortunately for Pharaoh and those of his ilk, they only succeeded in having some power for a short time.

Likewise, witchcraft has been used for thousands of years to move beyond the human; even Saul went to a medium for advice. Witchcraft is not often associated with transhumanism, but it fits within the idea of seeking and asserting power beyond the normal bounds, and some transhumanists note that their movement is linked as a modern expression.⁴

“Transhumanism,” wrote another advocate, “is a name for the way of thinking that challenges the premise that the human condition is and will remain essentially unalterable.”⁵

There are three laws to a system of ethics that a transhumanist should follow, according to Zoltan Istvan, who is running for US President under the Transhumanist Party:

- 1) a transhumanist must safeguard one’s own existence above all else,
- 2) a transhumanist must strive to achieve omnipotence as expediently as possible – so long as one’s actions do not conflict with the first law,
- 3) a transhumanist must safeguard value in the universe - so long as one’s actions do not conflict with the first and second laws.⁶



It is easy to see that transhumanist values, as given by Zoltan Istvan, are extremely self-centred and power hungry - the main concern being to improve the state of human life to a point of immortality and God-hood. Looking at these three points demonstrates this very well.

The first law says that one should look out for oneself above all others.⁷ This is incredibly self-centred and goes against what many people think, even if they do not have a faith in God. It is not that difficult to realize that humans have a desire to be cared for, and therefore they care for others, because even if they are not filled with the love of God, many people still take time to show their love to their friends. However, sad as this may be, there are also many people who will trample on others in order to “get to the top.” For Christians this is especially disturbing, because we are told in Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).⁸

The second law says that omnipotence must be achieved as quickly as possible; you must gain all the power!⁹ The logical flow and mindset is that if you have such power, you are invincible. Having ultimate power means that you make the rules and everyone has to do as you say. In a very real way, this attitude is reflected in our daily lives: we want to be able to control our surroundings, the people we come in contact with, and our own fate and future.

The third law says that one must safeguard value in the universe.¹⁰ It is interesting that this would be one of the main laws of Zoltan’s transhumanism, since individualist transhumanism is just that, very individualistic.¹¹ However, in dealing with the fact that transhumanists are trying to upgrade *nature*, the aspect of value becomes important - but whose values, and to what end?

Ironically, another supporter of transhumanism has said, “Transhumanism is not a philosophy with a fixed set of dogmas.”¹²

The Goals of Transhumanism

We humans have many goals and aspirations, but when we consider the seventy or eighty years to accomplish those goals, time often does not seem long enough.¹³

This extension of time is one of the reasons transhumanism has gained popularity over the last few years; people do not want to die, and wish to remain productive into the indefinite future. If they are convinced that a treatment that promising longevity is available - a pill, or some other technique that will grant longer life - they are willing to pay money for it. The anti-aging industry, which is largely cosmetic, demonstrates this basic human desire, and people are willing to buy “the promise” no matter what it costs.¹⁴ Of course, there are some enhancements that are being developed now that are far too fantastic and expensive for the average person to purchase.¹⁵ However, I suspect that many people would be willing to sacrifice, and do so deeply, in pursuing the promise of immortality - the birth into the transhuman.

Mark Pesce, another transhumanist, says that “like natural birth, the birth into the transhuman is inevitable.”¹⁶

Pesce has come to the conclusion that humanity will re-birth into something more. Along with him, many other people are searching for technical ways to improving and, if possible, transcend human life. The 2045 Initiative, for example, demonstrates this drive for techno-immortality. Topics explored by the 2045 Initiative include uploading a person’s consciousness and personality into cyberspace, apparently allowing them to live forever in a virtual world-based avatar. Going beyond this, the 2045 Initiative also suggests moving consciousness into a non-human carrier, an advanced robot that would house the personality or consciousness of the uploaded individual. Immortality would thus be gained, according to the transhumanist mindset.

Our ability to build and design understandably feeds the transhuman aspiration. In fact, advanced robotics with the ability to learn and interact with their surroundings already exist, representing hope in a techno-future.

The technology around transhumanism doesn’t just feed dreams of immortality. Other associated goals include creating robots that are able to work and solve problems. Such intelligent machines¹⁷ could offer real advantages within industry. Another associated example is lifelong emotional well-being through the re-calibration of the brain’s pleasure centres.¹⁸ Essentially, this would be achieved through a highly technical anti-depressant that leaves no side effects and allows one to function normally. “Personality pills” that one can take to attain more desirable traits, such as eliminating shyness, is one example.¹⁹ Another possibility that’s associated with transhumanism is nanotechnology, creating robot assemblers that can make virtually anything by manipulating matter at its molecular level.²⁰ Industrial uses and possibilities abound.

However, it is the hope of technically extending life, and the desire to beat death, that drives much of the transhuman worldview. People desperately want to extend life, for the inevitability of death is an ever-present reality.

Implications for Christianity

In considering the topic of transhumanism, I watched Mark Pesce's documentary *Becoming Transhuman*. Many of the things he said were not unique to transhumanism, but were rather "twists" on Christianity.

He said, for example, that, "We seek to bless ourselves with perfect knowledge and will, to become as gods and to transform the universe in our image for our own delight, as it is on earth, so it shall be in the heavens."²¹



This is a distorted parallel to the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). As it says in Ecclesiastes 1:9 "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."

There truly is nothing new under the sun; as was said earlier, the methods may change, but the desires are the same.

Something I found interesting was the song at the end of Pesce's documentary; the hymn, "Nearer My God to Thee." I thought this was a little strange because the song is about the Creator who is worshiped by Christians; the twist is that Pesce proclaims a techno-divinity, that we too can become "as gods." The rebuttal to the view of transhumanism turns on the truth that there is only one God, and that humans are made in His image and thus have intrinsic worth and value.

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'." (Is. 44:6).

Our talents, personality and personhood should be enjoyable to us, and we should be satisfied with what we have because we are made in the image of God.²² "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Anything that has been created cannot be greater than the one who created it, as it says in Romans 9:20-21 "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"

God is the creator of everything in the world, therefore humans cannot attempt to be greater than God, because as we saw in Romans, what has been created has no right over the Creator. God is our creator and if we believe and trust in Him we will live with Him forever in perfection, and this will not be through our technology.

Conclusion

The reward for the Christian believer is already provided; eternity with Christ in perfection. However, for those who have no hope in God or in eternal glory, it is understandable why they would choose perpetual life on a fallen world - it is all they know, and all they can hope for. We as Christians need to reach out in love, showing them the hope available through Jesus Christ alone. Christians have the assurance of Jesus Christ that is unfailing and true; hold to that truth, and spread it far and wide.

Endnotes:

¹ Google (2014), on-line document.

² Pesce (2011), on-line document.

³ Jones (1984), p. 191.

⁴ Pesce (2011), on-line document.

⁵ Bostrom (ND), on-line document.

⁶ Istvan (2014), on-line document.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ All Scripture is in ESV.

⁹ Istvan (2014), on-line document.

¹⁰ Istvan (2014), on-line document.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bostrom (ND), on-line document.

¹³ Lindsay (2008), p. 187.

¹⁴ Lindsay (2008), p. 189.

¹⁵ Lindsay (2008), p. 221.

¹⁶ Pesce (2011), on-line document.

¹⁷ Bostrom (ND), on-line document.

¹⁸ Bostrom (ND), on-line document.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Pesce (2011), on-line document.

²² Jones (1984), p. 194.