

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

VOLUME ONE

INDRADYUMNA SWAMI



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PUBLISHING

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Arab men whose prayers to Allah gave us safe passage across the desert into Azerbaijan, and to the Mohammedan caretaker of St. Daniel's tomb in Samarkand – a gentle soul whose reading of the Koran was full of devotion for the Lord. I am also grateful to the many Mohammedans who treated us with kindness and respect as we traveled through their villages and towns. Finally, I offer my most respectful obeisances to all the Vaisnava devotees who are preaching in the lands of Islam.

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A big thank-you also to my disciple Nrsimha Kavaca Dasa, who took most of the photos and published the original two volumes many years ago.

Indradyumna Swami

INTRODUCTION

I have decided to keep a diary, not for myself but for my disciples and well-wishers. When I was young I always thought people who kept diaries were egocentric. I couldn't understand why someone would want to record for posterity what was mostly misery. But now I feel obliged to write down my joyful experiences and sober realizations as a traveling preacher and share them with my disciples, especially those who don't get to see me often. The diary will replace the "Gurudeva" newsletter produced by my disciple Nrismha Kavaca dasa, because I find it easier to write about my experiences myself. Owing to my busy and often unpredictable schedule, further installments of the diary will be published whenever possible, rather than at regular intervals.



CHAPTER ONE

THE POWER OF SIMPLE GLORIFICATION

THURSDAY MAY 18, 1995

I left St. Petersburg this morning on my way to Vladikavkaz in southern Russia, traveling with His Holiness Bhakti Brnga Govinda Maharaja, Sri Prahlada dasa and three Russian disciples - Kartikeya dasa, my bodyguard; Uttamasloka dasa, my translator; and Madhavi devi dasi, our cook. Kartikeya dasa is a personal bodyguard of Russian President Boris Yeltsin and was given one month's leave to travel with us.

Along with fifteen hundred other devotees, we observed a four-day festival in St. Petersburg including Lord Nrsimha's Appearance Day (when I initiated 104 new disciples) and my Vyasa-puja. The celebrations were incredible. The local *gurukula* staged three amazing theatrical performances, *The Appearance of Lord Nrsimbadeva*, *The Pastimes of Lord Caitanya*, and *Brhad-bhagavatamrta*. I especially wanted Govinda Maharaja to see *Brhad-bhagavatamrta*. The Russian *gurukula* children are talented young actors, and combined with their natural devotion the play brought tears to everyone's eyes. The four days went by smoothly, the only hitch being that we didn't take into consideration that it took three hours to serve prasadam to 15 hundred devotees each time.

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The southern Russian region we flew into is a safe haven in a war zone. Vladikavkaz is eighty kilometers south of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, where Russian soldiers are still fighting night battles with Chechnian guerrillas. Grozny has been devastated by the war, and refugees have taken shelter in outlying areas. Several hundred kilometers to the east of Vladikavkaz is an enclave in Azerbaijan called Karabach. Bitter fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been going on there for many years and continues today. Just 100 kilometers to the south of the city is Georgia, which has been made unstable by its recent war with Abkhazia. And six hundred kilometers to the southwest, Turkey has invaded a region of Iran in order to fight Kurdish rebels there.

As we approached Vladikavkaz Airport we saw the field lined with military helicopters complete with surface-to-air missiles and machine guns. After landing we saw Russian soldiers scurrying about everywhere. It appears that Vladikavkaz is one of the main bases for military action in Chechnya.

But any fears or anxieties were immediately dissipated when we heard the *kirtana* of the local devotees waiting to greet us in the airport.

At the head of the reception was Acaryanidhi Prabhu, the regional secretary and a disciple of His Holiness Prabhavisnu Maharaja. Any spiritual master would be proud to have such a disciple. He is a young man in his late twenties, and he organizes the preaching in this zone, a difficult area because of the warring factions as well as the nationalist spirit of the people. In such an atmosphere it is extremely difficult to establish a “foreign culture” like Krsna consciousness.

I watched in awe last year at the Rostov Ratha-yatra as Acaryanidhi fearlessly stood up to the Cossacks and the local government and demanded they allow us to perform Ratha-yatra in the city streets.

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They refused, but we went ahead anyway and tried to stage the festival. The police attacked the devotees and confiscated the Ratha cart. This year will be different, Acaryanidhi assured me. “They have to surrender and let us put on the festival,” he said.

Although fearless in his approach as a preacher, he is a mild-mannered and humble devotee. Just seeing him inspires me in my service to Srila Prabhupada. He takes many risks for Kṛṣṇa, but probably no one outside of this area knows him. He constantly travels and preaches, organizing the devotees and inspiring them in their services. He is a silent soldier whom I hope will one day be mentioned in ISKCON’s history books.

Despite the difficulties surrounding the people of the Vladikavkaz region, Govinda Maharaja (who has been here before) told me they are extremely pious. Before the Russian Tsar conquered the area in the 1700’s it was known as the Kingdom of Ossetia, one of many small kingdoms in what is now southern Russia, including nearby Chechnya. But unlike the Chechnians who are tough and warlike by nature, the Ossetians are mild mannered and peaceful. Acaryanidhi told me the Russian politicians always try to marry Ossetian women because they are renowned for their chastity, dutiful nature, and pleasant disposition. They are also some of the most beautiful women in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

We arrived in Vladikavkaz at 2:00 PM and immediately went to a program the devotees had arranged at a public hall. We were exhausted from the festivities in St. Petersburg (and for Sri Prahlada and me, six weeks of a successful but intense spring festival tour in Poland), but we quickly took *prasadam* and went on to the main street of Vladikavkaz for *harinama* to announce the program, due to start in fifteen minutes.

I asked Acaryanidhi why we were advertising the program just fifteen

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minutes before it started. My question was answered as throngs of people came out from their apartments and shops following our *harinama* party. They appeared innocent and gentle and seemed to be enjoying the *kirtana* even though they had no idea who in the world we were. Soon many were clapping, then chanting and then dancing. It was an incredible scene: Sri Prahlada was enchanting them with his melodious and sweet accordion *kirtana*, and Govinda Maharaja was getting them to dance with his friendly and outgoing nature. But the people didn't need much encouragement. They seemed to be naturally attracted.

When we entered the hall everyone in the huge crowd quickly found their seats. I took a rough head count. More than six hundred people had come.

I studied their faces. Though this is a predominantly Muslim region, the people are not fanatical, as in Iran, several hundred kilometers away. Rather, they are open and receptive. Also in the area are Christians, and surprisingly, demigod worshipers.

The presentation was simple in comparison to the professional stage programs of our festivals in Poland. After five years of festivals there, we have put together a dynamic, five-and-a-half-hour program, which on our last spring tour included a *bhajana* with forty devotees, *Bharat Natyam* dancing, Indo-jazz dancing (contemporary dance to devotional music), a puppet show, lectures, pantomime, and a Hare Krsna rock concert. Now we were before six hundred people, and all we had on the agenda was *kirtana* and a lecture.

But tonight I witnessed how much potential there is in the simple glorification of the Lord. The people listened attentively and chanted in great happiness during the *kirtana*. The program was ecstatic. It was perfect and complete with just a lecture, *kirtana*, and simple

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prasadam. We could see how Lord Caitanya's *sankirtana* attracts the masses.

At 9:00 PM the owner of the hall turned the lights out, so we took the festival to the streets. Sri Prahlada led all the devotees and most of the guests through the streets with *kirtana* for another hour and a half.

CHAPTER TWO

"WITHOUT THEM, MANY PEOPLE WOULD DIE"

FRIDAY MAY 19

After the morning program with the local devotees at the temple, I talked with Acaryanidhi about the war in nearby Chechnya as we waited for a car to take us to our apartment. Being so close to the fighting, he's had the opportunity to meet soldiers from both sides and many refugees as well. He told me the Russians were eager to take control of Chechnya to reject Chechnian independence, because the Chechnian Mafia was more powerful than the Russian Mafia throughout the CIS. But the Russians underestimated the fighting spirit of the Chechnians. When Russian tanks entered Grozny, the local people destroyed three hundred of them in the first few days of fighting. Many were destroyed by ten- or eleven-year-old Chechnian boys who would climb onto the tanks and speak Russian, as if they were Russian boys asking for help. When the soldiers opened the hatch the boys would throw Molotov cocktails inside, killing the crew and leaving the tanks to burn.

Acaryanidhi told me that although the Russians have control of the city, the soldiers are always afraid of the rebels. Thus they drink and

"WITHOUT THEM, MANY PEOPLE WOULD DIE"

take drugs. In such a condition they commit many atrocities against the Chechnians, even against women and children. After hearing this I was surprised when Acaryanidhi said, "But our Food for Life program is doing well." I was amazed that devotees were there in such dangerous conditions distributing food.

"Yes," said Acaryanidhi, "we have ten devotees there who distribute fifteen hundred plates of food every day. Without them many people would die because many are old and invalid."

I marveled at the courage of devotees who stay in a place where there is no law and order. I asked Acaryanidhi if we could visit the devotees there to encourage them, but he said the situation was too dangerous. I asked if perhaps we could arrange it at the end of my visit to the CIS in six weeks, but he smiled and said that while only ten percent of the Chechnian men are engaged in the fighting, the rest are waiting for the opportune moment to push the Russians back.

I asked what would happen to our Food for Life devotees in Grozny. "We've left them with a vehicle," said Acaryanidhi. "I've instructed them to leave when it really gets hot."

Many devotees would have left long ago," I thought. All glories to the Grozny Food for Life devotees!

In the afternoon we went to the village of Elhotovo, where we were to have an evening program. We were driven in Bhakta Tomas's 1978 black Mercedes. It formerly belonged to Communist bosses, and Bhakta Tomas bought it for one thousand American dollars in Tbilisi, Georgia, two years ago. It was a pleasant change from the usual uncomfortable, small Russian cars we travel in, but one hour into our journey the steering mechanism broke, and we had to switch to a smaller car. The journey was made more austere when

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every three meters we swerved to avoid the potholes in the road. The roads in Russia are the worst in the world. I often see open manholes leading to underground sewers on major Russian highways.

Just after we arrived at Elhotovo's village hall, the devotees from Vladikavkaz joined us in a small minibus (World War II vintage). I was surprised to see two policemen in the bus. I asked Acaryanidhi what they were doing there, and he explained that the police in Vladikavkaz offered the bus and two police officers to escort us to the village program. Although Acaryanidhi didn't see any reason for them to be there, he accepted their offer, and so the devotees went in official style.

We started a *barinama* party and proceeded through the village. The warm reaction from the villagers was even bigger than in Vladikavkaz, as the people came out of their houses and followed us. We circled the town and brought several hundred people back to the hall to hear Govinda Maharaja's lecture.

On the way back to Vladikavkaz, we were stopped at a police roadblock, a common occurrence in this country. One of the policemen looked at Govinda Maharaja and me and snickered. "What kind of hairstyles do they have?" he asked.

"They are monks," said Bhakta Tomas. "With their shaved heads, they look just like your forefathers." He was referring to the ancient Cossacks who often had shaved heads with a *sikha* or tuft of hair on top.

The policeman's face suddenly changed. "Tell them they are our brothers," he said in a respectful tone.

After a long and arduous drive, we arrived back at our apartment at midnight and went to bed.

CHAPTER THREE

"I CAN DRINK THE BLOOD OF ANY RUSSIAN SOLDIER"

SATURDAY MAY 20

When I awoke in the morning, I immediately thought of my mother. It was my 46th birthday on the Roman calendar, and I thought about how on this day each year I would send her flowers and call her on the telephone. A strange feeling came over me as I realized I couldn't do these things today: my mother died a few months ago. Thoughts of her came to me throughout the morning as I remembered how she had gradually accepted Krsna consciousness through the years, and had been reading Srila Prabhupada's books during the last months of her life. She had even ordered tapes from my tape ministry in England, and according to my brother had been listening to them every day before she passed away.

Just moments before she left her body she turned to my brother. "Don't lament," she said. "I'm not this body. I'm an eternal spirit soul. I will live forever."

I said a prayer to Lord Krsna, asking Him to see to her continued progress in Krsna consciousness.

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I remembered Srila Prabhupada's words about his own father in his dedication in *Kṛṣṇa Book*. He mentioned how his father had been kind to him. My mother expressed her kindness by sending me money and gifts throughout my years in the movement, thus assuring herself opportunities for more service in her next life.

I thought about how she had received much mercy in her life and how the source of her good fortune was ultimately Srila Prabhupada, so I sat down in the afternoon and wrote my 1995 Vyasa-puja offering to Srila Prabhupada. It was based on the story of my mother's departure under auspicious circumstances, only by his mercy. I faxed it to Dravida dasa, the editor of this year's Vyasa-puja book.

After the morning program I had a meeting with my disciple Adi Rasa dasi. When she came in I didn't recognize her, partly because she wasn't wearing a sari. When she introduced herself and her mother to me, I was about to chastise her for not wearing a sari in my presence, but I suddenly realized from her appearance that she was probably too poor to afford one, so I held my remarks and asked about her welfare.

She smiled and said she was happy in devotional service. She thanked me for giving her the opportunity to see me.

She explained that she had been coming each morning for the past few days to meet me, but because there were so many disciples and guests who also wanted to see me, she never reached the front of the line. The full impact of what she was saying hit me when she said she lived four and a half hours away in the countryside. So I spent some extra time with her and her mother.

When her mother asked to become my aspiring disciple I consented. I asked what had impelled her to become a devotee.

"I CAN DRINK THE BLOOD OF ANY RUSSIAN SOLDIER"

"The death of my son who was killed in the military," she said.

"Oh," I said. "you mean he was killed in Afghanistan?"

"No," she said, "by his senior officers here in Russia."

My translator, Sri Govinda dasa, explained to me that in the Russian Army if soldiers are disobedient, senior officers will sometimes kill them on the spot. Therefore, many young men try to avoid military service. I reflected once again on the tough life of the common people in this country.

Later in the morning I noticed a young girl chanting in the temple. I had seen her at the program the previous night. She looked frail and sickly. When I asked who she was, the devotees told me she was Sati, my 12-year-old aspiring disciple. She would soon be going to a hospital in Moscow to have her left kidney removed.

Later I spoke to her mother, who told me the local doctors could not be sure what Sati's problem was, but felt that removing her kidney would help. I was shocked.

She also explained that due to the war in Chechnya there was a shortage of medical supplies, and so in desperation she was going to take Sati to Moscow and request the help of any hospital.

I told Sati's mother I would try to assist in some way and that she shouldn't let the Russian doctors handle the case any further. I called Poland and asked Amrtananda dasa, my main assistant there, to look into the possibilities of bringing Sati to Poland for medical aid. I also considered calling my disciples in South Africa to see if they could help bring Sati there for treatment.

In the evening we went for a program in a Muslim village. I was curious to visit there because I had heard that the villagers worship

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a god they call Wastraji, who they say has appeared descending from the sky riding a horse with three legs. There have been many sightings. In fact all the villagers have seen Wastraji many times. The last time he is reported to have appeared was in 1990, when the villagers say they approached him with an offering of a dead goat and wine. He became angry with them and said he would not accept such bloody offerings. He told them that if they wanted to please him they should bring him vegetarian foods like milk and honey.

We passed a twenty-foot statue of Wastraji as we drove into the village, where Sri Prahlada later lectured to three hundred people. While he spoke I was sitting at the back of the hall finishing my rounds.

Suddenly a little girl about nine years old came and sat next to me. She stared at me for some time. "Are you Indradyumna Swami?" she asked.

Through Sri Govinda I told her I was and continued to chant my japa. She stayed next to me for the entire lecture and afterwards followed me outside the hall. It turned out that her mother, who was from that village, had recently taken an interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. How the little girl had heard of me, I don't know, but as her mother was taking her home the little girl turned to me. "Can I travel with you?" she asked.

I was a bit surprised. "Why not?" I said. "Some day when you're bigger, you can come and cook for me and Sri Prahlada. What's your name?"

"Nadya," she said.

Before we left the village I was speaking with some of the local Muslim men. They were dressed in typical Islamic clothes and

"I CAN DRINK THE BLOOD OF ANY RUSSIAN SOLDIER"

sported big mustaches. I was preaching about a vegetarian diet and mentioned Wastraji's request that they offer him only vegetarian foodstuffs.

Trying to emphasize my point, I said that I didn't think any of them would actually have the heart to kill an animal themselves in order to eat it. I said that I didn't feel they could kill anything, man or animal. I was obviously naive about the time and place where I was speaking and to whom.

Their eyes became fiery and their faces twisted with hate. "I could easily tear to pieces any Russian soldier who came to take my land, as they are doing to our Chechnyan brothers," said one man. "I can drink the blood of any Russian soldier."

I looked uncomfortably at the men around me, who an hour before had been blissfully chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa but who now appeared like vicious animals.

CHAPTER FOUR

LINING UP TO NAME THE CHILDREN

SUNDAY MAY 21

We decided to hold an impromptu Sunday feast in the park in Vladikavkaz. Many people came and took part in the program. The people of this town are so pious that they seem so innocent like children. Perhaps this is because they are living in such an isolated region of the world and have not become so contaminated by Western civilization. I noticed that they stroll in the streets in the evening without any fear of crime.

Boys and girls and men and women chanted and danced without stop in the *kirtana*, and laughed uncontrollably as we staged plays like “Bird in the Cage” and “The Boatman and the Scholar.” Govinda Maharaja and Sri Prahlada were the sole actors in these plays as I narrated the words and actions with a translator on the side.

Our final *kirtana* lasted hours, and hundreds of people took part. At one point I became exhausted and sat down near the side of the stage where the program was continuing. Somehow word got

LINING UP TO NAME THE CHILDREN

out that I was a spiritual master in the movement, and many people started coming forward asking for spiritual blessings.

A sincere couple, whom I had seen at a previous program, asked that I rename their baby by giving him a spiritual name. "Call him Krsna dasa," I half-heartedly said, and before I knew it many couples were lining up for new names for their children. I asked Sri Govinda if they were serious, and he said they were considering it a great honor and would call their children by whatever names I gave them for life. And so it went, one by one they came forward and I gave names like Ganga dasi, Bhima dasa, Krsna Priya, and Radha Kunda. I must have given more than thirty names.

Later, as I strolled along the streets near our apartment, finishing my rounds, people came up to me and thanked me for the names I had given their children. Altogether it was an amazing experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

NINE-YEAR-OLD NADYA JOINS THE GROUP

MONDAY MAY 22

This morning a number of people from last night's park program visited the temple. I noticed one lady and her six-year-old daughter in particular. They had enjoyed the program very much, and I had given my rose garland to the little girl at the end. When the mother asked to speak to me I had Sri Govinda bring her, and her daughter to my room.

The mother told me that this morning her daughter had come into her bedroom and woken her up. The little girl said that her mother now had to follow the eleven commandments of the Bible.

The mother told her daughter that she was mistaken, that there are only ten commandments in the Bible.

The girl said no, the eleventh commandment was, "All mothers should take the good advice of their daughters."

The mother asked if her daughter had any advice to give her.

NINE-YEAR-OLD NADYA JOINS THE GROUP

“Yes,” said the girl, “from this day onwards you must chant the Hare Krsna song and follow the four regulative principles the man was talking about at the program last night.”

This evening we caught the train for our next destination, Rostov na Donu. About two hours into the journey our train made one of its routine stops. I glanced out the window and noticed it was the village where the people worship Wastraji. Suddenly a young girl appeared at the door of our cabin with a small suitcase in hand.

“Where is Indradyumna Swami?” she asked Uttamasloka

Uttamasloka’s jaw dropped in surprise. “He’s here,” he said and pointed to me.

I was as surprised as Uttamasloka.

She then turned to me. “Indradyumna Swami,” she said, “I’m going to travel with you for ten days.”

I looked closely and saw that it was Nadya, the little girl who had sat next to me at the program in the village.

“Nadya,” I said, “wait a minute. You’re just a kid. How can you travel with me?”

I turned to Sri Prahlada. “What in the world is going on here?” I said. But Nadya calmly put her little suitcase under the seat and sat down next to me.

At that moment, as the train was starting to leave, Nadya’s mother appeared at the door of our cabin “She insisted she travel with Indradyumna Swami,” said Nadya’s mother. “She was raising such a fuss. what could I do? She’s so determined. She’s a good girl, a nice devotee. I’ll come to get her in a week when you are in Krasnodar.”

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With that she hurried off the train.

Suddenly, there I was with a nine-year-old girl staring contentedly at me as she sat beside me on the seat.

“Are you hungry?” I asked.

“Yes, Indradyumna Swami,” she said.

I told Uttamasloka to get her some *prasadam*.

“I want to stay with you forever,” she said.

I was speechless. She sat there patiently waiting for my reply. “We’ll talk about that later,” I said finally, and I sent her to take rest with Madhavi dasi in her compartment.

Two stops later we were just settling in for some rest when we heard a *kirtana* as the train came to a stop at the platform of another village. We looked outside and saw fifteen devotees chanting and dancing. They had somehow learned that we were on the train, and they had come to greet us for the three minutes the train would stop in their village. Just as the train was pulling away they ran forward and started giving us all kinds of delicious *prasadam*. I counted five cakes, all kinds of juices, and a special preparation of the region called hachapuris, equivalent to paratas filled with cheese. And to our great surprise and delight they were steaming hot. Those devotees had timed everything perfectly.

CHAPTER SIX

WARNINGS OF ANTI-CULT DANGER

TUESDAY MAY 23

During the morning in Rostov we received a call that Niranjana Maharaja was refused entry into Russia. He had been in Tbilisi, Georgia, and was coming up from there by car into southern Russia to meet us. It was sobering information. Last week we met Maharaja in St. Petersburg, and he told Govinda Maharaja and me that ISKCON leaders in Moscow had received reliable information from sources inside the government that the FSK (formerly the KGB) is preparing a serious strike against us. After communism was finished in Russia in 1990, the KGB was reorganized as the FSK, the government's secret service unit. "Reorganized" means most of the same people remained in the service, only their titles were changed. It is obvious that every country needs a secret service, just as in the United States there is the CIA.

The recent events in Japan with the cult group Aum Shinrikyo, which is accused of a poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, caused a big stir in Russia. Aum Shinrikyo has many members here and they own a lot of property. One week after the incident in Japan, the Russian Government voted the group illegal and the FSK closed

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in on them and liquidated their assets. The FSK took four million American dollars from Aum Shinrikyo's bank accounts and gave it to the most powerful anti-cult group in Russia.

The next week the Duma (Russian Parliament) met and unanimously passed a stronger and broader law giving it full power to close down any "cult" or "sect." Niranjana Maharaja told us that the Russian Orthodox Church is strongly pushing parliament to do this.

The Church is upset about ISKCON's success in Russia since perestroika and glasnost gave rise to democracy.

Last year *Newsweek* magazine wrote that the Hare Krsna Movement is the "fastest growing religion in Russia."

When the Aum Shinrikyo incident happened in Japan, the Russian Orthodox Church used that to push the government to close the group down in Russia. But Niranjana Maharaja said that the Church's ultimate target is ISKCON. Under Russian law a parliamentary ruling must be voted on twice and then ratified by the President. The second voting on the "new religions" bill is imminent and will then go to President Yeltsin for approval. Considering that he often appears at public functions with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, things don't look very good for us.

Several weeks ago the government also reactivated Section 5 of the KGB, which oversees and investigates religious affairs. Since then, various temples have reported their telephone lines appear to be bugged, and one temple reported that its COM system had been infiltrated. Another ominous report is that Russian embassies in other countries are no longer issuing visas to ISKCON devotees desiring to visit Russia. My fear is that I may not be able to come back here. It is an uncomfortable thought because I have been preaching here for years, even secretly during

NINE-YEAR-OLD NADYA JOINS THE GROUP

the communist era, and have initiated more than three hundred and fifty disciples.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"ARE YOU GOD, THE ALMIGHTY?"

WEDNESDAY MAY 24

After chanting our rounds in the morning, we went to the Rostov temple for an afternoon program. After Govinda Maharaja's lecture we had a huge *kirtana*, which we took from the temple into the streets of the neighborhood. The temple is in a relatively poor area where there are only dirt roads. During the *kirtana*, Govinda Maharaja had an idea. "There's a colony of gypsies nearby," he said. "Let's take the *kirtana* there."

Within a few minutes we arrived at the gypsy area. Their crude wooden houses stood in a sort of circle, and we chanted in the center. Suddenly they all poured out of their homes, dressed in their traditional colorful outfits. They were amazed to see us, and a crowd of several hundred surrounded the *kirtana* and began clapping and moving to the rhythm. After a while we stopped the *kirtana* and I spoke to them, encouraging them to chant and dance with us. When I reminded them that their forefathers originally came from India, they cheered. When we began the next *kirtana*, transcendental chaos broke out as the gypsies began wildly chanting and dancing with us. The *kirtana* went on for hours.

"ARE YOU GOD, THE ALMIGHTY?"

Towards the end I was resting by the side when a group of gypsy children came and stood around me, mouths open, their big eyes staring at me. After standing motionless for some time they began speaking among themselves and pushed a boy forward.

"Are you God, the Almighty?" he asked.

I smiled. "No," I said. "I'm the tiny servant of God."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO LIVE HERE AND WORSHIP GOD"

THURSDAY MAY 25

We put on a *Harinama* and program in the center of Rostov. The police escorted our *Harinama* the whole way. I didn't bother asking Acaryanidhi why, because I remember this was where the Cossacks had threatened to beat us up on our *Harinama* last year. Today, when Govinda Maharaja was asking for questions after his lecture, a man stood up and defiantly challenged him.

"Why have you come to the land of the Cossacks?" he asked.

At the back of the hall a number of men began moving towards the stage, and we braced ourselves for a fight. But Maharaja began answering his question calmly, emphasizing that this is God's land and everyone has a right to live here and worship God as he sees fit. The audience applauded his answer, and the atmosphere calmed down. But I felt they wanted blood and that we would meet them again. The rest of the program went without incident.

When we returned to the temple this evening, a group of fifteen devotees, many of them my disciples, approached me with complaints

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about the temple president and local management. I listened carefully because I've learned from many years of leadership to always hear both sides of the issue. But from the beginning I had my doubts about their complaints. I knew Acaryanidhi and his men quite well, and they are competent managers.

After hearing from the devotees, I called for Acaryanidhi and the other managers and heard their side of the story. Then I called both groups in and had them discuss the issues between themselves in front of me. The whole procedure, which was intense, went until 2:00 AM.

Then I gave my verdict. I felt that the complaints were not of a serious nature, most of them stemming from rumors. Other complaints—that the devotees couldn't always get laksmi for personal needs, that the temple president once called someone a bad name, that he wasn't personal enough, etc—didn't warrant the revolution that was brewing.

On the other hand I told the temple managers that they had to have more communication with the devotees. I told them Srila Prabhupada introduced ista-gosthi (temple meetings) so that temple managers could keep in touch with the feelings and needs of devotees. I also reminded them that although some devotees are able to work harder and do more service than others, all devotees are important and should feel protected and cared for.

CHAPTER NINE

FEET SOAKED IN STICKY GULAB JUICE

FRIDAY MAY 26

This morning we left Rostov for Krasnodar, further south. As we were leaving the temple, my ten disciples came close to the car to see me off. Many had tears in their eyes, and all of them were looking at me intently, knowing that they would not see me again for a long time, perhaps not for a year or more. It is always a difficult moment for both my disciples and me when I have to leave a place.

But I think it is more difficult for me. They are being separated from only one person they love, but I am being separated from many. My only consolation in such circumstances is that I will soon be in the association of other disciples at the next destination.

Sure enough, when we arrived in Krasnodar, there were more than two hundred and fifty enthusiastic devotees there to greet us. Many were disciples of mine who had not seen me for a long time. We exchanged our loving feelings through chanting and dancing together to the holy names of the Lord.

Then Govinda Maharaja and I sat on the *vyasasana* together and accepted the traditional foot-bathing and guru-puja ceremony. As

FEET SOAKED IN STICKY GULAB JUICE

the devotees came forward to offer flowers, we both gave each one a gulabjamun, which had been soaking in sugar juice in a big pot in front of us. I was sitting on the left side so I gave each devotee a gulab first, after they had offered me a flower. With that gulab and another flower in their hands they then offered a flower to the feet of Govinda Maharaja.

But I laughed throughout the whole ceremony because each time they offered their flowers to Maharaja, the juice from the gulab in their hands also dripped onto his feet. By the end of the ceremony his feet were soaked in sticky gulab juice. And little Nadya, who always stayed by my side during her time with us, ate so many gulabs that she couldn't stand.

CHAPTER TEN

SHOCKING STORIES OF A RUSSIAN HOSPITAL

SATURDAY MAY 27

I was exhausted from many days of traveling and had difficulty rising this morning. Seeing my exhausted state, Govinda Maharaja told me to stay back from the program. With a little extra time I tried to answer some correspondence but fell asleep at the computer. It was the first time in months I had had a moment to attend to my correspondence. I feel bad because I know there are many disciples who are anxiously awaiting replies from me. I have more than three hundred letters to answer. But what can I do? My schedule is so intense, always traveling here and there with so many preaching engagements. My dear disciples, please forgive me.

I have also had to adjust my Deity worship. Several years ago I had an hour or more each day to offer puja to my Deities. But as the years have progressed and my responsibilities have increased, other services have taken priority. At the moment I am simply traveling with my Nrsimha salagrama. The puja takes me only ten minutes. I wear the salagrama around my neck during the day, instead of leaving Him unprotected in the apartments or hotels I stay in. For

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the time being, I have turned the worship of my other Deities over to several of my disciples in Poland.

My dear Lordships, please forgive me. Please accept my constant preaching to the conditioned souls and my disciples as my service unto You.

This morning Sri Prahlada took off the bandage on his right hand, and to our great relief his hand had healed properly. A few days ago he had injured it in a *kirtana*. A devotee dancing wildly had knocked Sri Prahlada into the wall, badly smashing his hand. I had the devotees take him to the hospital.

Upon his return Sri Prahlada had told us shocking stories of the state of affairs in a Russian hospital.

The devotees had accompanied him to the emergency room, where people, many in bad condition had been waiting in line for four days to see a doctor. The room was filthy, and the nurses were not caring for anyone. A man in great pain kept falling off his stretcher. No one came to help him, so Sri Prahlada and the other devotees would pick him up and put him back on the stretcher each time.

While the devotees were waiting for a doctor, a man came up to Sri Prahlada and asked if there were any Hare Krsna sisters present. He meant a woman devotee like a nun. He explained that his father was dying next door and he wanted a Hare Krsna nun to perform the last rites. Sri Prahlada looked around for a woman devotee, and seeing that none had come to the hospital with them, apologized to the man, who went away disappointed.

Somehow after only three hours Sri Prahlada was able to get treatment by a top neurosurgeon, who confirmed that his injury was not serious. In their ensuing discussions Sri Prahlada was shocked to

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learn that the doctor and most of his same caliber, earn a salary of only 100,000 rubles a month - about twenty American dollars.

A great risk in traveling in Russia is that if we would ever require serious medical assistance, the medical standard is so bad. Equipment in most places dates back to the 1960s. Proper drugs are scarce, even in big cities.

Recently my eighty-two-year-old disciple Kisor dasi had a two-hour surgical operation in Odessa without any anesthetic. I asked her how it was possible, how she tolerated the pain. She said she had no choice but to scream “Hare Krsna” at the top of her lungs during the operation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“NO PEACE FOR YOU IN THIS LIFETIME”

SUNDAY MAY 28

For the past week I have been having bad dreams. It often happens to me after initiation ceremonies.

Srila Prabhupada writes, “A devotee sometimes accepts a sinful person as his disciple, and to counteract the sinful reactions he accepts from the disciple, he has to see a bad dream. Nonetheless, the spiritual master is so kind that in spite of having bad dreams due to the sinful disciples, he accepts this troublesome business for the deliverance of the victims of Kali-yuga. After initiation therefore, a disciple should be extremely careful not to commit again any sinful act that might cause difficulty for himself and the spiritual master. Before the Deity, before the fire, before the spiritual master and before the Vaisnavas, the honest disciple promises to refrain from all sinful activity. Therefore he must not commit sinful acts and thus create a troublesome situation.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 8.4.15)

But last night I had an interesting dream. I dreamt that three beautiful Gandharvas (angels) with golden wings appeared in my room,

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emanating a brilliant effulgence around themselves. I was in distress for some reason, but with benevolent faces and gestures they told me that everything will turn out all right. They said they will protect me and that I have nothing to worry about. I awoke this morning completely peaceful. Although it was only a dream, it somehow gave me strength and encouragement.

This morning I spoke by telephone with Niranjana Maharaja, who had been allowed into Russia at the Moscow Airport. He had good and bad news regarding the rumored strike by the government. We learned that during a recent visit to Moscow, American President Bill Clinton had warned President Yeltsin not to sign the “new religions” bill. On the other hand, the head of the public relations department of the FSK, Alexander Mikhailov, appeared on national television and said that the FSK had begun an investigation of all new religious movements in Russia. As well as ISKCON, this means the Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, and many others. Maharaja said that people in the government favorable to us have warned us to keep a low profile during the next few months, so the devotees in Moscow have decided to cancel this summer’s Ratha-yatra.

After class I took a walk alone in the garden of the Krasnodar temple. It was a beautiful, warm spring morning with fragrant flowers blooming abundantly. Bees were humming, and butterflies were flying everywhere. The whole atmosphere was enchanting.

I found a bench under a flowering apple tree and sat there to chant my rounds. I suddenly realized it was the first time that I had been alone in years. As a traveling preacher, my life is public twenty four hours a day. I began savoring those few moments. It was a new world for me. I remembered a book I had read as a boy, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It was about the life of a soldier in the trenches of

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France in World War I. During a lull in a battle he notices a butterfly, the beauty of which sharply contrasts with the death and destruction around him. In an effort to reach out to something beautiful and full of life, he stands up in the trench to touch the butterfly and is immediately shot dead by the unseen enemy.

I thought of myself as being in the lull of a battle. Of course, a preacher's fight is not among death and destruction, but he does see the reality of birth and death, disease and old age constantly in his travels. And here in Russia the living standards are so low as people struggle to maintain themselves. So I identified with that soldier in the book as I observed the quiet and peaceful scene around me.

Suddenly Govinda Maharaja appeared on the path under the tree.

"Maharaja," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"Oh, just enjoying a few minutes of peace," I said.

He laughed. "That's not like you," he said. "Come on, it's time to go to Novorossisk. There'll be no peace for you in this lifetime. We have a lot of preaching to do. Let's go. The devotees are waiting. You can rest in the next life."

I left my little daydream in the garden and walked with Maharaja to the car.

After saying goodbye to a tearful Nadya, who left us today to rejoin her mother, we drove to Novorossisk, a city to the south on the Black Sea. The devotees from there had sent one of their congregation members to drive us in his 1989 Audi. It was a comfortable and pleasant journey through beautiful countryside down to the ocean.

The congregation member, Serge, turned out to be an interesting man. He was a captain in the Novorossisk Police and a member

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of an elite counter-terrorist team in the region. He was a well-built and handsome man in his late thirties with a pleasant disposition and quiet nature. I discussed a number of subjects with him: the importance of chanting sixteen rounds, how to make one's home into a temple, and (I couldn't help it) counter-terrorist operations, commando training, and state-of-the-art weaponry.

As we were driving I kept thinking, "Every time we drive somewhere in Russia we seem to get pulled over by the police for checks. I hope it happens this time. All Serge would have to do is pull out his police badge and counter-terrorist unit card and the police would apologize, salute us, and let us go on our way."

Two minutes later a police car, siren blaring, pulled us over to the side. I was in ecstasy. Everything went almost exactly according to my daydream. The police officer approached our car, and speaking in an official tone demanded to see Serge's identification papers. You should have seen the look on his face when Serge presented his documents.

He immediately backed off. "Of course you may go, sir," he said. I exchanged a big smile with Serge as we drove off.

When we arrived at our Novorossisk apartment, we showered and immediately went to a public program arranged by the local devotees. Govinda Maharaja asked me to speak, so I talked for an hour and then asked for questions.

A Christian man stood up. He began asking challenging questions and proclaiming that only Christians went to heaven. Usually I don't bother speaking to such people because they won't hear or accept what we say, but I debated with this man for almost an hour. I wanted to teach the local devotees the philosophical arguments we use in such situations.

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On the way back to our apartment, I noticed a big statue of Lenin. You still see these statues throughout Russia, along with other communist memorabilia, although it has been years since democracy replaced communism.

"Why doesn't someone pull these statues down?" I asked a local devotee.

"It costs money to pull them down," he said, "and people don't have money here."

It sounded logical, but still it seems strange to see the hammer and sickle and the busts and statues of Lenin everywhere.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"ONE'S OWN SPIRITUAL MASTER IS BEST"

MONDAY MAY 29

We held a morning program with about fifty local devotees in a park in Novorossisk. Govinda Maharaja gave class, and during his lecture I met with my local disciples.

I asked an aspiring woman disciple, who lives outside the temple, what type of work she did. She hesitated at first and then said she worked as a nurse in an abortion clinic.

I was shocked.

She said she didn't help with the abortions, but simply took care of the patients afterwards. I told her she had to find another job immediately. In order to give her time to find other work, I arranged to give her money, as she supports her husband and three children.

During our discussion she revealed the horrors of the abortion clinic. Sometimes when doctors perform abortions during the seventh month of pregnancy, the child comes out alive, often crying.

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Again I was shocked. "What do the doctors do with the child?" I asked.

"They kill it," she replied.

I immediately thought of Srila Prabhupada's statement in *Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*: "A saintly person can tolerate all kinds of difficulty, a learned man can do his duty without awaiting favorable circumstances, a devotee of the Lord can sacrifice everything to satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and a heinous person like Kamsa can act in any sinful way."

While I was speaking to my disciples, Govinda Maharaja finished his class and took a short walk in the park with Sri Prahlada and two of his own disciples who have joined our tour from India: Vinoda Bihari dasa from Ukraine and Krsna Prasada dasa from Nepal.

While they were sitting on a park bench, a curious thing happened. They were approached by a well-dressed man who told them that he knew our movement was under scrutiny by the FSK and that the FSK would soon make a move against us.

When the devotees asked how he knew this, the man replied that he had worked in electronic surveillance for the KGB for ten years and that he maintained contact with his friends who were part of the FSK. He asked what we were going to do if the FSK cracked down.

The devotees immediately understood he was an FSK agent trying to gain their confidence in the hope they would tell him what they knew about ISKCON's strategy.

"We'll depend on God, Krsna," Sri Prahlada said.

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“To say that you’re neither for something nor against something means that you are against it,” the agent said.

This didn’t have anything to do with the immediate discussion, but the devotees knew why he had said it. It was the philosophy the government was preaching to their agents: anything that is not part of Russian heritage and Russian ideology is against it. The conversation continued, but the devotees were careful not to say anything that would reveal what our movement planned to do.

When Govinda Maharaja told me about the incident, I felt uneasy. The situation was becoming as it was six years ago, when I always felt that someone was watching me during my visits to Russia. Once again we were being followed and watched, once again we were at the mercy of the secret service. In 1990 they had been told to leave all religious organizations alone, but now they were investigating again. Will it become like it was? The pressure gets to you sometimes. I thought of places like Australia and New Zealand, where the devotees are free to preach. That freedom of religion is meaning more to me these days.

This evening we drove back to Krasnodar to catch a flight to Azerbaijan early tomorrow. When we arrived at our apartment I checked my e-mail, and found a letter from one of my initiated disciples, where she expressed a desire to take her second initiation from another spiritual master. I always encourage my disciples to take shelter of, and inspiration from, other spiritual masters, but this came as a shock to me.

I have never heard of such a thing in our disciplic succession, that a disciple takes second initiation from another spiritual master. And her desire indicates a loss of faith in my ability to guide her in spiritual life. It is also painful in that it shows a lack of gratitude on her part for all I have done for her: taking the responsibility to help

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her in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, accepting her karma, counseling her in her difficulties... As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī once said, "It takes gallons of blood to make a conditioned soul into a devotee."

At the same time I don't want to discourage her. My desire is to see her progress in devotional service. If she is inspired by the association of another spiritual master I want to encourage her, but it must be done in accordance with Vaisnava etiquette.

So I wrote to her quoting from *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanamṛta* by Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Sarakara Ṭhākura, translated by His Holiness Jayapataka Maharaja and published by the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust.

In verse 46 Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Sarakara Ṭhākura says, "If one's initiating spiritual master and instructing spiritual master are of small spiritual potency, or in other words, if they do not possess a special power to give spiritual instruction on worship for devotional service, then one may listen from the mouth of other great advanced Vaisnavas and understand their special instructions. However, thereafter, the disciple must go to his spiritual master for confirmation or instructions."

In verse 48 he says, "Just as a faithful son may go out for earning money and subsequently brings to his father the wealth gained, later the son may ask for some allowance from the father and whatever he receives from the father he is entitled to spend for his own enjoyment. Similarly, a disciple may hear some instructions from another advanced Vaisnava, but after gaining that good instruction he must bring it and present it to his own spiritual master. After presenting them he should hear the same teachings again from his spiritual master with appropriate instructions."

Then in verse 50 Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Sarakara Ṭhākura says, "For this reason, in all circumstances all Vaisnavas are offered respect as one

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offers respect to one's spiritual master. However, with body, mind, and words one serves one's own spiritual master."

Finally, in verse 51 he says, "even if in the performance of one's devotional activities one has disobeyed the spiritual master, still one should not give him up, but should remain faithfully with him, because all authorities say that the shelter of one's own spiritual master is best and perfect, even if another spiritual master is more powerful."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NINETEEN HOURS THROUGH HELL

TUESDAY MAY 30

Last night as I prepared to sleep, I felt apprehensive about this morning's journey. Because of a shortage of funds we are unable to fly all the way to Baku, Azerbaijan. So we planned two short flights across southern Russia to Machatshkala, and from there a drive south along the coast. The devotees from Baku would cross the border into Russia to pick us up and drive us back into Azerbaijan. But the idea of crossing from Russia into a strict Muslim country at a remote border made me uneasy.

We rose at 4:00 a.m. and drove to the airport for the first leg of our journey. We stowed our luggage in the propeller plane and flew for one hour to Mineralnye Vody. From there we caught a flight to Machatshkala. It should have been a one-hour flight, but because of a diversion around the fighting in Grozny, the flight took three hours.

When we arrived, we again saw Russian military helicopters lining the airfield for use in Chechnya. We were happy to see several devotees from Azerbaijan still waiting with three cars to take us to Baku. While

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we were putting our bags in the cars, I took a moment to speak to a small crowd of Muslim men around me. They asked who we were, and I told them we are Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees. I mentioned that some of our men have been distributing food in nearby Chechnya. They expressed their gratitude and said they would pray to Allah for our safe journey across the desert to Azerbaijan.

We needed their blessings.

The seven-hour drive to the border was without incident although we were stopped a number of times at police checkpoints. It's a routine we have become used to. Govinda Maharaja usually gets out and jokes with the officers. He even embraces them, and then they start laughing and let us go. If that doesn't work, we give them a little money. That always works.

We passed many small villages where the Muslim people maintain themselves on small farms. Every 500 meters or so, children sell petrol in all sorts of containers. There are no petrol stations here, so when you need petrol, you simply purchase it from these roadside stands.

The trouble began about ten kilometers from the border while we were driving on an old dirt road. At first I couldn't figure out what was going on. I asked Vinode Bihari to ask the driver why we were on this dusty road. The driver explained that when they had come up from Baku this morning, the Russian border guards at the main crossing had refused to let them into Russia. They simply told them to go back home.

Expecting trouble, the devotees had brought along a top police officer from Baku, a good friend of our movement there. They were hoping he could persuade the border guards to let them pass, but the guards ignored him. When the devotees said they were driving

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into Russia to pick up their spiritual leaders, the Russians said if they brought their leaders to the border they would be arrested. The devotees asked why.

“We are the law here,” the guards said.

Having no other recourse, the devotees went to a nearby town and asked if there was another, perhaps smaller and more obscure, border crossing. They met a man who agreed to show them a crossing in a village 50 kilometers away. Using back-country roads, they eventually got to the border crossing and talked their way over. This was the border that we were going to. My apprehensions grew.

Two kilometers down the dirt road our car blew a tire. When our driver looked into the trunk he discovered there was no spare. So one of the other cars took the blown-out tire back to the previous village and had it repaired.

While we were waiting, I talked with our driver. He told me the last sannyasi to visit Baku was Gopal Krsna Maharaja a year ago. He said devotees never came there because the political situation was so unstable. A year ago the democratically elected president was overthrown by the military, resulting in a dictatorship. The country aligned itself with Turkey, which constantly sends aid to prevent the famine that would otherwise overrun Azerbaijan.

When the tire was fixed we continued on our journey. The road got worse, and twice we had to cross small streams. After five hours of driving through the dust, we neared the border crossing. From a distance I could see a small hut with seven or eight men inside and a small rusty gate across the road.

I turned to the driver. “What kind of people use this border crossing?” I asked.

He smiled. “Drug traffickers,” he said, “other criminals, people trying to avoid the army, refugees ... and now Hare Krsnas.”

I turned to Govinda Maharaja. “Next time,” I said, “let’s try to get the laksmi together to fly into Azerbaijan.”

At the Russian border we passed two or three drunken Russian soldiers no more than eighteen years old with AK-47 rifles around their shoulders. It was dusk and they probably couldn’t see us well so they simply waved us through. But when we arrived at the Azerbaijani border gate 50 meters down the road, seven men ran out with guns in their hands and surrounded our car.

They asked for our documents and Azerbaijani visas. It was the first time we had heard that we needed visas for Azerbaijan. Vinode Bihari pushed forward our Russian visas. “Here,” he said, “these are our visas.”

In the confusion and the darkness, the soldiers didn’t see that our visas were actually Russian and not Azerbaijani visas. So they prepared to stamp them. But if the visas were stamped they would become invalid as Russian visas, so we begged them not to stamp them. They couldn’t understand why we were making such a request.

Speaking fast in order to distract them, Govinda Maharaja got out of the car and started joking with the soldiers. I got out and proudly announced that I was from America, a stupid move because the United States supports Armenia in the war against Azerbaijan.

Suddenly the soldier with our visas realized he didn’t have his stamp with him, so he decided to write something on our visas. When we again protested, he grabbed his pen and started to write, but the pen ran out of ink.

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Then I had an idea. "Let's all take a photo," I said.

Somehow this idea became a hit with the soldiers, who stopped what they were doing as we posed together for a number of photos. Then we exchanged addresses, and delicately taking back our passports and visas, jumped into our cars and drove through the gate.

As we were driving away we couldn't believe we'd made it through the border. But we also realized that, because we didn't have the required visas for crossing the border, we were in the country illegally. The next question became, How will we get out of the country?

By this time it was 8:00 p.m. and dark. We had been traveling for fourteen hours. I asked our driver how much further it was to Baku.

"Another four hours," he said.

As he drove faster I asked him to slow down.

"There is a strict curfew in Baku," he said. "Everyone has to be off the streets from midnight to 5:00 a.m. Anyone breaking that curfew is immediately arrested by the military."

"Step on it!" I said.

We arrived at the outskirts of Baku at ten minutes to midnight. The streets were becoming deserted, and I was getting nervous.

"Are they really strict with the curfew?" I asked our driver.

"Oh yes," he said. "It's the dictator's order, and the army polices the streets carefully."

"How much further to where we're going to stay?" I said.

"Ten minutes," he said. "We've got just enough time."

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Just as he said that we heard something go “boom!” and our car swerved sharply to the left.

“Oh no!” the driver said. “We blew another tire.”

We all got out and looked at the flat tire. The streets around us were deserted, save for a car now and then rushing past in a mad dash to get home before being caught by the army. But there we were, stranded with a flat tire, exhausted after eighteen hours of traveling, and in the country illegally with no visas. He didn’t have a spare tire, so our driver took the spare from one of the other vehicles. It was much too small, but served the purpose.

After twenty minutes we sped off, but the curfew was already ten minutes in effect. There was no one on the streets of Baku. Govinda Maharaja started chanting Nrsimha prayers, and we all followed.

Suddenly up ahead we saw an army checkpoint. There was nothing we could do but go forward. As we arrived at the checkpoint the soldiers came forward, guns raised. An Azerbaijani devotee in the car in front of us jumped out and gave the soldiers one of Srila Prabhupada’s books. He began preaching to them that we were missionaries. It worked, and they waved us on. But they arrested another man who had arrived at the checkpoint at the same time we had.

We drove fast through the dark streets while having a very intense *kirtana* in the back. Suddenly we came across another checkpoint where soldiers ordered us to stop. Again our Azerbaijani devotee jumped out, shook their hands, gave them prasadam, and preached to them not to arrest us. Again Lord Nrsimhadeva’s mercy was with us, and we were soon on our way.

It seemed like we were driving around the city forever looking for

NINETEEN HOURS THROUGH HELL

our apartment. And then suddenly, once again an army checkpoint loomed ahead of us.

“Oh no!” I thought. “We’ll never get out of this one. It’s 1:00 a.m.”

But just before we arrived at the checkpoint, our driver turned sharply left into an apartment complex, and within seconds we were at the entrance to the building. We all sighed with relief. It had taken us nineteen hours to reach our destination, through hell and high water.

But there was one last austerity. The apartment was on the eighth floor, and there was no elevator. And to add insult to injury, when we finally entered the apartment, we were met by thousands of hungry mosquitoes. But we were happy, and the devotees in Baku were happy too. We took a big feast and went to bed at 2:00 a.m..
Jaya Lord Nrsimhadeva!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AN EXTRAORDINARY RECEPTION

WEDNESDAY MAY 31

This morning Govinda Maharaja found out that we definitely need visas to get out of the country, unless we want to go out the same way we came in. We voted unanimously not to do that and made plans to apply for visas at the Home Affairs Department. But it would take fifteen days to process the visas. The only alternative was to take a boat across the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan and catch a flight there to our next destination. Apparently no one checks the passengers on boats for visas. We seriously considered the plan.

We rested most of the day and went to the temple for our first program at 4:00 p.m. The reception was extraordinary. We were met by more than 300 devotees, most of them congregation members. The devotees were starving for association, and their bliss knew no bounds.

In the temple, Govinda Maharaja and I sat on the vyasasana to receive guru-puja. Sri Prahlada led the *kirtana*, and Krsna Prasada offered the guru-puja. One by one the people come forward: old men and women, couples with their children, brahmacaris, and brahmacarinis.

AN EXTRAORDINARY RECEPTION

They were all from Muslim backgrounds, all dark-haired and dark-eyed. Although they were dressed in Vaisnava clothes, a touch of their Islamic tradition remained in the colors and the jewelry they wore.

The temple room walls are decorated with beautiful Arab carpets, typical of the Muslim homes in Azerbaijan. Maharaja and I spoke, and then we had a two-hour *kirtana* with the devotees. It spilt into the driveway, but no further. In Baku we couldn't go chanting throughout the neighborhood as we did in Rostov. Azerbaijan is a traditional Islamic country, and although we're allowed to chant in the privacy of homes and the temple, that's the limit. To take the *kirtana* further would infuriate the local Muslim priests.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE FIRE-TEMPLE OF AGNIDEVA

THURSDAY JUNE 1

We awoke early to bathe and prepared to go to the temple. Although the devotees have given us the best facilities they can offer, they are austere by our Western standards. We are seven men (and one million mosquitoes) sleeping in two small rooms, and there has been no water in the bathroom since we arrived. Baku is in the desert, and the government rations the water. The devotees bring water for us in buckets up the eight flights of stairs.

After the morning program I had a meeting with my disciples. Although I have been here only once before, three years ago, I have more than 15 disciples here, most of them book distributors. I enjoyed hearing their *sankirtana* pastimes as they told how they distribute *Bhagavad Gita* in this Islamic country. They each distribute five to ten large volumes a day, mainly by going shop to shop and office to office. They say that they have gone to every town and village in Azerbaijan and that most people are receptive to Krsna consciousness.

After darsana with my disciples, Govinda Maharaja came to inform

me that we were in hot water regarding our entering the country illegally. He visited the Home Affairs Department, which refused to issue the visas necessary for us to leave the country. There are two alternatives. We can go back to the border we entered through and plead with the soldiers there to stamp our passports and then obtain our visas here in Baku, or we can take the boat across the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk in Turkmenistan. From there we would have to drive six hundred kilometers across the desert to Ashgabat and then catch a flight to Bishkek in Kirghistan, our next destination in central Asia.

Since the moment we arrived, the devotees have been telling us about an ancient Vedic temple just outside Baku. They say it is a temple of Agni, the fire god, which was established in this part of the world thousands of years ago. They even say there is a plaque at the entrance to the temple with Sanskrit writing. I was fascinated by the idea that there could be an ancient Vedic temple in this remote part of the world, so I asked the devotees to drive us there this afternoon.

After a short drive outside the city into the desert, we arrived at the temple. It appeared the government had recently begun excavating the site and preparing it for tourism. At the entrance to the temple we found the carved stone Sanskrit plaque, which Sri Prahlada and Vinoda Bihari tried to decipher. It begins by offering prayers to Ganesh and goes on to mention the name of a sannyasi who resided at the temple and oversaw its development. As we entered the temple area, we found it was constructed similar to an ancient monastery, with rooms made from stone in the inside wall. The temple itself is in the center of the compound.

We inspected the many rooms and discovered that most of them go deep into the ground to escape the heat of the desert. The actual mandira where Agni was worshiped consists of a small structure

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with a yajna pit, where fire is still burning from the natural gases below the surface. Fire also goes up through the walls of the temple with flames coming out of the structure on top. It was an incredible scene.

We were told that recently the government put gas lines in to regulate the flow of the natural gases to make it safer. But apparently, for thousands of years the natural gas fires burned without obstruction. One local man told us the fires went out briefly during the late 1800s, and the yogis who were worshiping there left, saying that Agni had become displeased and had himself abandoned the site.

The architecture of the temple is a curious mixture of Vedic and Muslim design. I would imagine that the original design was purely Vedic but that through thousands of years of development or reconstruction, it has blended with the Islamic tradition.

We visited several small rooms where the government is compiling artifacts, photos, and the history of the temple. I was surprised to see that the temple register goes back to the 1600s, where it is recorded that travelers from Europe visited the site at that time. The list was long, but included the following:

1671, S. Streis - Dutch sailor; 1683, Kempher - German traveler; 1689, Villot - French missionary; 1733, E. Lerh - German traveler; 1743, Canvey - English merchant; 1747, John Kuk - Russian surgeon; and 1770, Cmelin - Russian scientist.

From the information given by the government, it appears that the site was accessible to travelers because from the 15th through the 18th centuries Baku was one of the most important trade centers between Azerbaijan and India. Indian goods went by sea through Baku to the north of Russia and on to Western Europe.

THE FIRE-TEMPLE OF AGNIDEVA

There were accounts of people visiting the site from ancient times:

“Coming after their raid on Media, Iran turned to the other road and passing the flames rising out of the rock into the sea, had come to their motherland.” —*Panijsky, fifth century diplomat*

“Within Shirvan and Baku on the surface of the ground there are such places, where fire burns eternally.”— *Persian manuscript by Khamdulla Kazviny, first half of the fourteenth century*

“In one far slung from this city of Baku there is one place continuously erupting fire.”—*Azerbaijan geographer Abdar Rashid Bakury, beginning of the fifteenth century*

And the European travelers had also written of their visits to this Vedic temple:

“Here, near the fire, were cooking for the settlement Sroganny ates-garva, called so to this fire. Others were burning lime. Two descendants of the ancient Persian tribe, newcomer Hindu fire worshipers were passively sitting around the wall built by them and prayed—gazing at the flame gushing out of the ground and worshiped.”—*Kempher, German traveler, 1689*

“Near the wall there was seen a volcano erupting fire from eight or ten mouths. They call this place ‘Ateshgah’, that means ‘Home of the Fires’. Even nowadays it is honored by Hindus and Herbes. They come here to worship from different places and throw silver and gold coins and even keep two Dervishes to guard this sacred fire.”—*Villot, French traveler, 1689*

“Situated in the southern part of Russia, in the city of Baku, are a lot of things noteworthy of the attention of travelers. But without doubt the inextinguishable fire is the unique phenomenon that attracts all travelers.”—*E. Berjozin, 1842*

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There were some photos of the temple from the 1800s and drawings from earlier centuries as well. We noted with curiosity that in one of the drawings, yogis are doing an arati to an altar with a number of deities on it. Who those deities were, or where they are now, we didn't know.

Before leaving the ancient temple we offered our respects to Agnideva. It was an interesting visit and confirmed for us Srila Prabhupada's statement in *Srimad Bhagavatam* that the Vedic culture once existed all over the world.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WE GET THE VISAS

FRIDAY JUNE 2

Today I held initiations in the courtyard of the temple. I accepted two boys, 17 and 23 years of age, as disciples. Because they are *sankirtana* partners I called them Nakula dasa and Sahadeva dasa, after the twin sons of Madri, the wife of Pandu.

Besides a crowd of 300 devotees, many of them congregation members, there were a number of people from the neighborhood. There also must have been fifty Muslim children, and during the two-and-a-half-hour *kirtana* that Sri Prahlada led afterwards, they chanted Hare Krsna and danced in ecstasy as their parents looked on from the rooftops or over the walls of our temple.

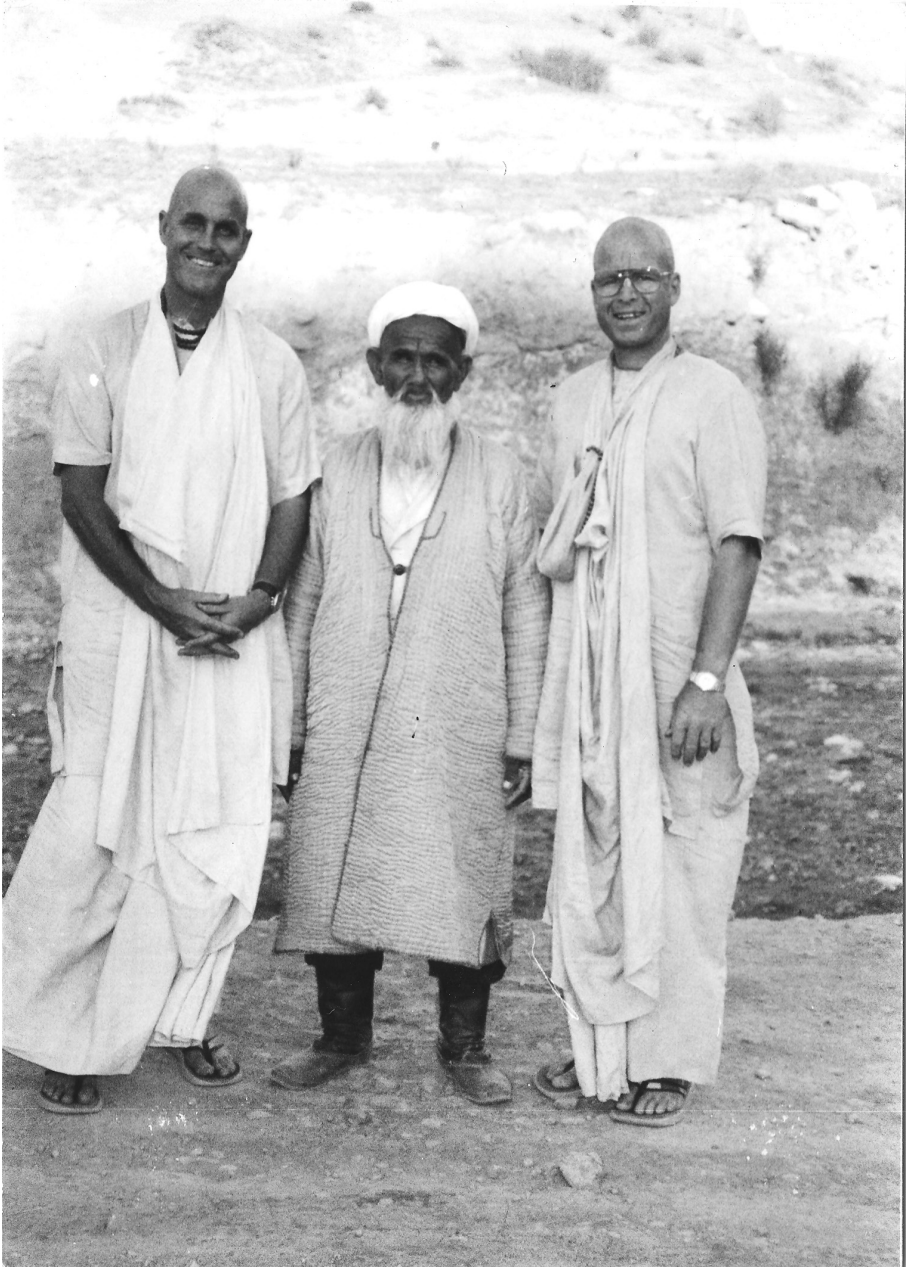
It always amazes me to see Muslims intermingling freely with devotees and attending our functions. The temple is situated in an area where the houses are packed closely together, but no one seems to mind our *kirtanas*. But every morning when Govinda Maharaja or I give *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class, the local mosque, just fifty meters away, blasts the reading from the Koran over its loudspeaker to the

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area's Muslims. The devotees attending class simply move in a little closer to hear the *Bhagavatam* speaker.

Before we took rest, a devotee brought us our passports. He had managed to get visas for us from a government office, with a bribe on the side. Now we were legally in the country and could legally leave as well. It was a great relief for us. Tomorrow night we plan to fly further into central Asia, to Bishkek on the border of northern China.

As I fall asleep I curse the mosquitoes. There is no relief from them, especially because in Azerbaijan and Russia you cannot buy mosquito repellent. It doesn't exist. For me it is "the most amazing thing." I searched shop after shop for mosquito repellent the other day, until Uttamasloka told me that Russians don't even know what it is.



With BB Govinda Maharaja and a Muslin Mullah (priest)



Crossing the border into Azerbaijan



Traveling through back roads into Azerbaijan



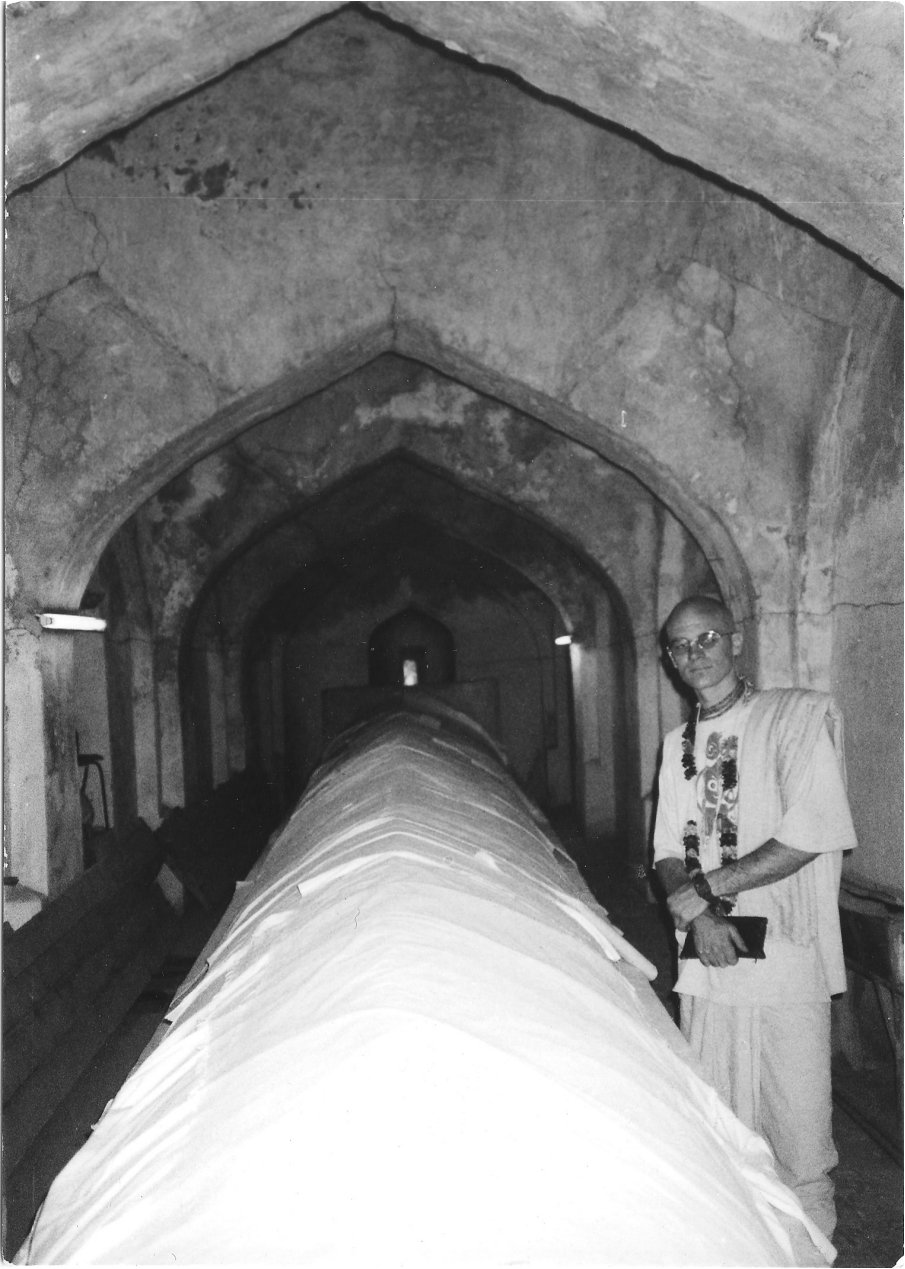
With my disciples in Kazakhstan



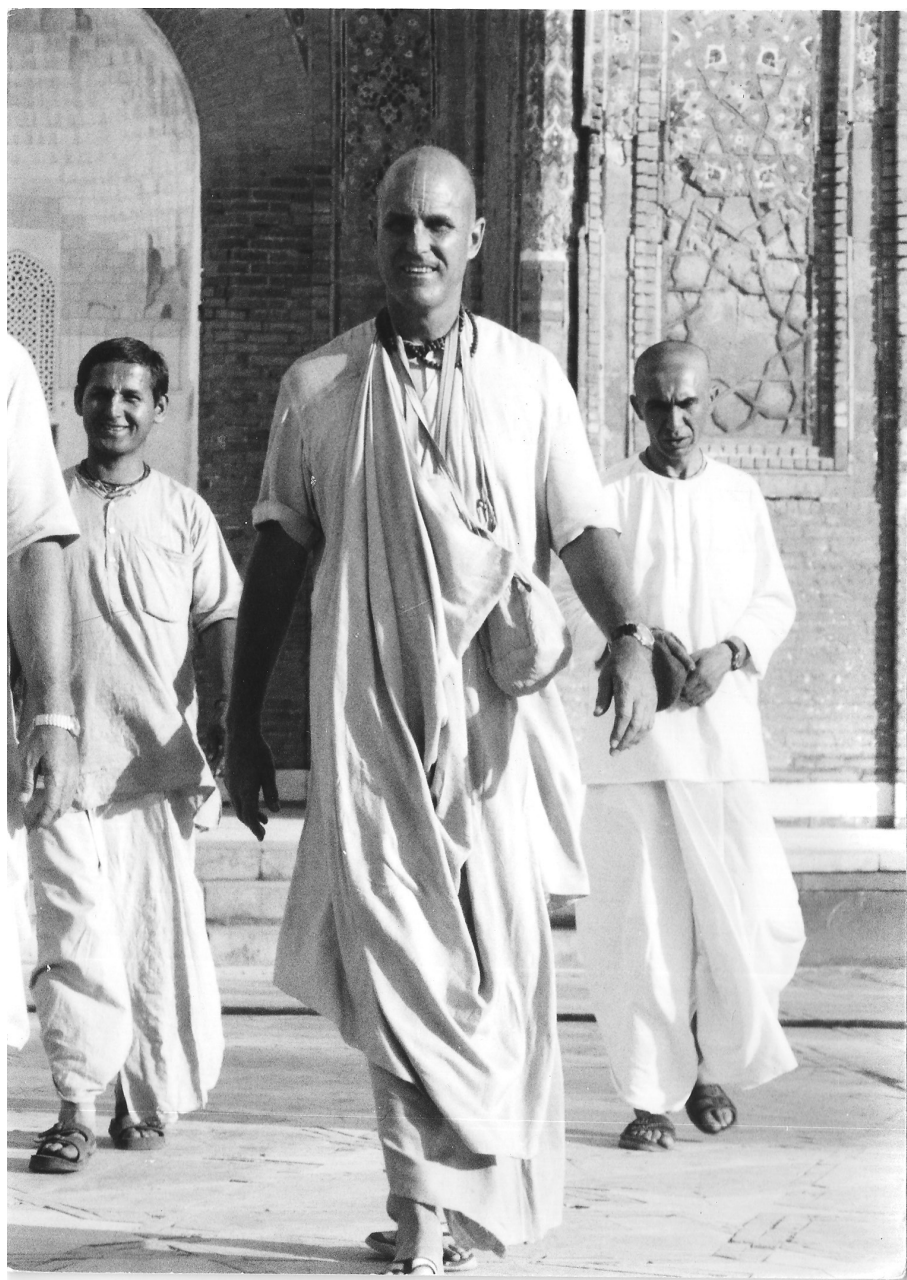
The police stopping us on the way to Baku



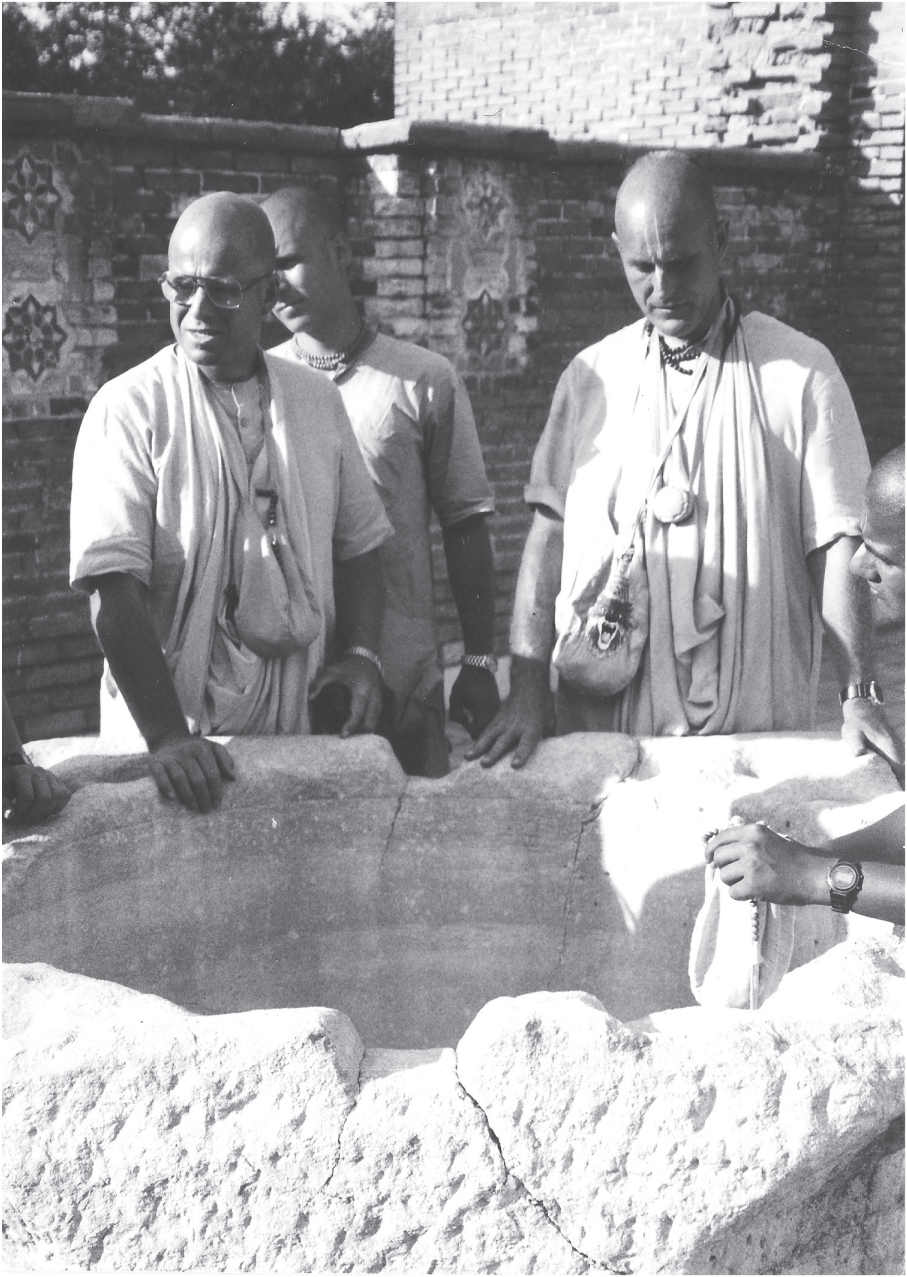
With local children at the temple in Baku



Sri Prahlada at Daniels tomb



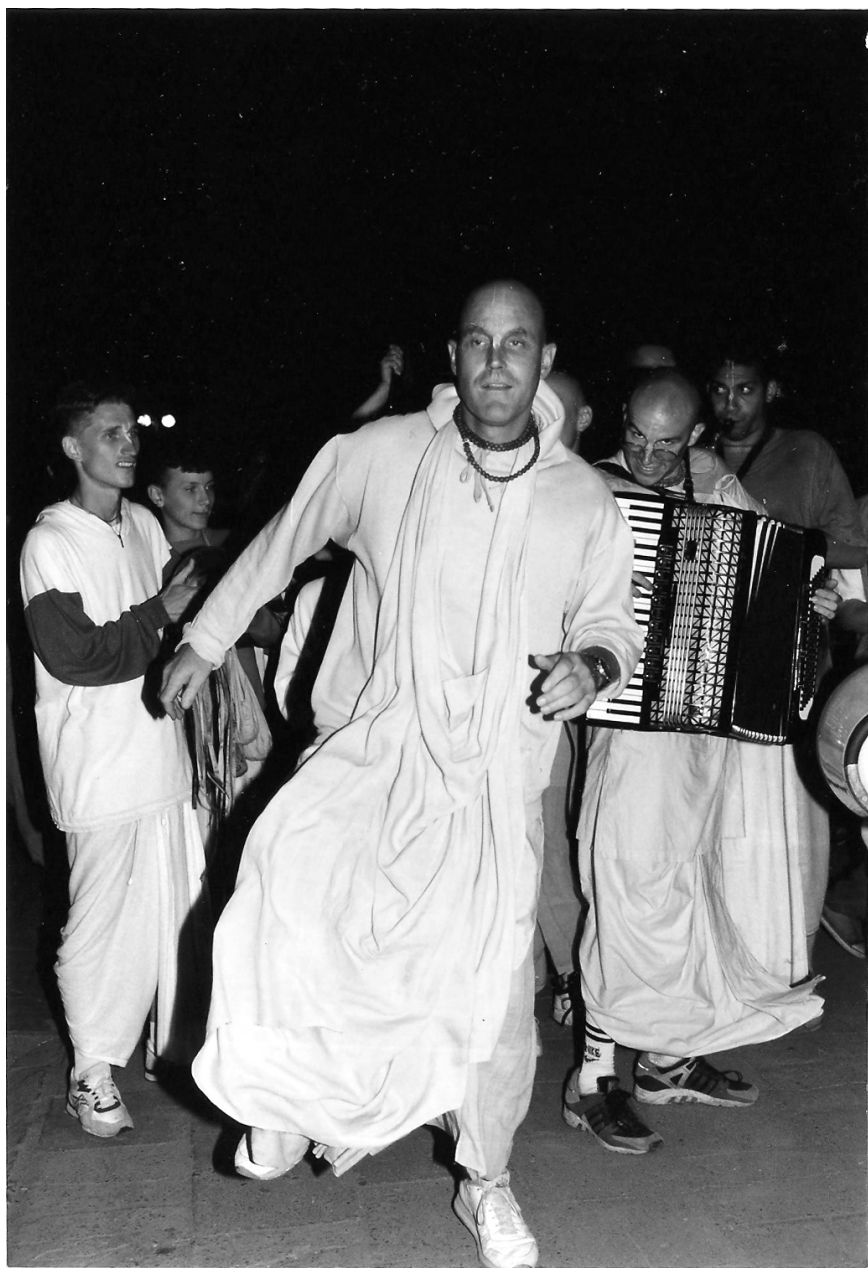
Near the palace of Timor in Samarkand



Timor's well



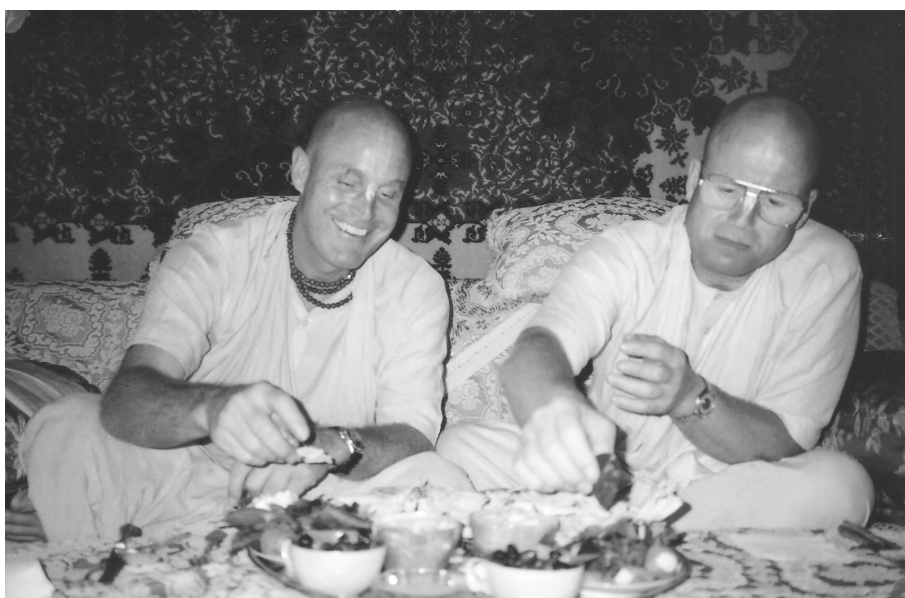
9 year old Nadia, who joined us in our travels



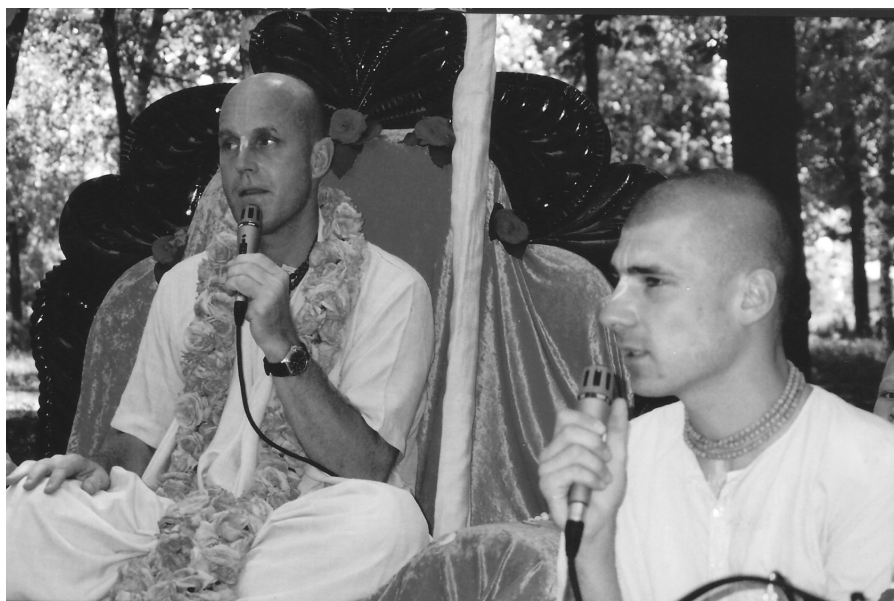
On harinam in Baku



Devotees in front of the Temple of Fire near Baku



With BB Govinda Maharaja (R) at a feast in Kazakhstan



With Uttama Sloka das at initiation speech in Kazakhstan



Temple of Fire near Baku



The plaque at the entrance of the Temple of Fire outside Baku



Initiation in Baku

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ALL GLORIES TO THE DEVOTEES OF THE BAKU YATRA!

SATURDAY JUNE 3

This morning I gave class on a verse from the third canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* about the glories of the brahminical, or priestly, order. I was emphasizing the point that by becoming a devotee of the Lord (a Vaisnava), one naturally develops the good qualities of a brahmana. I then gave the example that Haridasa Thakura was born in a low-class family as a Muslim.

Immediately upon saying this I felt uncomfortable, because almost all the guests were Muslims. It wasn't the proper choice of words according to time and circumstance. I immediately tried to adjust the mistake by quoting the verse from *Bhagavad-gita* that states that those of low birth can approach the supreme destination;

*mam hi patha vyapasrita
ye 'pi syuh papa-yonayah
striyo vaisyas tatha sudra
te 'pi yanti param gatim*

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“O son of Prtha, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, vaisyas [merchants] and sudras [workers]—can attain the supreme destination.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 9.32)

But of course, the verse doesn't mention Muslims, so I didn't completely succeed in adjusting the awkward moment. A preacher must become expert at preaching according to time and circumstance so as not to offend anyone and inspire his audience towards devotional service.

Later this morning, Sri Prahlada and I, with one other devotee, went into Baku to find a park to chant our rounds. While driving around we came across a beautiful mosque that was under construction. We stopped and got out to look.

We were surprised to see that it was being built entirely from solid pieces of rock and marble, like buildings of previous centuries. The small crew of men working on the construction at the front section of the mosque were chipping away at a piece of flat stone that appeared to be for an intricate window frame. They approached us and asked where we were from and what religion we were practicing. After some discussion about the Koran and *Bhagavad-gita* they invited us to come inside the mosque. At first I hesitated, because I feared that if any militant Muslims saw us in the mosque, we might have a problem.

Several years ago when there was agitation in India over the Hindus tearing down a mosque in Ayodhya, local Muslims in Baku surrounded our temple and threatened to burn it to the ground. The devotees called the temple in Moscow, where they immediately went on COM appealing for international help. A few hours later a flood of protests swamped the Azerbaijan Government from devotees and well-wishers throughout the world, and soon the Baku police came and dispersed the mob that was surrounding the temple.

ALL GLORIES TO THE DEVOTEES OF THE BAKU YATRA!

At the insistence of the workers, we went inside, and they took us all the way to the top of the mosque by way of the stairs in one of the turrets. At the top we had a bird's-eye view of the entire city. At one point Sri Prahlada turned to me and said he was also feeling nervous being in the mosque, due to a few people gathering and watching us from the street. So we thanked our hosts and descended the stairs back to our car.

This evening we held our final program in the Baku Temple. At the end of the last *kirtana* I gave a little talk thanking the devotees for their wonderful association and encouraging them in their preaching. I told them Srila Prabhupada must be very proud of them for their determined preaching in this part of the world. Srila Prabhupada once said he would take the dust of the feet of any devotee who preached in the Muslim countries. As I looked out at the Baku devotees, tears streaming down their faces, I could understand that many of them must have been placed there by Lord Caitanya to fulfill His desires for spreading the glories of the holy names in every town and village. All glories to the devotees of the Baku Yatra! May they be blessed with the full mercy of Haridasa Thakura!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BISHKEK: HALF A MILLION LISTENERS

SUNDAY JUNE 4

We left Baku for Bishkek at 3:00 a.m. on Azerbaijani Airlines. In the CIS, flights operate around the clock. The four-hour flight took us past Afghanistan and India to Kirghistan. The airplane was quite old, and it appeared it had never been cleaned.

It was typical of planes in the CIS. Inside they are more like buses, no drinks or refreshments are served, and no one asks you to buckle your seat belt. I can only imagine how much attention is given to the mechanical parts of the planes. Once Srila Prabhupada said that the external condition reflects the internal state. Then no doubt flying in the CIS is risky. I'm sure there are crashes, but the policy is that they are never reported. Vinode Bihari told me that on his way to join us he boarded an Aeroflot flight in Odessa bound for Moscow. Just as they were taking off, the right engine caught fire. The plane screeched to a stop and all the passengers fled the plane. The fire was extinguished and the engine replaced, and in three hours they were off again—in the same plane.

Upon our arrival in Bishkek we were met by the forty devotees of the

yatra. Because the place is so close to China, most of the devotees are of Oriental appearance. The only senior devotees to have ever visited this place are Gopal Krsna Maharaja and Govinda Maharaja, so the devotees were leaping in ecstasy to see us.

We went to the temple for a short darsana. As one particularly blissful old woman came forward to offer me flowers, I noticed a large, blue tattoo on her. It read, “46123.” I asked the temple president why she had such a strange tattoo, and he replied that she was a prisoner in one of Hitler’s death camps in World War II.

“How fortunate she is!” I thought, “She has survived to get the mercy of Lord Caitanya fifty years later.”

After the reception I was whisked away to a radio program downtown.

When I arrived at the radio station, I realized what a big preaching opportunity was at hand. The radio station was one of the biggest and most popular in Bishkek. The disk jockeys loved the devotees, who bring them prasadam every day.

When I walked in they told me I could do whatever I wanted for three hours. The studio was mine. They said more than five hundred thousand people would be listening. So I called the temple and told the devotees to tell Govinda Maharaja and Sri Prahlada to get down to the station in 45 minutes, before we went on the air. They arrived just before the program began.

Suddenly the mike was in my hands and we were on the air. We started a *kirtana*, and after a few minutes I spoke through a devotee translator.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” I began, “this is Indradyumna Swami, and I’ll be your host for the next three hours for a transcendental journey through the wonderful world of Hare Krsna.”

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Govinda Maharaja, Sri Prahlada, and I spoke and answered questions that came in over the hot line. At the end we had a big *kirtana* and all the disc jockeys and their assistants were dancing around the studio in ecstasy.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A WONDERFUL DREAM ABOUT SRI SRI RADHA-KRSNA

MONDAY JUNE 5

This afternoon we had a big *Harinama* in downtown Bishkek. The devotees had worked hard to get permission, so they were really eager to chant and dance. The public, being Oriental and quite reserved, didn't chant or dance with us, but looked on respectfully and asked some nice questions.

Before going to sleep, I told Govinda Maharaja about the bad dreams I'd been having since the big initiation in St. Petersburg on Lord Nrsimhadeva's Appearance Day. He told me that Sivarama Maharaja often has dreams of a spiritual nature. So I fell asleep thinking of Sivarama Maharaja and had a wonderful dream about him.

I dreamt that Govinda Maharaja, Sivarama Maharaja, and I were installing Radha Krsna Deities on the New Vraja Dhama farm in Hungary. Sivarama Maharaja actually plans to install such Deities there on Janmastami 1996. In my dream, after the installation the curtain closed for the pujaris to dress Their Lordships. When the curtain opened again, Srimati Radharani had a beautiful, radiant

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smile on Her face. Sivarama Maharaja fainted in happiness, and I caught him as he fell to the ground.

CHAPTER TWENTY

“YOU HAVE SURPASSED ALL THE STAGES OF YOGA”

TUESDAY JUNE 6

While I was brushing my teeth this morning, one of my teeth fell out. I took it as a sign that at 46 I'm not getting any younger. Srila Prabhupada says in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* that old age begins at 50. I also heard a lecture tape recently of Srila Prabhupada in New York City in 1969. “This body is no longer like a young man's body,” he said. “As soon as you are 50 years, old age begins. And when you are seventy years, you are completely old.”

I suppose if I'd taken things easier throughout my life, my body would be in much better shape than it is now. But I have no regrets. As the *Bhagavatam* says, “What is the value of a long life inexperienced by years in this world? Better one moment of full consciousness for that begins one on the path of perfection.” Being a traveling preacher is a demanding service and takes every ounce of one's energy.

Canakya Pandita says:

“A garment becomes old by being left in the sun, a horse becomes

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old by being left tied up, a woman becomes old from lack of attention from her husband, and travel brings old age upon a man.”

But despite the difficulties, the happiness in being a traveling preacher is unlimited. Not because one gets to see the world—I’ve seen enough of that— but because it is an opportunity to please Srila Prabhupada by completely devoting one’s body, mind, and words to his mission.

Srila Prabhupada wrote the following to Prabhavisnu Maharaja in London in January of 1973:

“I can understand that it is not an easy manner to travel extensively over long periods of time without proper food, rest, and sometimes it must be very cold there also, and still, because you are getting so much enjoyment, spiritual enjoyment, from it, it seems like play to you. That is advanced stage of spiritual life, never attained by even great yogis and so-called jnanis. But let any man see our devotees working so hard for Krsna, then let anyone say that they’re not better than millions of so-called yogis and transcendentalists, that is my challenge. Because you are rightly understanding through your personal realization this philosophy of Krsna consciousness, therefore in such a short time you have surpassed all the stages of yoga processes to come to the highest point of surrendering to Krsna. That I very much appreciate. Thank you very much for helping me in this way.”

This morning I gave a lecture to 100 university students, and in the afternoon I lectured to 300 people at a public program, some of them from the university program. During Govinda Maharaja’s question-and-answer session, I did a television interview for the biggest television network in Kirghistan. They had heard last night’s radio program and came to film our lecture program. This evening I gave a lecture at a devotee’s

"YOU HAVE SURPASSED ALL THE STAGES OF YOGĀ"

apartment, where Govinda Maharaja installed Gaura-Nitai Deities. The day was packed full of preaching programs from morning to night.

"Oh Prabhupada, how happy I am to serve you like this,
"Always preaching and traveling on,
"As a flowing river remains always clean,
"I pray to remain always pure."

(Vyasa-puja offering, 1990)

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

ARRIVING IN TASHKENT

WEDNESDAY JUNE 7

Beginning early this morning, we drove eleven hours from Bishkek to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, passing briefly through Kazakhstan. It was a long and arduous journey through 800 kilometers of arid land. One compensation was the snow-capped Himalaya Mountains that remained to our left for most of the journey. There was not one petrol station the entire 800 kilometers. You either bring your own petrol or buy it from the old petrol tankers that park intermittently along the route.

At one point we found a crystal-clear river coming down from the mountains and stopped and bathed for an hour. It was a welcome relief from the sweltering heat.

We arrived in Tashkent at 10:30 pm. The devotees had been awaiting our visit for more than a week because our travel plans had been adjusted several times. When our car pulled up in front of the temple, the devotees exploded into an amazing *kirtana* that swept us into the small temple room. After *guru-puja*, Govinda Maharaja and I spoke, thanking the devotees for the reception and

ARRIVING IN TASHKENT

telling them how much we looked forward to the next few days with them.

The temple is a simple building in a residential district on the outskirts of Tashkent. The devotees struggle to maintain it. They are able to collect only the equivalent of 100 American dollars a month, and that must go for all their expenses. I simply couldn't understand how they survived.

But people in this part of the world are tough and enterprising, and so the devotees go on. They have even started a small restaurant here, although on their income I couldn't understand how. But the temple president said that everything in the restaurant—the small storefront itself, wood for re-decorating, kitchen equipment, and plates and cutlery—was donated by friends and well-wishers, even Muslim neighbors.

The Uzbekistan Government is very strict regarding all religious movements. No one—neither the predominant Muslims, the minority Christians, nor us—is allowed to proselytize in any way, means, or manner because the government fears the fundamentalist Muslims who have taken control in countries to the south, like Afghanistan. We are not allowed to do any *Harinama* or public programs, so our stay in Tashkent is simply for being with the devotees and the congregation in the temple. The first Mogul invasion of India originated in Uzbekistan.

A thousand years ago, the conqueror Mohammed Gazzi left from Samarkand, a city to the west of Tashkent, with a massive army to conquer India. When he reached the outskirts of Mathura he marveled at its majesty and beauty.

“In all my imagination,” he is quoted as saying, “I could never have dreamed of such an opulent and beautiful city.” Then he ordered

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his army to level Mathura. After destroying the city, its Deities, and most of the population, he took all the gold and riches back to Uzbekistan. It was the beginning of Islam's long domination of India.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

"MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE!"

THURSDAY JUNE 8

After the morning program, I went with Sri Prahlada into Tashkent to buy a few necessities. I was still looking for a tube of insect repellent. We went to the biggest market, where the upper class people shop. Shopping in the market was not easy, for the reason that everyone who saw us stopped out of curiosity to speak to us. The people were polite and respectful, but their many questions made it impossible for us to do any shopping. After one hour we had made it only twenty meters into the store. The products in the market looked like something out of the 1950s in America, and I couldn't even find insect repellent. What I would give for some good repellent! I remembered the king in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, who falling from his horse in the crucial battle for his throne cried out, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

THE FIRST MUSLIMS TO INVADE INDIA WERE FROM HERE

FRIDAY JUNE 9

Today was Pandava-nirjala ekadasi, and I decided to observe the full fast, even from water. It wasn't easy because we were in the desert, and somehow there often seems to be many complications on ekadasi. Today was no exception.

I received an e-mail message early this morning that the temple presidents in South Africa were considering postponing the annual December Ratha-yatra in Durban until April. The reason was that Ratha-yatra interferes with the December book-distribution marathon. I was angry about a move to switch plans in mid-year and jeopardize such a big preaching program. After last year's Ratha-yatra we discussed the pros and cons of changing the dates and decided to keep it in December. But recently someone again agitated the situation, and the desire to change was further expressed.

I feel protective of the festival because when Srila Prabhupada visited Durban in 1975, he told the devotees to build a beautiful temple and hold a big Ratha-yatra every year. It wasn't until 1989, when I was

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temple president in Durban, that we succeeded in holding the first Ratha-yatra. It was an overwhelming success, which has increased every year since. To change to April is risky for a number of reasons: It's not the festive season like December, it is subsequently more difficult to collect funds in April, and we may not get permission for our regular site.

I personally feel the real issue is that the devotees in Durban are not fully into the book-marathon spirit in December and are using the Ratha-yatra as a straw man. But I feel practically helpless to do anything from central Asia. It's difficult to get out of Tashkent or Uzbekistan by phone or e-mail, and it's expensive.

After hours of trying, I managed to contact Bhakti Caru Maharaja by telephone. I also managed to call Sruta Kirti, the temple president in Durban. I have a long-standing friendship and admiration for Sruta and appealed to him to go ahead with the plans to hold Ratha-yatra in December. He said it would be discussed during the weekend. In an effort to find a solution that would be acceptable to everyone concerned, I offered to take charge of the December book-marathon as well as the Ratha-yatra. For most of the ekadasi, I paced the floors in the sweltering heat, praying to Lord Jagannatha to let the festival go on as planned.

More bad news came this afternoon. When Vinod Bihari went to the office to buy train tickets for our next destination, Dushanbe in Tajikistan, he was told we were all in Uzbekistan illegally because we didn't have visas. It was like a bad dream all over again. We had driven into the country but no one stopped us at the border from Kazakhstan into Uzbekistan. The rules are still unclear in these former Soviet Republics. Bureaucracy is slow moving, and laws change day by day. But it appeared we definitely needed visas.

So Vinod Bihari had to resort to our previous tactics in Baku. He was

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led to a dark, smoky office at the back of the train station, where a “friend” could help him. There he produced some American dollars and got special stamps put in our passports. They weren’t even stamps, just some writing. It is supposed to be enough, but we won’t know until we reach the border.

Getting to Dushanbe is not going to be easy. Islamic fundamentalist rebels are fighting government forces in the countryside, so we can’t fly into Tajikistan from Tashkent, and the trains are diverted to safe passageways that change all the time. Nothing is sure or certain.

Besides that, the devotees said the train is a slow-moving train to hell. The toilets are never cleaned, and the windows are boarded up as protection from any fighting along the way. Our only real possibility is to drive to Dushanbe. But it’s a fourteen-hour drive through territory held by the rebels. Although the devotees said the rebels probably wouldn’t stop us, I am a bit nervous about the idea. They also told me that the border guards are known for taking some “help” in the form of money or anything they like from one’s bags. What’s more, the road is simply a dirt road etched out of the mountainside, with room for only one car to pass.

Once again, we are faced with a decision to go and give association to devotees who rarely see any senior devotees and who are preaching under difficult situations, or to play it safe. We decided to go to Dushanbe.

The problem was that we had only one vehicle. So Govinda Maharaja called all his disciples together and asked them to try to find a car that would take us through Samarkand and down to Dushanbe. It was not an attractive proposal—driving through rebel territory into an uneasy situation in Dushanbe.

But Maharaja’s disciples rushed off, eager to please him, and four

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hours later came back with several choices: an army jeep, an old Russian Volga, a Polish Nysa van, or a 1970 Mercedes. We chose the Mercedes with its professional driver named Boris, not because we wanted to go in style but because it was the safest vehicle.

This afternoon, Govinda Maharaja and I did an interview with the biggest television station in Tashkent. Having been told we couldn't proselytize our faith in Uzbekistan, it wasn't clear to me how I was supposed to do a major television interview. But the interviewer gave me a list of questions, and then I understood how it was possible. Most of the questions were based around yoga, but as the interview went on Maharaja and I began to speak freely about Krsna consciousness: its history, traditions, and philosophy. No one objected, and the television personnel were thrilled with the program, which they said would be aired on Saturday at prime time. I took the whole thing as Krsna's mystic power.

This evening Govinda Maharaja gave *Bhagavad-gita* class at the Tashkent temple. He began with the *Jaya Radha-Madhava* prayers, but as he kept going, the *kirtana* got bigger and bigger. Finally he got off the Vyasaśana, and we had a two-and-a-half-hour *kirtana* that lasted until 10 p.m. With more than two hundred devotees and guests, we took the *kirtana* out in front of the temple, but no further. Many Muslim neighbors came out of their homes to see, and cars and buses stopped to watch. We had quite a crowd, and everyone was pleased. We may have been a different religion, but everyone enjoyed seeing us chanting Hare Krsna and dancing. Soon a number of the neighbors were chanting with us. Again, I marveled at how Lord Caitanya's *sankirtana* transcends all barriers of birth, nationality, and religion. It is completely transcendental.

After the *kirtana*, all 200 of us plus many neighbors sat cramped on the small pathway into the temple as Govinda Maharaja, Sri

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Prahlada, Vinod Bihari, Uttamasloka, and I took turns preaching and reminiscing about our visit. Govinda Maharaja told the story of how Lord Caitanya defeated the Muslim Chand Kazi, who was initially opposed to the *sankirtana* movement. After discussing with Lord Caitanya, the Chand Kazi allowed the *sankirtana* of the holy names to continue throughout Navadvipa and requested all further generations of Muslims to permit the chanting of Hare Krsna to go on in the area.

As Maharaja pointed out, the first Muslims to invade and settle in India were from Uzbekistan, so this is where the Chand Kazi's ancestors must have come from. Maharaja prayed that one day the Uzbekistan government would also honor the order made by the Chand Kazi of Navadvipa for Lord Caitanya and allow us the freedom to chant the holy names without restriction throughout the land.

Sri Prahlada's final *kirtana* again brought a flood of tears from the devotees as we said our final goodbyes. In *The Nectar of Devotion* Srila Prabhupada says that a devotee must learn the art of crying for Krsna:

"In other words, one should learn how to cry for the Lord. One should learn this small technique, and he should be very eager and actually cry to become engaged in some particular type of service. This is called *lanhyam*, and, such tears are the price for the highest perfection." [*Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 9]

This is possible only by the mercy of the *sankirtana* movement.

On our way back to our apartment at midnight, we were stopped at a police roadblock. But when they saw we were Hare Krsna devotees they laughed and waved us on. The next car wasn't so fortunate. I saw the driver had to give the police a bottle of Russian vodka before they would let him go.

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Govinda Maharaja told me that last year when they crossed the border into the country, his servant had to give his watch to the customs officer in order to be allowed in.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

THE GOLDEN ROAD TO SAMARKAND

SATURDAY JUNE 10

We left Tashkent this morning for Samarkand. As we were driving, Yasomatinandana dasa, the regional secretary for this area, told me that in the nineteenth century all the Muslim countries in this area—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—were one country called Turkmenistan, with the Imir of Bukhara (now Uzbekistan) as the absolute authority. The country was fabulously rich from its invasions throughout the centuries.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, the Imir of Bukhara, fearing a communist takeover of his country, had his soldiers put all the gold in the treasury on a caravan of camels and take it to the desert to hide it. Then he had the soldiers killed, and those soldiers who killed those soldiers killed and those soldiers who killed those soldiers killed, until he was the only one who knew where the treasure was. He died without revealing its location.

Our trip to Samarkand, one of the prominent capitals of ancient Islam, took four hours through dry farm land. We passed many irrigation ditches where young boys could be seen happily swimming

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in the sweltering heat. I saw that much of the farming was being done by Muslim women in colorful traditional dress. Bundles of wheat were being transported to the nearby villages on small donkeys.

It is said that visiting Samarkand thrice is equal to visiting Mecca once. As we approached the city, a famous quotation I had memorized in my school days suddenly came to my mind:

“For the joy of knowing what may not be known
We take the golden road to Samarkand.”

As we entered the city we saw many ancient, beautiful mosques. It was one of the five times of the day that Muslims pray, and we heard the Mullahs reading the Koran through the loudspeakers atop the mosques. Men were kneeling in prayer here and there. I was awed by the size and beauty of many of the buildings, although some were in disrepair. Dating back more than 25 hundred years, Samarkand was once called the Pearl of the Muslim World.

We had several hours before our program with the local devotees was to begin, so we decided to visit some of the historic sites. We saw the tomb of Timor, the Mogul tyrant who swept into India after Mohammed Gazzi and conquered Delhi. Outside his massive and ornately decorated tomb is a huge marble seat where he received guests. Nearby is a large stone vat, about three meters in diameter.

I asked one of the guards what it was. He said Timor would have each of the men in his army pour a cup of wine into the vessel before going into battle. When the men returned from fighting, they would again take their cups and dip them one time into the vessel and drink. By seeing how much wine was left in the vessel, Timor could judge how many of his men had been killed in battle.

We saw his actual tomb underneath the ground. Because he was one

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of the Mogul tyrants who conquered India, my thoughts while there are difficult for me to put in this diary.

Just outside Samarkand we visited the tomb of St. Daniel, the great Christian who was untouched when thrown to the lions in the Colosseum by the Romans. I asked Yasomatinandana why St. Daniel was buried in Uzbekistan.

He told me that Timor had tried for many years to conquer Syria but was unsuccessful. One of his ministers suggested it was because the saint from biblical times, Daniel, was buried there. Timor then sent his army to where St. Daniel was entombed in Syria and after a fierce fight with the Syrians was able to take the body back to Uzbekistan. It is said that St. Daniel was eighteen meters tall and that it required a caravan of camels to transport his remains to Uzbekistan.

When we saw his tomb, I was surprised that it was indeed eighteen meters long. The caretaker of the tomb is a kind and gentle Muslim man who told us that worshipers from many religions—Muslims, Christians and Jews—visit the tomb. He requested that we circumambulate the tomb to pay our respects. Then he asked us to sit down, and with great devotion he began reciting the Koran before the tomb. He was such a simple and kind man that his prayers moved me a lot.

He told us that once he was sleeping next to the tomb and St. Daniel appeared to him in a dream., “Get up, my child,” St. Daniel told him. “Get up. Guests are coming to visit.”

Govinda Maharaja later took a broom and swept the entrance to the tomb “to do some seva for Daniel.” Before leaving we drank water said to have the power to cure from a natural source that had sprung up the day St. Daniel was entombed here.

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Dusk was setting in by the time we reached the park where the program was to be held. Remembering that proselytizing was against the law in Uzbekistan, I was again wondering how we were to present a program in a public park. But when we arrived I understood how the devotees had arranged it. They had heard that Sri Prahlada was the lead singer in our rock band Celibate Lovers in Poland. So they had simply advertised the program in the park as a rock concert.

When we arrived, the caretaker of the park was a bit taken aback by our dhotis and shaved heads, but as soon as Sri Prahlada started *kirtana* with his accordion, everything was all right. About a hundred people gathered as soon as Sri Prahlada started to sing. I was standing there, again marveling at how we were chanting Hare Krsna in Samarkand, the ancient Pearl of the Muslim World.

“This one’s for all the ksatriyas who fell in battle defending the city of Delhi,” I thought. “Roll over, Timor ... “

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

BIG SMILES AND SLAPS ON OUR BACKS

SUNDAY JUNE 11

After a short morning program with the twenty devotees of the Samarkand yatra, we left in two cars for the city of Dushanbe in Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan. Boris's yellow Mercedes led the way with Govinda Maharaja and four other devotees inside. The rest of us followed in another car. Considering the dangers of traveling through the mountains, we decided to take a longer route that was less risky. The further south we drove the hotter it got.

We stopped to get petrol at the first "petrol station" that I had seen in Uzbekistan. The men at the station brought out a strange contraption that mixed petrol with oil. After mixing the substances, they poured the petrol by hand into our gas tank. It took half an hour to fill the tank of each car.

About an hour after filling up, one of the red lights on our car's dashboard lit up and our driver, Alexander, pulled over to the side of the road. Taking a screwdriver and wrench he jumped out, opened

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the hood of the car and cleared the gas lines in the engine. He said the petrol we took was of such poor quality that it had blocked the gas lines. It was a good thing he knew how to fix cars. Otherwise, what in the world would we do if we broke down out there in the desert of Uzbekistan?

Boris, who has driven trucks through this area for 25 years, told us that if you stop at the side of the road at night and leave your headlights on, thousands of tarantulas will come out from the desert on to the road attracted by the light. He also said some of the deadliest scorpions and snakes in the world are in this region.

It took us eleven hours to reach the Tajikistan border. After passing through three checkpoints on the Uzbekistan side, we had to pass another three border controls on the Tajikistan side. As we came to the first checkpoint on the Tajikistan side, four soldiers approached our car each carrying an AK-47.

In the process of searching our cars for weapons, a soldier found my money belt, which I had stupidly left in the glove compartment. Opening it, he found the several hundred dollars I was keeping there. It was a tense moment. He asked why I was carrying so much money, and I replied it was to help our Food for Life program in Dushanbe. I explained that we give free food to people who are in need there because of the war. He seemed to appreciate that, and with a sly smile gave me back my money belt. We were questioned and held for half an hour at each of the other two checkpoints.

At the last checkpoint, one of the border guards told Boris that we were lucky we were coming into Dushanbe from this direction. He said that 50 kilometers on the other side of the city a battle was raging between government forces and the rebels.

“But be prepared to duck the bullets from either side as you enter the city,” he said. We were all a bit tense, and I chanted some Nrsimha prayers as we drove towards Dushanbe, 30 kilometers away.

Then the most amazing thing happened. About three kilometers from the border, as we were passing through a village we saw a huge Muslim wedding ceremony taking place. It was 9:00 p.m., and all the villagers were singing and dancing in an illuminated field. A small band was playing traditional Islamic music and there were several rows of tables where men and women in Muslim dress were feasting. The bride and the groom sat with their relatives at a table on one side of the field, and many people, young and old, were dancing for their pleasure. It was a joyful and colorful scene.

“It would be really interesting to visit that ceremony,” I thought.

Just at that moment, Govinda Maharaja’s car stopped ahead of us and he jumped out and came back to our car. “What do you think Govinda Maharaja?” he said. “Shall we go down there?”

“Sure,” I said. “Lets go.”

We walked down to the field with the rest of the devotees. We had no idea how we were going to be received, but we had always been warmly and kindly treated by the Islamic people so we had no fear.

And just as we expected, as soon as the people saw us, they welcomed us with the traditional Muslim gesture, a hand to the heart. With big smiles and slaps on our backs they swept us forward to sit with the men at the tables. When they offered us food we politely refused, saying we were Hindustani Mullahs observing our own Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

They then respectfully gave us water. After a few minutes of discussion, the elders of the village asked us to lead the singing.

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Uttamasloka ran back to the cars and got our mrdangas and karatalas and Sri Prahlada's accordion.

The leading men of the village then took us to where the musicians were playing and introduced us to the crowd of two thousand villagers over an antique loudspeaker system. I spoke through a translator for a few minutes, thanking the villagers for receiving us so warmly. When I mentioned that we felt like part of the family, a huge roar of approval came from the crowd.

Then we began *kirtana*. At first the people watched us with curious faces, the men with their big mustaches and the women and girls with their heads covered by scarves. Then one by one, men and women came out on the field and danced with us. It was an incredible scene: Muslims and Hindus dancing together like the best of friends.

After the fifteen minutes of *kirtana* we were all given seats of respect with the elders of the village. They tried again to give us meat and vodka, but we again pleaded that we were observing a fast. Then the local band played again, and hundreds of people came forward to dance in a traditional Islamic way. The leaders asked us to dance also. To refuse would have been seen as a great offense, so we got up and danced like them.

A few minutes later the crowd roared for us to sing Hare Krsna again. So as Sri Prahlada and Govinda Maharaja sang over the loudspeakers, Uttamasloka, Vinod Bihari, Krsna Prasad, and I danced on the field. At one point we approached the bride and groom's table of honor. They stood up and respectfully received us, and the groom's friends all shook our hands. The bride's face was completely covered, so I couldn't see her.

Just as we were getting ready to leave, the village elders came and insisted that we go to another festival five kilometers away. By now

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it was 10:00 pm., but we agreed to go because again, if we refused it would be seen as disrespectful. Besides, it was a rare chance to spread the glories of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in the Muslim world, so off we went.

As we were driving to the next village, Govinda Maharaja became a little anxious. “They could take us anywhere,” he said, “and do anything they wanted to us.”

A few minutes later we arrived at the next festival, which turned out to be the celebration of a newborn boy’s circumcision. The whole village was there enjoying the singing and dancing, and we were once again met with hearty approval and applause by the people, many of whom must not have seen foreigners before. The village children gaped at us.

Soon we were having another big *kirtana* as people came forward to dance. And there I was again, watching in amazement as the modern-day miracles of Lord Caitanya’s pastimes unfolded. There we were in a Muslim country torn apart by a civil war, a battle raging only a few kilometers away, yet chanting in unabated happiness with the people in a remote village.

Who could ever imagine? What miracles are still to be seen for those who serve the mission of Lord Caitanya within this world? Oh, Srila Prabhupada, please give me the privilege to serve you like this birth after birth.

We arrived at the Dushanbe temple at 1:30 a.m., passing through four more police checkpoints on the way. At each checkpoint the police were nervous because of the battle on the other side of the city, but each time they let us pass, recognizing us as some sort of holy men.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

THEY STOOD ON THE BALCONY WATCHING THE ROCKETS

MONDAY JUNE 12

Totally exhausted from yesterday's activities, we slept until 7:30 a.m.

Later I went with Govinda Maharaja and the temple president, Subuddhi Raya, in a car to chant our rounds in the city. Just after we entered the city's main street, a car drove by us, and gunfire started coming from the windows. On the other side of the street a man dove to the ground to avoid the bullets. The sound of gunfire startled me and I saw many people ducking for cover. We decided it would be better to chant our rounds at the temple, although Subuddhi Raya said that recently a car bomb exploded near the temple, and on several occasions the temple has been sprayed with machine-gun fire.

The Dushanbe temple is the nicest I have seen in the CIS. Situated in woods high above the city, it gives a panoramic view of Dushanbe. The devotees told me that when the war was at its peak in 1992 (the year ISKCON was registered here), they watched from the balcony of the temple as rockets flew from the nearby hills into the city.

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The government had been refusing to recognize our movement, but then a rebel missile destroyed a government building, killing the people inside who were refusing to register the devotees. The devotees applied again and were registered, During the eight months the Muslim fundamentalists controlled Tajikistan in 1992, the devotees bought the temple for five hundred American dollars from the previous owner who had to flee the country.

To date, the war has taken 100 thousand lives. The fundamentalists have been pushed back into nearby Afghanistan and Pakistan but continue to infiltrate the country and cause havoc. But there is a silver lining for our devotees: Tajikistan's pro-communist government likes us. Fearing a fundamentalist Muslim takeover, the government tries to encourage other religions in the country. It supports our daily Food for Life prasadam distribution in downtown Dushanbe.

Before taking rest Govinda Maharaja told me that the pain he has had in his back for many months has practically disappeared since he bathed in the waters of the natural spring near St. Daniel's tomb.

I replied that the pain in my ankle, from an injury I received a year ago, had almost disappeared as well. I'm not professing a miracle, just stating the facts. Maybe it's a coincidence ...

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

TOUCHING THE HEARTS OF THE OFFICIALS WITH PRASADAM

TUESDAY JUNE 13

While we were leaving Tajikistan today, the customs officials at the airport asked us to have a *kirtana*. We are not allowed to do *Harinama* on the streets because of the war, but somehow they had heard about our *kirtanas* at the temple. So right there in the customs hall, with people waiting to have their passports stamped and bags cleared, we got our instruments out (we always travel with Sri Prahlada's accordion and my mrdanga) and had a ten-minute *kirtana*. The officials were in bliss, laughing and clapping their hands when suddenly the airline people came running towards us saying that we were holding up the plane.

When we arrived in Almaty, Kazakhstan, two and a half hours later, the customs officials there were making a thorough search of everyone's baggage. But when they saw us they just waved us through. I couldn't understand why, until I met the devotees who were there to receive us. They had gone into the customs hall before our arrival and distributed delicious prasadam to all the officials, thus facilitating our entry into the country. I was thinking how in the

material world people rarely show kindness to others unless it's in their own interest to do so. So when devotees show causeless mercy to people, it touches their hearts like nothing else.

As we pulled up at our apartment, incense was literally billowing out of the upstairs window, permeating the area around the building with the sweet smell. Anyone walking within fifty meters had to smell it. Sri Prahlada told me that Radha Carana Prabhu had become a devotee as a result of a similar situation. He had been walking in the area of the Paris temple one afternoon and had smelled the sweet fragrance of incense. It was so attractive that he followed the scent to the temple. He had never seen or met devotees before. The door to the temple was open, and he just walked into the temple room where the incense was burning. There he met devotees, and that was the beginning of his spiritual life. Much like the four *Kumaras*.

In the evening I lectured on the life of Syamananda Pandita. He has always been one of my heroes in Krsna consciousness. Although he was such an advanced devotee, experiencing the highest mellows of devotional service, he was also a powerful and bold preacher. Just like Srila Prabhupada.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

"I'M IN SUCH ANXIETY THAT I'VE FALLEN ILL"

WEDNESDAY JUNE 14

News came from South Africa that they are still debating postponing Ratha-yatra. I spent much of today trying to contact them, to no avail. I'm in such anxiety that I've fallen ill as a result. This evening the local gurukula children put on a performance for me in their school apartment. I was enchanted with the music. They performed some very sweet bhajanas with a guitar, harmonium, and flute. To some degree, it mitigated my anxiety over the Durban Ratha-yatra.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

A WONDERFUL HARINAMA IN ALMATY

THURSDAY JUNE 15

We had a wonderful *Harinama* in downtown Almaty. There are no laws forbidding chanting in the streets here. The people loved it. A middle-aged woman stopped to watch us with the rest of the crowd assembled around us. I was speaking to the crowd at the time, and when I asked them to repeat the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra the woman responded enthusiastically. At the end I asked her to come forward, and in front of the whole crowd I gave her my thick red-rose garland. She was overwhelmed. During the next *kīrtana* she came forward and started dancing with us. That encouraged others to come forward, and soon we had about fifteen to twenty people dancing wildly with us. It was wonderful.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE FSK SPY BECOMES A DEVOTEE

FRIDAY JUNE 16

I awoke exhausted with a bad headache and didn't know how I was going to do any service today. I considered taking some aspirin. I don't generally do it, unless my headache is really bad, so after a little reflection I decided not to. But all I could do was lie in bed.

Sri Prahlada brought me some juice. I drank it, but complained to him that the juice tasted terrible and he should be more selective in what juices he gives me. There are some horrific brands on the market in Russia. On the way to an initiation ceremony I was to do in Almaty that morning, I mentioned to Sri Prahlada that I felt better, but a little groggy. He smiled and said that he had put aspirin in my juice because he couldn't stand to see me suffering. He knew I had a big day ahead of me. When I realized that was why the juice had tasted so bad, we started laughing together uncontrollably.

The initiation ceremony was held in a public park. It appeared we might have to cancel it due to rain, but the skies cleared long enough to have the four-hour program. As soon as we finished, it showered

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again. I initiated a girl, Vrnda devi dasi, who has a severe heart problem and may not live much longer.

Immediately after the initiation, I went for a television interview with Govinda Maharaja. We spoke for about twenty minutes on national television to an audience estimated at one million.

After the interview we held a public program. As in Bishkek, Govinda Maharaja had me give the talk, and then we answered the questions together for more than an hour.

This evening we were entertained again by the Almaty gurukula's bhajanas and dances. I could easily understand how in Vedic culture, families in villages would come together for such evening programs after a hard day's work. The mind is stimulated to higher thoughts, and the soul is enlivened. Nowadays, families gather in front of the television to watch horrible programs that do their thinking for them and pollute their hearts.

Before taking rest I went on checked my e-mail and received news from Moscow that an FSK agent, who had been planted in a temple, had become a real devotee through association. He admitted he had been placed in the temple to oversee our activities, but the life and philosophy of the movement had changed him. The day after he made his confession, there was an attempt to assassinate him, no doubt by the FSK. He's in the hospital but more determined than ever to become a devotee.

He confirmed our suspicion that a crackdown on our movement is coming, although he said there are definitely people in important positions within the government who support us. I sometimes wonder if the FSK would make an attempt on the life of a foreign preacher like me or arrange for an "accident." It's certainly not impossible and is a sobering thought. But they should take into

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consideration the following verse from the *Sri Nrsimha Kavaca* of the *Brahma Samhita: Trailokyavijaya*:

*Ugram viram maha visnum
jvalantam sarvato-mukham
nrsimham bhisanam bhadram
mrty-mrtyum namamy aham*

“I bow down before the all-powerful, frightening, auspicious, sublimely ferocious Lord Nrsimha, who is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Visnu, who burns like fire, whose faces are everywhere, and who is the death of death.”

I also heard that as part of the World Children’s Day celebration in Moscow’s Red Square, the devotees brought a two-ton cake to feed the city’s hungry children who were attending the celebration. Many important groups and dignitaries were there, and we received favorable coverage on television and in the newspapers. Top officials from the Russian Orthodox Church were invited, but many refused to come when they heard the Hare Krsnas were going to be there. When those who did come saw the cake, they declared that the whole function had become polluted.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

A BIG GRIN AND A TENNESSEE DRAWL

SATURDAY JUNE 17

Before we left Almaty, Sri Guru Carana Padma dasi, a disciple of mine who had just arrived back from India, told me an interesting story. While in Vrndavana she had met one of the devotee women who had traveled in my group up the Amazon River seven years ago. At that time we had encouraged many of the Amazon Indians in the villages to chant Hare Krsna.

The woman told Sri Guru Carana Padma that devotees had gone back to those villages recently in another boat and she'd had the opportunity to go with them. In one remote village they found a young man, perhaps 16 years of age, who ran forward with tears in his eyes when he saw the devotees entering his village. He embraced them and said he had been faithfully chanting Hare Krsna on beads every day for seven years. He began looking around anxiously for "that tall fair-skinned man in saffron robes" who had given him the beads seven years ago.

Hearing this story, I suddenly remembered the boy. We stayed in his

village for two days. At that time he must have been nine years old. He was particularly attracted to us and had been asking me how he could join us. I told him it was impossible, but I gave him an extra set of beads that I had and taught him how to chant. I told him to try to chant sixteen rounds a day. He promised me he would and would wait for the day we returned. Krsna arranged for the devotees to return to that village. The woman said the boy was devastated that I wasn't there. When I heard this story my heart pained, and I longed to go back there immediately.

This afternoon we traveled three hours by plane to Novosibirsk in Siberia. As we descended from the plane, we were met by the cool winds of the tundra, a big change from the hot deserts of central Asia.

We were nervous as we approached Russian customs and immigration. Govinda Maharaja, Sri Prahlada, and I had our multiple entry, one-year visas ready, but Krsna Prasada's visa was not actually valid. He had initially come into Russia on a single entry visa, and that had terminated when we left Russia to go into Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Having no alternative, Govinda Maharaja decided to try to get him back in on the same visa. It seemed like an impossible dream to me.

As we approached immigration we all put our passports and visas together, with Krsna Prasada's Nepalese passport and his expired Russian visa on the bottom. When the immigration officials saw us they were shocked, presumably because foreigners rarely enter Russia through Novosibirsk. But suddenly here we were—two Americans, a New Zealander, a Nepalese, and our Russian helpers—all in dhotis with shaved heads. It created a big stir.

A number of officials came over and made a show of demanding our passports and asking us all sorts of questions. It was a tense

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moment, and it didn't look as though they were going to let even those of us with valid visas in. But then Govinda Maharaja, undaunted as usual in such situations and not the least intimidated by the aggressive officials, started joking with them. He has demonstrated again and again a unique ability to make friends with anyone and everyone. As soon as he puts his big grin on his face and starts joking with officials in his Tennessee drawl, their defense breaks down and they are drawn to him. It's like magic and always works. When his humor makes them smile, he slaps them on the back, and suddenly the officials are like old friends that will do anything for him.

This time it also worked. The officials systematically went through our papers, starting with Sri Prahlada and me. Maharaja started up, and by the time the officials got to Krsna Prasada's papers they hardly looked at them. They just smiled, stamped his passport, and let him through. All due to the magical charm of Govinda Maharaja.

We exited immigration and customs to a reception by a hundred blissful devotees. Among them were many children, eyes and hearts fixed on me. It always amazes me that wherever I go there are often children waiting to see me. I have never seen them before, but they seem to know me. As we approached the assembly of devotees, an eight-year-old child approached me and stood next to me as we accepted garlands and flowers from the devotees. At one point he looked up at me. "You like kids, right?" he said.

Their spontaneous devotion reminded me of an incident with Srila Prabhupada in 1975 at the New Mayapur farm community in France. Srila Prabhupada was staying in the main building, an old chateau. One afternoon I was carrying my son, Gaura Sakti, who was only two or three years old at the time, around the chateau on

my shoulders. Suddenly Srila Prabhupada appeared at the window of his room on the second floor.

“Srila Prabhupada!” Gaura Sakti called out. “Srila Prabhupada! Srila Prabhupada!”

Prabhupada smiled at him and waved. That evening at darsana, Srila Prabhupada mentioned the incident and remarked how the children of the community have so much affection for him, although they had never met him.

The Novosibirsk temple is an old kindergarten building with ample facilities for the devotees. They worked hard to secure the building, but it appears they may soon lose it. President Yeltsin recently signed a decree that buildings erected by the communist government as kindergartens must be used solely for that purpose. The devotees are considering opening a Hare Krsna kindergarten in part of the building.

There are about a hundred devotees in the Yatra actively preaching throughout Siberia with book distribution and Food for Life centers. This evening we had a three-hour *kirtana* in the temple room, leaving no time for class. While preparing to take rest I encountered the Siberian summer mosquitoes, as big as houses. I practically fainted when I saw them. But God’s grace was upon me. A devotee who had just returned from India gave me a tube of the Indian Odomos insect repellent. To me it was worth its weight in gold.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

BOOK DISTRIBUTION: THE BEST TRAINING A DEVOTEE CAN GET

SUNDAY JUNE 18

Today I was faced with the decision of whether to go back to Poland when our tour finishes on June 24th or to stay a few more days to give association to my disciples in Moscow, many of whom couldn't come to my Vyasa-puja celebrations in St. Petersburg. By going back to Poland, as scheduled, I'll get a chance to attend to my correspondence. There are many letters from disciples around the world waiting to be answered, and if there is any extra time I could get some rest before our summer Polish festival tour begins. It's one of the most demanding tours of the year. But the disciples in Moscow are begging me to come and spend a few days with them. My intelligence tells me to go back to Poland and rest, but my heart tells me to stay on in Moscow.

I gave class this morning to an eager and receptive audience. The devotees don't get much association on the tundra of Siberia, so they relish every moment of nectar they are given. I met my disciples throughout the day, and this evening we had a four-hour *kirtana*.

BOOK DISTRIBUTION: THE BEST TRAINING A DEVOTEE CAN GET

Just before taking rest I received good news: the leaders of the South African Yatra, after considering my arguments for holding this year's Ratha-yatra in December, agreed to go ahead with it as planned. The deciding factor seemed to be my offer to lead the book marathon from the Durban temple during November and December. I was relieved, and I wondered if it was all Krsna's trick to get me into the book marathon.

I distributed books in France for twelve years from 1971 to 1983. How much I enjoyed that service! And when I look back on those years, I see how important they were in my development in Krsna consciousness. Most of what I utilize in my service as a sannyasi and spiritual master, I learned from distributing books for so many years.

Book distribution is definitely the best training a devotee can get. One remains detached from material life by constantly seeing the temporary miserable nature of the material world, while at the same time developing his faith in Krsna consciousness by daily witnessing the extraordinary mercy of Lord Caitanya upon the fallen conditioned souls. And by having to defeat opposing arguments and convince others to take up spiritual life, one becomes a capable preacher.

Sometimes I long for the simple life of being a book distributor, but then I see my present responsibilities as an opportunity to inspire others to distribute books and obtain the same benefits I had. But if my higher authorities suddenly ordered me, "Now go back to book distribution," I would have no regrets. I know exactly what villages I would go back to in France. But now it seems Krsna is fulfilling that desire by giving me an opportunity to help organize the book marathon in Durban. My mind is already full of plans and ideas. My only prayer is that the Lord may allow me to keep body and

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soul together. Generally the Ratha-yatra takes all my material and spiritual resolve. But if my disciples in South Africa help me, I think I can do it.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES

MONDAY JUNE 19

I spent most of the day giving darsana to my disciples. For many of them it was the first time they had ever spoken to their spiritual master. A young lady, Madhu Priya dasi, told me an interesting story. She had gone to my Vyasa-puja celebration in St. Petersburg, five thousand kilometers from her temple here in Novosibirsk. Being a young brahmacarini, she has little if any laksmi at all. The temple was unable to pay her fare, so she was in complete anxiety. But she was determined that somehow or other she would get to the festival.

So with two of her Godsisters, Visnu Sakti dasi and Vaijayanti Mala dasi, she went to the local military airport and asked to speak to the commanding officer. Surprisingly, she was allowed to see him and she begged that he allow them to fly to St. Petersburg on a military plane. The commanding officer couldn't believe his ears.

But after they preached to him for an hour, he somehow agreed, and that afternoon they hitched a ride in the luggage compartment of a military cargo plane en route to St. Petersburg. Only in Russia could something like this happen. I asked her how they got back to Siberia,

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and she said they preached to several St. Petersburg businessmen who agreed to pay their way. "Man proposes, God disposes."

This afternoon I went for a japa walk in a park. The whole area looked as though it had been abandoned for years. In fact, most of Novosibirsk looks like that. As the economic situation in Russia deteriorates, the cities look more and more grim. There seems to be nothing beautiful in terms of buildings, parks, roadways, or housing in this country. And everything is getting worse. Of course, such situations are good for preaching, so one tolerates the austerities.

There were many mosquitoes in the park, and I watched with amusement how people dealt with them. They were tearing small branches from trees and bushes and swatting themselves continuously to keep the pests away. I was happy I finally had my mosquito cream.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

EXHAUSTED FROM THE TRAVEL BUT NO TIME FOR BEING TIRED

TUESDAY JUNE 20

Today we flew from Siberia to Chelyabinsk in central Russia. The devotee who drove us to the airport late in the night was speeding and taking risks by weaving in and out of the traffic. He was breaking one of my cardinal rules to my disciples: to drive safely and cautiously under all circumstances. We never think about how dangerous it is to ride in a moving vehicle. Even if we are driving carefully, there are always many people on the road who are not.

Therefore, I forbid my disciples to chant japa, eat, or engage in extended conversations while driving. They should concentrate on the road as their immediate devotional service and observe the speed limit. And if they get tired, they should pull over and take some rest. Although I asked the devotee several times to slow down and take it easy, he didn't heed my instructions. We arrived at the airport on time, but I was counting my blessings.

We had an evening program in Chelyabinsk in a rented hall. I was exhausted from the travel but tried to remain fresh and alert

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because I knew many of my disciples were seeing me for the one and only time this year. As Kṛṣṇa's representative, I had to speak and present the Absolute Truth to insure their faith in guru and Kṛṣṇa and give them strength for the many months that we would be separated. There was no time for being tired. We had *kīrtana*, and Govinda Maharaja and I spoke. I lectured for more than an hour, elaborating on Śrīla Prabhupada's perfect formula for expanding this movement:

“Preaching is the essence, books are the basis, utility is the principle, and purity is the force.”

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

HARE KRSNA AND THE LATEST DANCE FAD

WEDNESDAY JUNE 21

I gave class this morning from the Third Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. If I think of the activities I appreciate the most in Krsna Consciousness at this stage of my advancement, I would have to say they are doing *kirtana* and giving *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. Delivering the perfect wisdom of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* by Srila Prabhupada's grace is an important duty and responsibility for all preachers, and a pleasure as well.

This afternoon we went on *Harinama sankirtana*. As our car approached our pre-arranged meeting point I saw more than two hundred devotees in the midst of a blissful *kirtana*. But I also noted an ominous sign: there were four police vans parked alongside the *kirtana* party.

I asked Uttamasloka what was going on, and he explained that the police had suddenly taken a new attitude towards us. Up to a month ago they were always friendly and accommodating, but Uttamasloka speculated they had recently received some instructions from higher

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up and were being more strict with us. I again felt the vice closing tighter on our movement. The police cars escorted our *Harinama* through a desolate part of town, but when we said we wanted to chant in the center of the city, our request fell on deaf ears.

After an hour we managed to convince them to let us chant near a fairly large and populated street corner, where we drew a large crowd. Just off to one side, a group of young boys and girls were performing break dancing, the latest fad, with their ghetto blasters (large, loud tape recorders).

We invited them to break dance to our *kirtana*, and their performances drew an even larger crowd. It was an interesting combination. At one point they asked to dance to the music of one of their tapes, saying we would love it. I agreed and they put on the tape of a top band in Russia singing Hare Krsna. They had worked out a dance routine that all of us—devotees and those in the crowd—appreciated very much.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SRILA PRABHUPADA

THURSDAY JUNE 22

I spent several hours meeting my disciples. Because there were more than forty disciples to see I had to limit all darsana to five minutes. It was difficult, with each of them wanting as much personal association with their spiritual master as possible. Although we often say that the *vani* (the spiritual master's instructions) are more important than the *vapu* (the personal association of the spiritual master), every devotee knows that in order to fully appreciate and assimilate the instructions of his spiritual master, personal association is important. It is for that reason Srila Prabhupada once said, "[I am] traveling all over the world just to give association to my disciples."

During the darsanas I had to listen carefully to each of my disciples and give the appropriate encouragement, chastisement, or instruction. I had to choose each word and sentence carefully, knowing that whatever I said would be the guiding light for each disciple for days, months, or even years to come. Personally, I know that the few sentences that Srila Prabhupada said to me remain fresh within my

mind after twenty-five years and are pertinent instructions in many circumstances. I cherish his few words to me and keep them like veritable jewels within my heart. They are the source of unlimited strength and inspiration at all times:

“Don’t sleep in my classes.”

“They are all simply fools and rascals, attached to the bodily concept of life. No good qualities.”

“What do you think, Indradyumna?”

“Come on, take prasadam.”

And of course, the words that give me the greatest hope in my life:

“So much endeavor in this material world, but when I take you back to Godhead everything will be easy and sublime.”

Thank you, Srila Prabhupada. Please give me the purity, the strength, and the intelligence to guide my own disciples to your lotus feet.

Throughout the darsanas, I found myself quoting from Srila Prabhupada again and again, that the spiritual master teaches his disciples the basic principles of devotional service, and the disciple must learn to execute the details. I said this because very often disciples would ask for practical solutions to marriage problems, business problems, health problems, etc. Although I give guidance in these matters, I feel it is important for the disciples to mature and be able to make Kṛṣṇa-conscious decisions for themselves. If that is not always possible, then they should learn to take help from temple authorities, senior devotees, or Godbrothers and Godsisters.

Of course, they can always come to me in the event the problem is of a serious nature and cannot be resolved any other way. But

I have almost five hundred disciples, and it is impossible to be involved in their practical lives. I am confident that the knowledge Srila Prabhupada has given us in his books and which is repeated by me as their spiritual master can solve my disciples' difficulties in material existence. But I know that my personal association is important, therefore following in the footsteps of Srila Prabhupada, I am traveling constantly.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

SAINTLY PEOPLE WITH A HOLY FATHER FROM THE WEST

FRIDAY JUNE 23

Today we drove for three hours from Chelyabinsk to Ekaterinburg for a Ratha-yatra, the journey taking us through the thick pine forests of central Russia. As we approached Ekaterinburg, I noticed many poor people picking the natural berries and fruits in the forest. This is one time of the year where the people have some opulence, Mother Nature providing sweet treats from her trees and bushes. It was a hot day, and I noticed that the people were resourceful: they were wearing hats fashioned from the leaves of the forest.

As we approached the outskirts of Ekaterinburg, we came to a police roadblock. Cars were backed up as the police searched each and every vehicle. We were worried that we wouldn't make the parade, scheduled for 2:00 p.m., so we quickly drove alongside the traffic up to the front of the roadblock. Suddenly two police officers approached our cars with AK-47s aimed directly at us, their fingers on the triggers. Apparently we had made the wrong move at the wrong time. "Now we'll be here for hours," I thought.

SAINTLY PEOPLE WITH A HOLY FATHER FROM THE WEST

My disciple Brhat Mrdanga dasa jumped out and began talking to the officers. Suddenly, their attitude changed, and they waved us on without any search of the car. I was amazed. I asked Brhat Mrdanga what he had said.

“I told them that saintly people were in the car with a holy father from the West,” he said. As we drove off I noticed two army tanks taking position at the roadblock.

The Ratha-yatra was wonderful, with more than three hundred devotees participating. I got a chance to meet all the gurukula children from the Ekaterinburg gurukula, and I spoke at length with the 12- to 14-year-olds. Before returning to Chelyabinsk, I accepted several as aspiring disciples.

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

THE ROSTOV TEMPLE ATTACKED

SATURDAY JUNE 24

This morning at Chelyabinsk we received horrible news. The Rostov temple, which we visited just a few weeks ago, was attacked by thirty thugs. The attack left fifteen devotees hospitalized.

The gang entered the temple compound in four cars and three motorcycles at 7:00 p.m., while the devotees were attending gaurarati. The temple is surrounded by a large wall, having previously been a kindergarten. There are only two ways to enter and exit the compound, and the thugs stationed men at each exit so devotees couldn't escape. After smashing all the cars in the driveway with sticks, they broke all the windows on the ground floor and entered the building. Most of the men were wearing black ski masks and helmets, and they all carried wooden sticks and small sharpened, shovel-like spades.

They entered the kitchen and began attacking the men and women there with the sticks, beating two devotees unconscious and destroying most of the equipment in the kitchen. Before leaving they sprayed the unconscious devotees with fire extinguishers.

THE ROSTOV TEMPLE ATTACKED

The mob then went upstairs to the storage room where the books are kept and fractured the skull of one devotee and broke the arm of another. Anyone who resisted was beaten. Finding their way into the temple room they beat the men and women attending the ceremony. They tried to tear the sari from one woman.

“You are Russian!” they screamed at her. “Why are you wearing these clothes?”

Then they smashed the altar and threw the Deities to the ground.

The devotees were helpless. Acaryanidhi was knocked unconscious by a blow to the back of his head with a shovel. There was blood everywhere. Those devotees who managed to escape the building were beaten outside. After twenty minutes the gang departed, leaving the temple in a shambles..

The police arrived shortly afterwards and apprehended five of the men, who were found to be members of local extremist political groups. An investigation into the attack has begun, and the police have placed officers with machine guns around the temple to protect the devotees. The violence is getting extensive media coverage, and the devotees in Moscow have appealed to parliament for an inquiry, criticizing a growing tendency in Russia towards religious intolerance.

The incident has sent shock waves through all the temples in Russia, as devotees fear the attack could be connected with the rumored crackdown by the government and that trouble may erupt elsewhere.

Lord Nrsimhadeva, please protect the devotees.

*vidikṣu dikṣūrdhvaṁ adhaḥ samantād
antar bahir bhagavān nārasimhaḥ*

*prahāpayāḥ loka-bhayam svanena
sva-tejasā grasta-samasta-tejāḥ*

“Prahlada Maharaja loudly chanted the holy name of Lord Nrsimhadeva. May Lord Nrsimhadeva, roaring for His devotee Prahlada Maharaja, protect us from all fear of dangers created by stalwart leaders in all directions through poison, weapons, water, fire, air and so on. May the Lord cover their influence by His own transcendental influence. May Nrsimhadeva protect us in all directions and in all corners, above, below, within and without.”

[Srimad-Bhagavatam 6.8.34]

I gave class later this morning, but found it difficult to concentrate. My mind was on Rostov and particularly on Acaryanidhi, Lord Caitanya’s soldier who is lying in great pain in the hospital. It became clear to me that in the future many sacrifices will have to be made to spread this movement.

In the afternoon we went to the Chelyabinsk airport to catch a flight back to Novosibirsk for their Ratha-yatra. The city had officially invited the devotees to hold their Ratha-yatra parade along with other festivities for the annual City Day.

It was cool and rainy when we arrived back in Siberia, and the mosquitoes seemed more furious than ever. But the bright side was that His Holiness Prabhavisnu Maharaja had arrived at the airport an hour earlier and was waiting for us at the temple. It had been more than eight months since we had been together, and I was anxious to see Maharaja. We hurried to the temple and went upstairs to his room, where we exchanged obeisances and loving embraces.

As traveling preachers, we all have our responsibilities, often in isolated areas, and as such we don’t often get the association of

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Godbrothers. But when we do meet there is a camaraderie that is difficult to express as we exchange stories of our preaching experiences.

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

RATHA-YATRA IN NOVOSIBIRSK

SUNDAY JUNE 25

In the morning it seemed as though we would have to do the Ratha-yatra in coats and hats, but the weather changed by midday, and we had a wonderful parade through the center of the city, which was packed with people enjoying the festivities. The beautiful Ratha cart, carrying the colorfully dressed Jagannatha Deities and accompanied by a blissful *kirtana* group of 400 dancing devotees, was in sharp contrast to the mode of ignorance that prevailed in the city.

The people's attempt to enjoy the City Day festivities consisted mainly of walking the streets drinking beer and vodka while occasionally dancing to the various bands that played along the way. The city of Novosibirsk is old, gray, and dilapidated, with most of the buildings in need of repair. The Siberian people are a tough lot, having to live much of the year in extreme weather conditions. It often goes below 50 degrees in the winter, and the summers are short and cool. As our *kirtana* party passed by, the people stood in amazement while the devotees revealed the color, joy, and festivity of the spiritual world.

In the afternoon we performed *kirtana* and spoke from a small stage provided by the festival organizers. The local devotees also presented a show by their transcendental rock band. In the crowd I saw the face of a young woman who had been present along with her friends when we arrived at the Novosibirsk temple last week. During our reception, she had been standing outside with her friends, laughing and making fun of the devotees. I assumed she was from the neighborhood and that the reception had attracted the attention of her group.

At one point the devotees asked them to leave and stop making trouble, but she returned a few minutes later with another girl and continued to watch the chanting and dancing, this time in a more submissive mood. Though she was unkempt and her jeans and shirt were dirty, I motioned to her to come into the temple. She must have been flabbergasted that I would suggest such a thing, and she recoiled, but an hour later the *kirtana* was still roaring, and I invited her in again. This time she shyly entered and stood at the back of the room, her mouth and eyes wide open as she watched the devotees chanting and dancing in ecstasy. Somehow she had become irresistibly attracted to the chanting, which was having a purifying effect on her.

After that I didn't see her again, but the image of the rapid change that had come over her remained.

Now she was in the crowd watching us again. I pressed forward to look closer. Lo and behold! She was dressed in a sari, a big smile on her face, chanting and dancing with the devotees. I couldn't believe my eyes.

She also recognized me as the one who had encouraged her to join the *kirtana* a few days earlier. She smiled at me, and as I offered her one of the garlands I was wearing, she folded her hands in pranama,

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thanking me in return. How quickly she had been delivered from the ocean of material existence and had given up her old ways! One of my favorite verses by Srila Rupa Goswami immediately came to mind:

“Now that we have become devotees, Your holy names have affectionately created a jubilant festival in our mouths. Your bodily splendor, like a dark rain cloud, has become the black ointment of our eyes, and the music of your flute has become the ornament of our ears. We no longer take pleasure in material desires. O almighty Lord, material desires no longer appear beautiful to us.” (*Padyavali*)

CHAPTER FORTY

AN ANTI-CULT OFFENSIVE IN POLAND

MONDAY JUNE 26

Today Prabhavisnu Maharaja left to continue his visit to Central Asia, Govinda Maharaja flew back to Western Europe, and Sri Prahlada and I flew to Moscow. It was difficult having to separate from Govinda Maharaja. We had been through so much together during the past two months.

Friendship in Krsna consciousness is based on service to the Supreme Lord, and because the service is profound, being of a transcendental nature, the relationships are also profound between devotees who serve Krsna together. There is nothing I wouldn't do for Maharaja, and I'm sure he feels the same towards me. Such a relationship is rare in this world, and I cherish his friendship very much.

Although Sri Prahlada and I will spend a day and a half in Moscow, I am thinking of Poland in preparation for our summer tour beginning next week. By Krsna's grace, I have several good men in Poland who organize the festival tours while I am traveling and preaching outside the country. In particular, Amrtananda dasa works diligently in my absence to assure the tour is properly arranged before I return. We

speak by phone several times a week from wherever I am in the world.

Recently he informed me that the anti-cult people in Poland have stepped up their offensive against us with negative articles appearing in the press. Several unfavorable television programs have also appeared. I had always hoped it would never happen in Poland, because the preaching is especially nectarean and sweet there. But those envious of our success cannot tolerate us any longer, and they are poisoning the minds of the people with false charges and accusations. So I feel as though I am going from one battlefield to another. The pressure is on from all sides.

But I suppose we have to expect such fights because, after all, this is the material world, and the devotees and asuras have been at odds with each other since time immemorial. We are at the forefront of a great spiritual renaissance in society, as predicted by Lord Caitanya 500 years ago when He said the chanting of Hare Krsna would be heard in every town and village in the world.

Srila Prabhupada also shed light on ISKCON's role in the future when he said the following to Guru dasa in London in 1971: "This movement will save the world in its darkest hour."

There may be difficult times ahead, as indicated by recent events in Russia and Poland, but if we take shelter of Krsna we will most certainly be victorious.

Srila Prabhupada says: "If the preachers in our Krsna consciousness movement are sincere devotees of Krsna, Krsna will always be with them because He is very kind and favorable to all His devotees. Just as Arjuna and Krsna were victorious in the Battle of Kuruksetra, this Krsna consciousness movement will surely emerge victorious if we but remain sincere devotees of the Lord and serve the Lord

AN ANTI-CULT OFFENSIVE IN POLAND

according to the advice of the predecessors (the six Gosvamis and other devotees of the Lord). . . . If we attempt this seriously within the society, it will be successfully done. There is no question of estimating how this will happen in the mundane sense. But without a doubt, it happens by the grace of Kṛṣṇa.” [*Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līla purport 4.79*]

≈ ≈ THE END ≈ ≈

GLOSSARY

Bharat Natyam: traditional Indian style of dance.

Brahmacari: unmarried male devotee practicing celibacy.

Brahmacarini: unmarried female devotee practicing celibacy.

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States (the former Soviet Union).

Darsana: an audience with the Supreme Lord or His representative.

Dhoti: traditional Indian garment worn by men

Duma: Russian Parliament.

Ekadasi: The eleventh day after the full and new moon, a special day for increased remembrance of Krsna. Abstinence from grains and beans is prescribed.

Food for Life: charitable food distribution program run by Hare Krsna devotees worldwide.

FSK: formerly the KGB, now reorganized.

Gandharva: extraordinarily beautiful demigod singers and musicians.

Gaura-arati: evening prayers in the temple..

Gulabjamun: traditional Indian sweet made of milk and flour, rolled into balls, deep-fried, then soaked in a sugary syrup.

Guru-puja: worship of the spiritual master.

GLOSSARY

Gurukula: the school of the spiritual master, traditional Vedic education.

Harinama: public chanting of the holy names of the Lord.

ISKCON: International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Ista-gosthi: discussion amongst temple devotees.

Janmastami: the anniversary of Lord Kṛṣṇa's appearance in this world.

Japa: soft recitation of the Lord's holy names as a private meditation.

Jnani: one who tries to understand the Supreme through the process of speculative knowledge.

Kali-yuga: (Age of Kali) the present age, characterized by quarrel. It is the last in the cycle of four ages. The present Kali-yuga began 5,000 years ago.

Kamsa: Kṛṣṇa's uncle, who constantly plotted to kill Kṛṣṇa.

Kirtana: congregational chanting the holy names of the Supreme Lord.

Kṣatriya: a warrior or administrator. The second of the four Vedic social orders.

Kumaras: four learned ascetic sons of Lord Brahma, appearing eternally as children.

Lakṣmi: colloquial term for money, in reference to Srimati Lakṣmi devī the goddess of fortune and eternal consort of Lord Narayana.

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Lord Jagannatha: the Supreme Lord, Lord of the Universe. The Deity form of the Lord at Puri, Orissa.

Lord Nrsimbadeva: the half-man, half-lion incarnation of the Supreme Lord. He protected Prahlada Maharaja and killed the demon Hiranyakasipu.

Pranama: to join the hands, palms together, in front of the chest, in prayer or as a gesture of respect.

Prasadam: the Lord's mercy; food or other items spiritualized by being first offered to the Supreme Lord.

Ratha-yatra: an annual festival in which Deities of the Supreme Lord are drawn in procession upon huge, lavishly decorated, canopied chariots.

Salagrama-sila: a Deity incarnation of the Supreme Lord in the form of a stone.

Sankirtana: congregational glorification of the Supreme Lord, Krsna, especially through chanting of His holy names: Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

Sikha: tuft of hair customarily at the back of the head of male devotees of Krsna.

Vyasa-puja: worship of the compiler of the Vedas, Srila Vyasadeva, or his representative, the bona fide spiritual master.

Vyasasana: the seat of Vyasa, on which the representative of Srila Vyasadeva sits.

Yatra: temple or area of preaching.

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

VOLUME TWO

INDRADYUMNA SWAMI



TORCHLIGHT
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DEDICATION

*To Bhakta Andrei Savitskiy,
who gave his life in service to Lord Caitanya
during the war for independence in Chechnya.*

INTRODUCTION

The events in this diary are factual. One of my Godbrothers, Ālālanātha Prabhu from New Zealand, once said that I am one of the best storytellers he knows. However, I assure the reader that there is no exaggeration herein. Although many of these pages are filled with the realities of material existence—birth, disease, old age, and death—I didn’t go looking for these things but found them naturally in my travels as a preacher in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In chapter 29 of the *Kṛṣṇa* book, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “A preacher has to face many difficulties in his struggle to preach pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Sometimes he has to suffer bodily injuries, and sometimes he has to meet death also. All this is taken as a great austerity on behalf of Kṛṣṇa.”

Because of the tragic nature of some of the events, the reader may find parts of the diary unpalatable. But the events are history and cannot be ignored. What is important is to see how the devotees always remain Kṛṣṇa conscious and take shelter of the Lord. Their activities are instructive for all of us who live within this temporary material world and desire to go back home, back to Godhead.



CHAPTER ONE

“WOULD YOU KILL A SERB?”

WEDNESDAY APRIL 17, 1996

I begin this volume of *Diary of a Traveling Preacher* in Split, a former resort on the coast of Croatia. H.H. Guëagrahi Maharaja, Sri Prahlada dasa, and I are traveling throughout the region with a team of twenty-five international devotees, holding festivals in the major cities.

The people of Croatia have recently concluded a war with their Serbian neighbors, a war that engulfed the Balkans after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in 1992. As we pass through the villages, one senses a relief among the people that the brutality of war is over. The thought always crosses my mind that war is a reaction to sinful activities, and only when these cease will it stop.

In a room conversation in Paris on June 11, 1974, Srila Prabhupada said that one cause of war is the mass slaughter of cows, one of the sinful activities mentioned in the Vedic scriptures: “We want to stop these killing houses [slaughterhouses]. It is very, very sinful. Therefore, in Europe, so many wars. Every ten years, fifteen years, there is a big war and wholesale slaughter of the whole humankind. They do not see it. The reaction must be there. You are killing innocent cows and animals. Nature will take revenge... They will

fight among themselves, Protestant and Catholic, Russia and France, and France and Germany. This is going on. Why? This is the nature's law. Tit for tat. You have killed. Now you become killed."

That war has ended in Croatia simply means that the previous stock of people's sinful reactions has been depleted. But if in ignorance they continue to kill cows and abort children in the womb, war will come again. For this reason the Krsna-consciousness movement is important, for we are educating the people in this knowledge.

We have been successful in that endeavor on our present tour. In Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, more than 3,000 people came to our program a few days ago. During my lecture, I talked about the need for spiritual education in society, and touched on karma and how the problems we face are a result of our sinful acts in the past. As I spoke, I felt the potency of our philosophy, and I ended with the solution for this age of Kali: the congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord.

Krsna inspired me, and at the conclusion of the lecture there was a loud and long-lasting applause. I reminded myself that it was not for me the audience was applauding but for the perfect, concise truth of *Bhagavad-gita*. A preacher must be careful not to take credit for his success in devotional service. If he does, it will be the beginning of his end. "Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall."

While I was taking *prasadam* with the guests at the Zagreb program, a well-dressed man approached me. He introduced himself as a United Nations peace worker from the United States and shook my hand. "You people are actually accomplishing what the UN has tried to do for fifty years," he said. "You have my deepest respect."

I thought how happy Srila Prabhupada would have been to hear such a comment.

"WOULD YOU KILL A SERB?"

This afternoon we went on *Harinama* in Split for the second day in a row. We chanted near Saint Domnius church, one of the oldest churches in the world. It is said that thousands of years ago it was a demigod temple and that the early Christians converted it into a church.

As Sri Prahlada played his accordion and thirty devotees chanted and danced to the holy names in happiness, we drew a crowd of onlookers. They simply stared at us. I noted the difference between the atmosphere here and in Poland, where our *kirtans* bring out an appreciative mood among the people instead of a mood affected by war.

In my talk I mentioned that devotees are vegetarian, and supported the fact by saying that Hare Krsnas practice *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, and wouldn't hurt an ant.

Suddenly a man from the crowd shouted out. "Would you kill a Serb?" he yelled.

It became tense as everyone looked at me for my answer. To say no would turn the crowd against us, as many had lost family members in the war. But to say yes would immediately be a contradiction and compromise what I had just said. So I did something I rarely do. I simply ignored the question and started to speak on another subject.

The tactic seemed to work until suddenly a powerfully built man in his twenties started screaming at me. We sometimes get drunks trying to shout us down during *Harinama*, but this young man seemed particularly angry. I concluded the talk quickly and told Sri Prahlada to start singing.

As he sang the man came forward and demanded we leave immediately. "Croatia is a Christian country," he shouted, "and you are not welcome here!"

I looked at the crowd and saw that they were not prepared to defend us in any way. Suddenly, the man leapt up and tried to kick Sri Prahlada in the head, missing him by inches. Then with two more kicks he smashed the accordion, and was ready for more when two of our local *brahmacaris*, in normal dress, beat him back.

The man's companion then pulled a knife and urged him on. Even angrier than before, the man moved forward again. At this point two members of the Friends of Krsna group confronted the pair and dragged them away from the crowd.

The incident polluted the atmosphere and agitated some of the other young men, many of whom had recently returned from the war. As we sang again, a few of them threw rocks and threatened to beat us. Everywhere I looked I saw faces full of hate and envy. This seemed beyond anything we could be responsible for, explainable only by the fact that the men were still in the mood of war.

We left as fast as we could, with the men following us, shouting obscenities. I led the chanting of the *Nrsimha* prayers, and the Lord protected us until we reached our vehicles. We didn't have enough cars because some devotees had come by bus, so first I sent the *matajis*, then the smaller men, and finally I boarded the bus with a few strong *brahmacaris*.

Preaching is not always easy, and one must be prepared for the worst in some situations. The most important thing is to remember the Lord and depend on His mercy.

CHAPTER TWO

"I WAS BORN IN SARAJEVO AND SURVIVED THE FOUR-YEAR WAR"

THURSDAY APRIL 18

This morning I gave class from the Third Canto of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, but I had difficulty concentrating because my mind was still reeling from the violence on *Harinama* yesterday. To give *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class one must be situated in the mode of goodness, or higher.

Throughout the day devotees have sent letters to my room. Years ago I would always see those who asked to meet me, but these days it is more difficult. At least that is so in this area, where there are so many devotees it is impossible to meet everyone who would like to see me.

Recently I spent time with H.H. Sacinandana Maharaja, who told me he deals with this problem by giving small *darsans* to select groups, such as guests, friends of Kṛṣṇa, temple devotees, or disciples. I will also employ this idea from now on. It is less formal and more intimate than the association a preacher can give in class. Both types of association are essential—class and informal *darsans*.

I received a letter from Bhaktin Maya, an aspiring disciple of H.H.

Harikesa Maharaja. I was touched by the nature of her letter, and I sent her a fairly long reply. She had written:

“Thank you so much for coming to Croatia and for all the happiness you are giving us through your lectures and *kirtans*. I also want to thank you for your decision to go to Sarajevo, Bosnia, tomorrow and hold a festival there with your devotees. I was born in Sarajevo and survived the four-year war that has only recently ended there. Most of my friends were killed during the war. Many of them liked Krsna consciousness, read the books of Srila Prabhupada, and chanted Hare Krsna. Your going to Sarajevo will bring relief to many people.

“I have never seen my *guru Maharaja*, Sri Visnupada, because we could not leave Sarajevo, during the war. And now I cannot obtain a proper passport to leave this part of the world. I am very unhappy that I cannot see him, but my unhappiness is mitigated by the presence of your festival tour here.”

This evening we held a festival in a hall in the center of Split. It was a complete success. More than 600 people crowded into the small hall, many of whom had come as a result of yesterday's *Harinama*. They enjoyed a program of a *bhajan*, a performance of the *Ramayana* by the Bhaktivedanta Players from England, a *kirtana*, and a multi-vision slide show. Our tour band, Celibate Lovers, later treated the audience to a transcendental reggae concert.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEVOTEES ARE ATTACKED NEAR THE MOSQUE

FRIDAY APRIL 19

Although we had taken rest at 1:00 a.m., we rose at 3:30 a.m. to begin the six-hour drive to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. We left the Split temple in a caravan of two vans and four cars, with a total of thirty-two devotees. Heading south along the coast, we passed many resorts partially destroyed by the war.

Just before the Croatia-Bosnia border we stopped briefly. A Croatian soldier walked up to our car, rifle in hand, and put his head in the window. I was a bit alarmed as he engaged in an emotional conversation with Lucas, our devotee driver. The soldier seemed disappointed by what he heard and eventually shook his head and left.

I asked what the soldier had asked about, and Lucas said he had wanted to know the whereabouts of his friend, a devotee who had fought alongside him on the battlefield and had helped him by speaking Krsna-conscious philosophy.

As we entered Bosnia, the reality of war was revealed. We often saw three or four villages in a row destroyed and abandoned, with only

a ghostly silence remaining. Troops from IFOR, the international peacekeeping force that has replaced NATO, are a common sight in the populated villages. A devotee can get a smile from people in most parts of the world, but here the death and destruction are all too obvious. It was very sobering for us as the miseries of material existence about which Kṛṣṇa speaks repeatedly in the *śāstras* became manifest.

Lucas, a middle-aged man who served in the Croatian Army as a major, pointed out positions where Serbian gunners had been only weeks before. He was able to determine how far their artillery could fire and what damage it would have done. Such knowledge came easily to Lucas, as if a sixth sense, and I understood how he had survived.

He told me that during the war he constantly prayed to God and felt that his prayers had led him to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I thought of Kṛṣṇa's statement in *Bhagavad-gītā* that four kinds of men approach Him: the distressed, the desirer of wealth, the inquisitive, and he who is searching for knowledge of the Absolute.

Lucas and I were close because he had saved my life several months ago when I visited Croatia for the first time. We were on *Harinama* in central Zagreb when a crazed soldier pulled out a pistol to shoot me during my lecture. Pointing it directly at my face, he screamed he wanted to kill the "bishop" because God had not saved his family.

We later learned that the soldier's wife and six children had been killed by Serbian forces a week earlier. He had lost all reason and was simply wandering the streets, happening upon our *Harinama* in his army fatigues. Having had to deal with men in similar states of consciousness during the war, Lucas approached the soldier and began speaking to him in a calm manner. Gradually he convinced the man he shouldn't kill me, and finally the soldier burst into tears, put his gun away, and walked off.

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After passing through mountains and over specially erected bridges, we reached Mostar. I had been there when traveling through Europe as a young man of 19, just before I joined Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I remembered Mostar as a beautiful little town with a quaint 13th-century bridge spanning a sparkling river. But the town we entered bore no resemblance to the one I had visited years ago.

Literally every house, apartment, shop, and building was riddled with bullets and shrapnel. Many had gaping holes in the sides, and we could see inside as people conducted their daily affairs. Buildings had been gutted by fires, and there were demolished vehicles strewn everywhere. The people went about their lives stepping over mangled steel or concrete and walking through bombed-out buildings. The damage was so extensive I imagined it would be many years before the town could be rebuilt.

However, nothing could have prepared us for what was waiting in Sarajevo, just two hours further up in the mountains. As we approached from the west, we did not see a single building in the suburbs of the city that was untouched by the war. The same scenario continued as we drove into and through Sarajevo. We all stared in amazement, contemplating how an entire city had been ravaged.

One of the most startling things was that there were graves everywhere. Fifty thousand people had died during the fighting, and because they were surrounded, the local population had to bury their dead within the city limits. Thus there were graves in every available space. Most parks and gardens had become graveyards. Even patches of land between two buildings served as cemeteries for two or three bodies, or a single grave was marked with a cross or a Muslim tombstone on a grassy intersection.

Eventually we arrived at the small Sarajevo temple in the Muslim sector of the city. The fifteen local devotees greeted us with a *kīrtana*, which seemed a cheerful contrast to the destruction around us. As I

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got out of the car, I saw that the temple was also riddled by bullets and shrapnel.

As we entered the temple I asked about two *matajis*, Jahnukanyaka dasi and Hamsahina dasi, who lived alone here through the height of the war from April 1992 to July 1994.

When Bosnia declared its independence from the Yugoslav Federation in 1992, Serbia immediately laid siege to Sarajevo, and the citizens were unable to leave. Most of them remained indoors to shield themselves from the relentless mortar attacks that rained indiscriminately upon them. However, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina ventured outside daily to distribute books and *prasadam* door to door or to the few souls on the street who were braving the shelling and sniper fire.

The temple became a shelter for refugees from the hills, who were driven from their homes by the advancing armies. To live outside meant certain death, so throughout Sarajevo people with homes or apartments gave shelter to others less fortunate. Several families came to the temple seeking shelter, and fifteen people actually lived in the temple room throughout the siege. They always rose early so that Jahnukanyaka, Hamsahina, and the few congregational devotees who risked coming to the temple could have a morning program. The refugees also shared the *prasadam* that the devotees took daily.

Getting food and water was not easy, because water, gas, and electricity had been cut off. Every day, Jahnukanyaka or Hamsahina had to risk walking to areas of the city where water was available (either from an open pipe or a spring), and much of their time was spent fetching water or food.

Jahnukanyaka later told me that for her and Hamsahina, obtaining water was a necessity—while others remained soiled and dirty throughout the siege, she and Hamsahina always bathed daily, wore

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fresh *saris*, and kept the temple spotlessly clean. One man told them that compared with the dirty appearance of most Sarajevans, they looked like angels living in hell.

Many people starved in Sarajevo, but by Krsna's mercy, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina had no shortage of food. At first they begged for foodstuffs, but one day they heard that city officials were meeting relief organizations to ration the limited food supplies that were being allowed into the city in UN convoys. Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina went to the meeting, pleading that they were Hare Krsna devotees wanting to distribute food. They had little chance of gaining support for their activities and were told the food would be given to institutions such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

But the next day, one of the officials, who was sympathetic to them, arranged for a ton of food for *prasadam* distribution. However, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina had to pick it up themselves and transport it to the temple. Jahnukanyaka wondered how, with no vehicle, two small *matajis* could accomplish such a task.

She decided to visit the local Bosnian Army base and somehow got in to see the commanding officer. She convinced him to give her a driver and one of his trucks to ferry the food from the UN depot to the temple on the other side of the city.

In order to ration the food for distribution, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina ate sparingly. Each day they would bake cookies or bread and go to hospitals, schools, and refugee centers to distribute *prasadam*. They would even go to the front lines 300 meters outside Sarajevo. Bosnian soldiers were amazed to see two women in *saris* with cakes and cookies approaching them in their foxholes. Naive about the reality of war, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina often thus exposed themselves to enemy fire and on more than one occasion had to be pulled down to avoid the bullets. In any event, Krsna protected them in their service.

The most amazing thing was that they also distributed Srila Prabhupada's books. A large supply of books had arrived in Sarajevo for the Yugoslavian *yatra* just days before the fighting began, but it had not been possible to deliver them to the temples. The problem was that they were being stored in a house occupied by people unfriendly to the devotees. Worse still, when Jahnukanyaka visited the house, she was shocked to see the books being used to fuel fires. When she pleaded with the inhabitants not to do that, they ordered her away at gunpoint.

Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina, like all ISKCON devotees throughout the world, wanted to participate in the December book-distribution marathon, so Jahnukanyaka went back to the base where the officer had helped her transport the UN supplies. She again begged for help, this time to rescue Srila Prabhupada's books.

The officer submitted to her purity and determination, and sent a number of soldiers in armed personnel carriers to get the books. Within hours the entire shipment was safe in the temple compound. Putting their lives at risk from snipers, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina went out daily to distribute the books, keeping aside the money owed from the sales. Even in the hardest times, when they lacked the bare necessities of life, they never used the money, and when the war was over, they sent the entire amount, equivalent to 10,000 DM, to the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust in Sweden.

Often their lives were threatened by soldiers, but Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina were determined and undaunted in their desire to preach. Although it was sometimes possible to flee to the Croatian safe zone under cover of the UN convoys or, if one had to, through the sewer system, Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina always refused. They had their service, and they were in Sarajevo to stay, because they had faith in guru and Krsna.

At the time they were both uninitiated devotees. Only after the

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war were they able to travel to Croatia to take initiation from H.H. Harikesa Maharaja by letter. There are so many stories of their courage and bravery, so many things to say about their devotion. Thus upon entering the temple, I looked eagerly for Jahnukanyaka and Hamsahina.

But everything happened so quickly, and I soon found myself receiving *guru-puja* on the *vyasasana*. I lowered my head, thinking that somewhere in the crowd of devotees who were worshiping me were the two *matajis* who were worthy of my respect. I waited patiently for the opportunity to speak and glorify the devotees of Sarajevo. When the *arati* finished and that moment came, I spoke to the fifty devotees present, my voice filled with emotion.

“Thank you very much for the wonderful reception,” I said. “Traditionally, sannyasis travel from village to village and town to town giving association and inspiring people in Krsna consciousness. But knowing the austerities you have all undergone in your preaching here, we have come to be inspired by your association.

“No doubt, Srila Prabhupada is very, very pleased with you. I’ve just been reading *My Glorious Master*, a book written by one of my godbrothers, Bhurijana Prabhu. Therein he relates how Srila Prabhupada was pleased with even the most insignificant service rendered by a sincere disciple. Considering the great service you have all done here, I’m sure that from his transcendental position Srila Prabhupada is showering blessings upon all of you.

“We have also come because we know that preaching is especially good in situations where people are in distress. For the time being, no one in this city is in any illusion about the real nature of the material world, how it is a miserable place of birth and death. Such people are excellent candidates for Krsna consciousness.

“We should take advantage of this moment and plant the seed of

devotional service in their fertile hearts. If you plant an ordinary seed in poor soil it won't grow, but if the same seed is planted in fertile soil, it grows very quickly. Now is the time to plant the seed of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the fertile hearts of the people of Sarajevo, who are weary of war and destruction and are looking for relief.

“Because of your efforts in distributing books and *prasadam* there is some semblance of peace in this city at the moment. Others may say that peace has come as a result of the arrangements of politicians. But we know that it has come, at least in part, because of your efforts. Srila Prabhupada once said, ‘If just one percent of the world becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, the whole face of the earth will change for the better.’

“He also said, ‘If it were not for the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu, we could not even imagine how horrible this planet would be at the moment.’ So please go on with your valiant efforts and may Lord Caitanya bless you.”

After my talk, we prepared to go on *Harinama saṅkīrtana*, the first time in Sarajevo since the war began. The devotees received permission for the *Harinama* from the local police, who also agreed to send an escort of two or three policemen in case there was any trouble. But the devotees didn't expect any trouble because of our good relations with the local Muslims.

We were so excited about going out, we even decided to skip lunch *prasadam* and honor it when we returned later in the afternoon. I busied myself assembling the devotees, asking them to gather all the colorful flags and banners they had made especially for the occasion. Within a short time, Sri Prahlada was leading sixty of us in a blissful *kīrtana* along the street. Little did we know that we were walking right into the lion's den.

From the beginning, I sensed that something was wrong. I kept

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turning to the local devotees. “Are you sure it’s safe to chant in public like this?” I would ask. “Won’t the Muslims take offense at our big *kirtana* party coming through their part of town?”

They kept reassuring me. “Maharaja,” they would say, “don’t worry. They love us. We distributed *prasadam* here throughout the war.”

But in spite of their many wonderful qualities, the Sarajevo devotees are young and naive. None of them had told me that it was a holy day for Muslims, and we were en route towards the largest mosque in Sarajevo just as the prayer hour was finishing. The war was over, but not the feelings of hatred and desire for revenge between the people of the region (the Serbians, the Muslims, and the Croatsians), many of whom are fiercely loyal to their traditions. Anything different was bound to provoke them.

Oblivious to all this, we chanted and danced without abate. The *kirtan* was ecstatic and loud. Some people smiled as we went by, and a few took the cookies we were passing out. But most were cautious. They had been through hell, and the contrast of so many happy people singing and dancing was difficult for them to adjust to. As we weaved our way through the old streets, suddenly the mosque loomed ahead. The moment I saw it I wanted to turn around, but it was too late.

Among the crowd emerging from the mosque, three men in their late twenties saw our procession, and after exchanging a few words among themselves charged towards us, their faces twisted in hate. They ran at full speed and within seconds were upon us. Priyavrata dasa was in front of the *Harinama*, filming it with his video camera. He didn’t even see what hit him, as the man leading the charge struck him full force in the jaw with a karate kick. Priyavrata spun backwards, his camera flying, and fell on the ground. The three men then plunged into our party, furiously kicking and punching the devotees.

The *kirtana* stopped, and some devotees fought back. One of the attackers came for me, but I ran towards him swinging my *karatalas* over my head, and he retreated. To my left I saw three devotees beating back one of the attackers, who fell into a store window, smashing it to pieces. Although we bloodied them, I noticed they seemed unfazed. Nevertheless, they were outnumbered, and they retreated.

The devotees stood immobile in the middle of the street. We sang the *Nrsimha* prayers, afraid to take another step forward, yet at the same time unsure whether to remain. I looked around and noticed that a number of our party had bloody noses and cut faces. The *matajis* were screaming, “Nrsimha! Nrsimha! Nrsimha!”

Within minutes, a large group of tough-looking men had joined the original three attackers. As I studied them, I had a feeling that they weren’t simply young hooligans. We later learned that they were all soldiers, just back from the war with the Serbians. They were hardened killers.

A woman reporter from a local television station was filming the scene when suddenly one of the men took her camera and smashed it on the ground. On that cue, about ten of them came rushing towards us. It was a well-planned operation. As they charged at the center of our party, we ran to either side of the street. The attackers then turned and cornered and attacked the devotees, starting with those who looked the strongest.

The first to go down was Nrsimha Kavaca dasa. One of the thugs, a former soldier who had once interrogated Janukanyaka and had also threatened to kill her, shoved a pistol into Nrsimha Kavaca’s face, threatening to pull the trigger. Instead he smashed the butt over his head. Nrsimha Kavaca fell to the ground unconscious, blood gushing from the wound. As he lay in a pool of blood, four men began kicking him in the ribs.

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In the midst of the chaos, as each devotee was fighting for his life, Thakura Bhaktivinoda dasa tried to rescue Nrsimha Kavaca, but he was overpowered by several men, one of whom pulled a knife and stabbed him in the back. I stopped fighting to scream to the *matajis* to run away. Turning to my right, I saw four men overpower Bhakta Colin and stab him. One of our police escorts tried to stop the fighting, but was slapped in the face by the attackers and thrown to the side of the road.

There was blood everywhere on the street, and I wasn't sure where all the devotees were. Nrsimha Kavaca was still unconscious on the ground twenty meters in front of us, but to try to rescue him would mean certain death. We started backing down the street, but the men followed us screaming, "Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! " ['God is great!'] When they stabbed a local bhakta we broke into a run, carrying the wounded devotees.

As we approached a main road, two traffic policemen saw us and stopped a passing car. They put Thakura Bhaktivinoda and the *bhakta* into the back seat and told the driver to take them to a hospital. While Thakura Bhaktivinoda was getting in, I was shocked to see that the back of his kurta was drenched in blood. I then asked the policemen if they would rescue Nrsimha Kavaca.

When we returned to the temple, which was in total confusion, I tried to account for the devotees who had been on the *Harinama*. We called all the hospitals in Sarajevo asking if any devotees had been admitted. Within an hour we had located them. A store owner had pulled Nrsimha Kavaca off the street into his shop, and then driven him to the hospital, the same hospital where Thakura Bhaktivinoda and Bhakta Edwin, a local bhakta, had been taken. Meanwhile the driver of a car had stopped and taken Bhakta Colin to a different hospital.

I left immediately to visit our injured comrades. Some devotees

warned me not to go to the hospitals in devotional clothes, as the men who attacked us could still be roaming the streets. But no one had any pants or shirts, and time was short. I didn't know if my disciple Nrsimha Kavaca was dead or alive.

As I approached the first hospital, I was shocked to see its condition. Like most of the buildings in Sarajevo, it was partially destroyed. Sections were bombed out. The entire building was riddled by machine-gun bullets, and many parts were blackened by fire.

When my devotee driver and I arrived at the main gate, we were refused entry. The authorities had stopped allowing visitors long ago, because the "visitors" were often soldiers dressed as civilians trying to enter the hospital to kill their enemies. But eventually they agreed to let me in, mainly because they trusted the fact that I am a monk.

When I reached the main floor of the hospital, I was introduced to Dr. Nakash, the head surgeon. He was a large man with a big mustache, and his eyes had deep black circles under them. Dr. Nakash is known internationally for his work during the war, when he performed operations for days at a time without sleep or food, often when the hospital was under artillery and rocket attack. His work was complicated by the fact that there was no electricity or water, and during the entire period he operated without anesthesia.

"In the name of Allah," he said with arms raised, "please forgive my people for what they have done to all of you. The people of Sarajevo are with you. Only some maddened soldiers have done this."

As we walked to the room where Bhakta Colin was lying, Dr. Nakash surprised me. "I have your *Bhagavad-gita*," he said. "It helped me during the war."

Bhakta Colin was asleep, his chest and stomach covered with bandages. He awoke as we approached the bed, grimacing in pain.

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Dr. Nakash turned to me. “Sorry,” he said. “We don’t have any painkillers here.”

I spoke briefly with Bhakta Colin, who told me he wanted to be discharged as soon as possible. As I was leaving, Dr. Nakash told me Bhakta Colin’s lungs were slowly filling with blood, and that he was going to have to operate within an hour. He said Bhakta Colin would be in the hospital for several weeks.

My driver and I made our way to the next hospital, which was in an even worse condition. There I found Nrsimha Kavaca on the operating table with doctors stitching up his head. One of the doctors pushed me out of the operating room and told me to wait outside.

Later the doctor spoke to me. “His condition could be serious,” he said. “He has no memory of anything more recent than five days ago.”

I found Thakura Bhaktivinoda in another operating room. His wife, my disciple Syama Gauri dasi, was crying outside. She told me the doctors were uncertain about the extent of her husband’s wounds and that he would also have to stay in the hospital.

Bhakta Edvin was about to go into surgery. As I waited in the hall to speak to the surgeon, my eye caught two men approaching from the other direction. They appeared to be Muslims, and were looking at me with the same look of hate we’d experienced this morning. As I braced myself for trouble, they walked up to me and one of them spat in my face. With that they left, and I looked for a washroom to clean myself.

At the temple, I gathered the devotees and we discussed what to do next. Some felt that the men would come to the temple and attack us again. “After all,” said a devotee, “this is a Muslim neighborhood, and they can do what they want.”

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But I replied that the police knew what had happened and were coming to the temple to get our report of the incident. They had also promised to guard the temple twenty-four hours a day for the next few days.

As we were ending our discussion, the police arrived. They had somehow obtained the video from the photographer whose camera had been smashed, and they wanted us to watch it to identify the attackers. As the video began many devotees started crying, having to relive those moments so soon after the event. One by one the police asked us to identify the attackers. It wasn't difficult. You don't easily forget someone who has tried to kill you.

The Police Chief of Sarajevo later apologized for the incident on national television, saying it did not represent the feelings of most Sarajevans towards the Krsna-consciousness movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUPPORT FROM THE PEOPLE OF SARAJEVO

SATURDAY APRIL 20

The whole city is talking about the attack. The news spread like wildfire because the people have been experiencing only their first few months of peace. The leading newspaper in Sarajevo, *Vecernje Novosti*, published this front-page headline this morning: “Bloody Beginning to the Festival of India.”

The article described the attack in detail and sympathized with us. It mentioned how the parade to promote our festival was violently and brutally attacked by thirty men and how we had fought back “like lions.” The reporter went on to say it was shameful that foreign blood was being spilled on Snipers’ Alley, a name given by citizens to the street we were chanting on, where many had been killed by Serbian snipers.

There were favorable articles in other local newspapers, and I later learned the news had gone international with reports in England, Switzerland, France, Australia, and India.

Other local newspapers, however, were not so favorable. Several Islamic publications accused us of provoking the attacks and threatened that further action would be taken.

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This evening we held the Festival of India in a large hall in Sarajevo. The police provided thirty armed guards who stood at every entrance. The citizens of Sarajevo, many of whom wanted to express their sympathy, came in droves. More than 1,500 people attended the festival, including ambassadors from several countries and members of IFOR, the UN, and the Red Cross.

The stage program went smoothly, although the *Ramayana* was patchy because Thakura Bhaktivinoda, who plays Lord Rama wasn't there, and a local devotee had to play his part.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEAVING SARAJEVO

SUNDAY APRIL 21

Today we left Sarajevo. I wanted to stay because although last night's festival was successful, the shock of the attack was still very much with the devotees and the fear of reprisals remained. I was also waiving the opportunity to follow up and continue the positive media coverage we were getting.

But we had to go. We had only eighteen hours to drive back through Bosnia, Croatia, and Italy to catch a flight to England. So we packed our belongings, I gave final instructions to the devotees, and we departed. Priyavrata, who had come to Sarajevo to help with the Food for Life program, volunteered to stay to help the police and continue media relationships.

PART II
POLAND, RUSSIA,
AND SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST POLISH WOODSTOCK

SATURDAY OCTOBER 12, 1996

I left Poland for Russia today after finishing a six-month festival tour, which began in May after my return from the Balkans. It was our offering to Srila Prabhupada for his centennial. The tour was conducted in three phases: a spring, summer, and fall tour. The highlight was our participation in a three-day Woodstock-style festival held in Poland in July. After the festival, Sri Prahlada wrote the following report for *ISKCON World Review*:

Krsna's Village of Peace

In a recent Polish poll, the three most popular people in the country were Pope John Paul II (which is not surprising, because Poland is a Catholic country and the Pope is a Pole), Mr. Jurek Owsiak, and Polish president Mr. Kwasniewski.

Who is Jurek Owsiak? He's the director and founder of Poland's biggest charity, the Great Orchestra of Christmas Help. Every year during the Christmas period, the charity puts on television benefit programs, during which the public phone in pledges to buy medical equipment for children's hospitals. Last year the Orchestra raised one million dollars, no small amount for an Eastern European country.

THE FIRST POLISH WOODSTOCK

For the past two years, Jurek has also arranged a folk-rock festival in the summer, called Woodstock. The festival, which is based on the concepts of the original Woodstock in America twenty-seven years ago, is attended by tens of thousands of young people. Jurek says he organizes the festival “so that all of the people who took part in the winter fundraising can come together for a summer meeting of love, peace, and music.”

This year’s festival was held on July 12 through 14 at an airfield fifteen minutes from Szczecin, a city of 600,000 in the northwest of Poland. Jurek invited the members of the Hare Krsna movement to take part, which Indradyumna Maharaja accepted on behalf of the 230 devotees of the Laksmi Nrsimha Traveling Festival, who were already geared up for a 15-festival tour of the Baltic coast.

The Polish weather bureau had predicted rain for the festival period, and Jurek expressed his concern to Maharaja, saying, “Please do something. Pray to your Lord Krsna.”

Maharaja said, “All right, I will pray to Krsna, but if the weather changes you have to accept that it was Krsna who changed it and thank Him!” Jurek agreed to this.

The day before the festival began, Maharaja and a group of twenty devotee men spent several hours in gale-force wind and rain trying to erect a circus tent, within which the devotees planned to put on entertainment. Eventually they got the tent up, only to see it rip apart and fall down minutes later.

Maharaja was devastated. He called the tent company in Warsaw, a 10-hour drive away, asking them to send another circus tent as soon as possible. The company secretary told him they didn’t have another, to which Maharaja replied that she had to locate one. Miraculously, she called back fifteen minutes later saying she had found a tent, and

was so concerned it arrive on time she would deliver it personally in Szczecin by 1:00 a.m.

Maharaja turned to the men who were standing around him and said, “I need some volunteers to stay here tonight to off-load the tent when it arrives and then put it up before the sun rises tomorrow morning.” They all agreed to stay, despite the fact that none of them had any bedding, toiletries, or change of clothes. The tent was in place by 11 a.m. when it was decorated by devotee artists with colorful streamers, flowers, balloons, cloth tapestries, hangings, and flags from India. A 20-meter banner was erected at the top of the tent which read: *Krsna’s Village of Peace*.

The tent was an instant success, with its own stage to present devotional items and situated just a hundred meters from the main stage in full view of the 50,000 people that attended the festival each day. Even before the devotees could finish decorating the tent, crowds of young people who had arrived a day before the official first day of the festival started gathering around the devotees.

Maharaja had expected this would happen, and had told the devotees earlier that one of the most important days for preaching would be the day before the official first day, because there would be no entertainment. So right on cue, at 4:00 p.m. the devotee kitchen crew arrived with 2,000 plates of hot *kichri*, *halava*, and *papadam prasadam*. Simultaneously Maharaja began *kirtan* and went on to present a lecture. Throughout the rest of the day, Krsna conscious cultural entertainment was presented in the tent including *bhajans*, *katak* dance by Vinode Hassal from India, lectures, a play *The Advent of Lord Krsna*, and in the evening the *Celibate Lovers* reggae band. When the band finished at 1:00 a.m., the young people were shouting, “More! More! More!” But the devotees had to finish for they were all exhausted, and the festival had not even officially begun.

On July 13, Jurek invited Maharaja to the main stage to give the

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opening address in the bright sunshine. Maharaja told the crowd how to achieve real peace—by coming together regardless of race, color, or creed and associate on a common platform as sons and daughters of God. Maharaja also told the people about the deal he made with Jurek: “A couple of days ago, Jurek asked me to say some prayers to Lord Krsna so there would be good weather. I said to Jurek, ‘If I pray to Krsna and there is good weather, will you understand that Krsna made it so?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ So when the clouds departed and the sunshine came through this morning, Jurek came up to me and said, ‘I know who made the good weather. It was Krsna.’ There is a tradition in India that when there is good weather, it is considered Krsna’s smile. So I can just say that because of Jurek’s endeavor in putting on this wonderful festival for peace, Lord Krsna has given us nice weather, which means that Lord Krsna is smiling on us all.” The audience applauded as Maharaja and Jurek shook hands.

One of the most popular personalities at the village tent was Rama, a bull from the New Santipur farm. All day he was surrounded by a crowd of spectators petting and feeding him, and at noon he took a cartload of children, followed by a *Harinama* party, throughout the festival grounds. It was a beautiful sight—bright-faced Hare Krsna devotees dancing, singing, and smiling behind a colorfully painted wooden cart pulled by Rama.

The devotees also had three smaller tents at the festival. One was about the New Santipur Polish farm project, another contained books and devotional items, and the third was solely for questions and answers about Krsna philosophy. H.H. Sacinandana Maharaja spent the entire festival in the third tent speaking to hundreds of young people.

On the last day of the festival, Maharaja conducted a Vedic marriage ceremony for seven devotee couples in the village tent. Maharaja

invited Jurek and his wife to be the guests of honor. Despite their busy schedules, they both accepted. Jurek's wife agreed to wear a *sari*, but nothing could compare with Jurek's arrival at the village dressed in a *dhobi* and a "Krsna's Village of Peace" t-shirt, followed by his secretaries in *saris*. The reporters and photographers went wild.

The ceremony, which the crowd of 1,500 loved, went perfectly. Jurek spoke for fifteen minutes. It was incredible. Everyone in Poland loves this man, and he was in front of the whole country in a *dhobi* glorifying the activities of the Krsna consciousness movement. Maharaja said it was one of the happiest days of his life.

At 9:00 p.m. the *Celibate Lovers* performed on the main stage. After Jurek introduced them, Maharaja gave a short talk about the holy names of Krsna and got all of the young people in the audience to chant. Then devotees at the other side of the airfield released 10,000 helium balloons "for peace." A roar of approval went up from the crowd.

Celibate Lovers then played for an hour—many melodies, but singing only the Hare Krsna *mantra*. It was one of the biggest *kirtanas* in ISKCON's history, as 40,000 young people chanted Hare Krsna and danced wildly. Before the last song, Maharaja brought Jurek forward and in front of the crowd offered him a one-ton cake, which was parked near the stage on a truck. It had taken a team of seven devotees three days to make it. Jurek invited the audience to enjoy it, and suddenly 10,000 kids rushed to the truck. Maharaja quickly ordered the driver to take the cake away before someone got hurt. It was later distributed peacefully near the main gate.

At 3:00 a.m. there was a gathering of the festival organizers on the main stage, and Maharaja went to say goodbye to Jurek. When Jurek saw Maharaja, he rushed forward and embraced him, kissing him on both cheeks. He thanked Maharaja for all that the devotees had done to help make Woodstock a success. Then Maharaja embraced

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Jurek again and thanked him for giving the devotees a chance to come and participate in the festival in such a big way.

Throughout the festival Maharaja spent a lot of time with television, radio, and newspaper reporters, many of whom ran favorable articles about the devotees. The second biggest newspaper in Poland, *Rzeczpolita*, commented: "The peaceful Krsna Village was also part of the festival. Its residents welcomed every new day with sunrise meditation. Apart from that, Krsna followers prepared 5,000 vegetarian meals daily."

A Szczecin newspaper, *Eki*, said: "The Hare Krsna followers dominated Woodstock. National television filmed the devotees constantly. The devotees were the most colorful, brightest, and happiest thing going there."

Jurek was so appreciative of the devotees' involvement in the festival that he asked Maharaja for his assurance that they will participate in his fund-raising charity festival in January, to be shown on television. Several days after the festival the devotees received the following letter in the mail:

Dear Friends,

We will remember your being with us at the Woodstock Stop '96 forever. The peaceful Krsna village contributed extraordinary color and became one with the main stage, from which you gave your message of love, friendship, and peace to the young. Your efficient activities were praised by everyone who came to the festival. Your food and your meetings with the people will stay in our memory for a long time, together with the message of your philosophy, words, rites, and manners. All this gave us a three-day experience of a different, better world, and your music came to the hearts of everyone.

On behalf of my foundation, I'd especially like to thank Indradyumna

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

Swami for being with us with his spirit, body, and work. Thank you for the delicious meals, smiles, and for everything.

Jurek Owsiak,

The Great Orchestra of Christmas Help

CHAPTER TWO

"THANK YOU FOR DELIVERING MY DAUGHTER TO HEAVEN"

SUNDAY OCTOBER 13

I was up late last night meeting my Moscow disciples. They were eager to tell me of their devotional services of the past few months, and I was eager to hear. Today is the second anniversary of my disciple Vraja Lila dasi's passing away, and I spent much of the morning in my room reading from my own book, *Vraja Lila*. I wanted to capture in my heart again the moments of her glorious departure two years ago, which has so much affected the lives of many devotees throughout the world.

Just before noon there was a knock on my door. My servant, Uttama Sloka dasa, entered and announced that Vraja Lila's mother, Taisiya Kuznetsova, was outside and that she wanted to see me. I was surprised, as I had never met her. I immediately asked that she be brought in.

She came into the room and immediately spoke to me. "Thank you so much," she said, "for delivering my daughter to heaven."

I had her sit down, and I asked her how it was she had come to the Moscow temple. She explained that although she lived far away, she

felt that the temple was the best place to spend the anniversary of her daughter's departure.

We talked for some time, and gradually Taisiya began showing a genuine interest in our movement. She asked if I could also help her go to the spiritual world. I asked Uttama Sloka for some beads and gave them to her, showing her how to chant. She memorized the *mantra* and promised to chant every day.

Finally she asked if she could somehow go to that "special village" in India where Vraja Lila had spent her last days, the village that had "brought my daughter so close to God." I said I would be taking a group of devotees to that village, called Våndāvana, soon and I would be happy if she came with us.

After she left, I remembered Lord Nāsirāhadeva's promise to Prahlada Maharaja, that by the merit of his being a pure devotee, twenty-one generations of his family members would be liberated:

Sri-bhagavan uvaca

triṇ-saptabhiṇ pita putāṇ pitābhiṇ saha te 'nagha

yat sadho 'sya kule jato bhavan vai kula-pavanaṇ

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Prahlada, O most pure, O great saintly person, your father has been purified, along with twenty-one forefathers in your family. Because you were born in this family, the entire dynasty has been purified." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.10.18)

CHAPTER THREE

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR HARI BHADRA DASİ

MONDAY OCTOBER 14

This morning I received an urgent call that my disciple Hari Bhadra dasi, who is very ill with cancer, was about to leave her body. She is the mother of my bodyguard, Kārtikeya dasa, and has been staying in his apartment for many months. Along with Uttama Sloka, I hurried to their apartment.

Kārtikeya told me that his mother was still holding on to the idea that she could live, despite her terminal condition and was unwilling to leave her body. She was maintaining many attachments despite Kṛṣṇa's warning that death was coming soon.

I sat next to her bed and began speaking to her. As I spoke, I reflected that many of my instructions were similar to those I had given to Vraja Lila. The following are excerpts from my talk to Hari Bhadra, which were recorded by Kārtikeya's wife, Kṛṣṇavali dasi:

“Hari Bhadra, we are here to chant for you because it appears that you're going to leave your body. Don't be afraid to give up your body, because you have an eternal, spiritual form with which to serve the Lord in the spiritual sky. Whether you leave today, tomorrow,

or next week, you're surrounded by devotees who are chanting the holy names, and that's a definite expression of Kṛṣṇa's mercy and kindness upon you.

"Kṛṣṇa is here in the form of His name. The holy name is our best friend. It was the holy name that attracted you to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it is the holy name that has maintained you in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and it is the holy name that will take you to Kṛṣṇa's abode. So, all of your senses should be focused on chanting now.

"At death we are afraid because we think, 'I'm alone. I have to face this all alone.' But you're not alone. Your guru is here. Your devotee son is here. Your devotee daughter-in-law is here. The *Vaiṇēavas* are here. And we're all here for one reason: to help you pass the final test. You're not the first ISKCON devotee to have to pass this test, and you won't be the last. We will all be in this situation, sooner or later. So you should encourage us by setting a good example, and face death with a smile on your face, because you're going back to Kṛṣṇa.

"My prayers are that you will successfully pass that test and you'll go back home, back to Godhead. The stage is set, and it's up to you to perform the final act. Just listen to the chanting, and when the final moment comes, remember my instructions to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare."

Late into the night, Hari Bhadra rested, and I left.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISTRIBUTING BOOKS BEFORE TAKEOFF

FRIDAY OCTOBER 18

Uttama Sloka and I arrived early at Moscow Airport for our flight to Vladivostok, in far-eastern Russia. I thought that by arriving early I could ensure a good seat for the eleven-hour flight. I was in anxiety contemplating the long journey in a Russian plane, but things became complicated even before we took off: the flight was delayed by four hours. I should have known. In Russia it's typical for flights to be delayed for hours, sometimes even days.

We decided to wait at the airport. I was restless and couldn't concentrate on reading or chanting in such an environment. Suddenly about twenty of my disciples arrived. They had been informed of our delay. They crowded around us and began asking questions.

Gradually, a number of curious onlookers also gathered around. Most of the questions were too difficult for outsiders to understand, so I dovetailed the opportunity and replied with basic philosophy, so our guests would benefit. It was invigorating to preach to fifteen guests at our impromptu program, and time soon passed by.

Before our curious guests had gathered, I had been speaking to my disciples about the importance of distributing books. I mentioned that I had done almost twelve years of book distribution. The eyes

of the disciples who are full-time book distributors lit up with excitement.

One of my disciples handed me some books. “Please,” he said, “show us how you did book distribution, Guru Maharaja. We would be very happy to see you distribute these books to our guests.”

I was on the spot. I couldn’t say I was a bit rusty. That wouldn’t fit their understanding of guru. So I asked a few of the guests to come forward and gave them books.

“These books will elaborate on what we’ve discussed,” I said. “Take them home and read them. They will make you happy.”

The first man to whom I gave a book, a lawyer, skillfully avoided the sale, but another man, a PhD in chemistry, eagerly accepted my offer. Within minutes he paid for a *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srila Prabhupada-Lilamāta* in Russian. After doing so, he shook my hand vigorously and had his wife take a photo of us together. We exchanged addresses, and then he brought his friend over to meet me. Then they left.

My disciples were wide-eyed. “Was it always like that for you, Gurudeva?” they asked.

I smiled. “Oh yes,” I said. “Let me tell you. When I was young...”

Uttama Sloka and I checked our baggage and went upstairs to a large lounge with the other passengers to await boarding. There were no seats, but I was tired, so I sat on the floor. Uttama Sloka went into a nearby office and asked a woman for a chair for me. At first she refused, but when he said it was for his spiritual master, she came outside, looked at me, and gave him a chair.

Such a small consideration on her part was most welcome, according to the time and circumstances, and I sent Uttama Sloka back to her with my package of dinner *prasadam*, which she greatly appreciated.

The flight to Vladivostok was nothing short of torture. The dim

DISTRIBUTING BOOKS BEFORE TAKEOFF

lights in the cramped Aeroflot plane, the dirt and grime, and the austerity of flying through three time zones made me feel uneasy. I thought death must be something like this, giving up the sure for the unsure, while being completely disoriented. I prayed that at the moment of death I would have the ability and strength to focus my mind on the holy names and be *dhéras tatra na muhyati* ('sober and not bewildered by such a change'), as explained in *Bhagavad-gita*.

CHAPTER FIVE

PREACHING WILL BE OUR PRASADAM

SATURDAY OCTOBER 19

We arrived at Vladivostok in the afternoon. This distant outpost on the eastern horizon bears a close resemblance to European Russia. Before visiting here the first time, I had imagined it would look subtropical, being only 600 kilometers from Japan, but on the contrary, Vladivostok is another gray Russian city on a bare and unattractive landscape.

We were greeted at the airport by Vrajendra Kumara dasa, ISKCON's Regional Secretary for the Far East. He is a disciple of H.H. Prabhaviñëu Maharaja. On the way to our apartment, Vrajendra Kumara took us to the buildings the Vladivostok devotees are renovating for a temple.

The buildings once served as a camp for the Pioneers, Russia's equivalent of the Boy Scouts. When the work is completed and the temple opens, there will be an enormous temple room, a large kitchen, a spacious lecture hall with 400 seats, and accommodations for more than sixty devotees.

In the car, Vrajendra Kumara suggested I take *prasadam* and relax. I asked if there was a preaching program scheduled for the afternoon. Uttama Sloka, half asleep in the back seat after the

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long journey, looked up. “Gurudeva,” he said, “you have to take *prasadam*.”

“Uttama,” I said, “preaching will be our *prasadam* today,”

We made our way to the Hare Krsna Cafe in downtown Vladivostok. We surprised about a hundred guests and devotees as we entered the cafe and proceeded to do a program.

I also did a program at the temple that evening. The children staged a wonderful Indian dance for me, and I invited them to take lunch with me the next day. By the look on their faces it seemed as if all their desires had suddenly been fulfilled.

“This is what it must be like in the spiritual world,” I thought. “All your desires are fulfilled in Krsna’s association, even though the activities are seemingly so simple. But because transcendental affection is there, everyone is fully satisfied.”

CHAPTER SIX

THE COURAGE OF THE DEVOTEES IN CHECHNYA

SUNDAY OCTOBER 20

I have reserved today, Sunday, for meeting my disciples. I haven't seen some of them for almost two years. One of the disciples who came was Tribunga Sundara dasa, who had just returned to Vladivostok from Grozny, the capital of the Republic of Chechnya.

Chechnya, officially part of the Russian Federation, recently attempted to become an independent country with the result that a war was fought for months in and around Grozny between Russian troops and Chechen rebels.

Tribunga Sundara was part of a small team of ISKCON devotees who had been distributing *prasadam* in Grozny before the war and had only recently escaped the fighting when the Chechen rebels retook control of the capital. There were many devotees to see, so we couldn't speak for long, but Tribunga Sundara left his diary with me.

When I finished seeing my disciples, it was late, and I prepared to take rest. I picked up the diary, but after reading it for a few moments I couldn't put it down. I include several days of Tribunga

DISTRIBUTING BOOKS BEFORE TAKEOFF

Sundara's diary here in my own diary to share with readers the faith and courage of the Food for Life devotees in Chechnya:

EXCERPTS FROM TRIBUNGA SUNDARA'S DIARY

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WE GOT AN ORDER TO SHOOT ALL RUSSIANS"

GROZNY, CHECHNYA, AUGUST 6

4:30 a.m. Today I got up late again. Last night I couldn't fall asleep for a long time, thinking about the future possibilities of our mission in Chechnya. After making calculations yesterday, we came to the conclusion that to distribute one million plates of food here, we have to prepare fifty-four more tons of *prasadam*. Every day we distribute about one ton of food from the abandoned school we live in here in Grozny. If we double it, quite soon we'll make it. We'll have a unique chance to glorify Srila Prabhupada on his centennial year by presenting him with this achievement.

It seems that today I'll be quite busy because I have to call Novosibirsk and wish my mother a happy birthday. Normally every year I send her a cable on her birthday, but this time if she gets a telegram from Grozny, it won't be a nice gift for her. So I asked a reporter to help me call by satellite phone later today to make it look as if I have called from Moscow.

5:30 a.m. I took a bath, washed my clothes, and applied *tilaka*.

5:50 a.m. The sun has just risen, and the strict city curfew is over.

"WE GOT AN ORDER TO SHOOT ALL RUSSIANS"

I'm going to bring the van from a farm outside the city where we park it every night for safety. I'll probably take Bhakta Andrei with me. He arrived from Moscow just two days ago to help us with our Food for Life activities.

After coming back from the farm, Andrei and I were approaching the school. Through the window of the house next door, I noticed a man who was wearing a white Muslim hat on his head and prayer beads around his neck. He had a grenade launcher and machine gun over both of his shoulders and was dressed in a flax jacket full of grenades and clips of bullets. Upon seeing us he shouted, "Hey, come here!"

I started to approach him slowly. I thought, "He looks like a Chechen rebel. Perhaps he is not alone."

"Come here!" the man shouted again.

I called out, "We are from the Hare Krsna Movement. We are feeding people here in the city. We are doing humanitarian work."

"I said come here!" he shouted in a more demanding voice.

I was stunned and couldn't take a single step. At that moment two more devotees, Yadusrestha and Bhakta Sergey, came from around the corner chanting *japa*. I felt a little relieved. At least we weren't alone. I thought perhaps Sergey would be able to convince the rebel to leave us alone. Then the man became nervous and called for his friend who was nearby. Sergey and Yadusrestha started talking together and suddenly ran in different directions. I thought to myself, "What is going on?" The rebel suddenly took out a grenade and pulled out the pin.

My mind was reeling with the thought that when a grenade explodes, the fragments spread over a hundred meters. I had to let the other devotees know what was happening, because they may also come by chanting *japa*. I said to Andrei, "Let's go!" and began running towards

the school. Stopping at the entrance for a moment, I screamed to the devotees, “A Chechen rebel is going to throw a grenade!”

Then I ran into the school and threw myself on the floor. But I noticed that Andrei wasn’t with me. He must have run in another direction.

I waited for the explosion from the grenade, but nothing happened. Within moments a group of twenty or thirty Chechen soldiers appeared in the yard of the school. Pointing their machine guns at the windows, they ordered us to come out. At first I couldn’t understand if the order was addressed to one or two of us or all of the devotees. I crawled to the door of the altar room and saw Kalikrit, who had just finished dressing the Deities. I said to him, “It seems that we have some guests here, Prabhu.”

“Oh really?” he replied. “Who are they?”

“Chechen rebels, and they’re all armed,” I said in a trembling voice.

Kalikrit didn’t seem affected. He was very calm. I took out my bead bag and with a shaking hand tried to chant *japa*. Gradually it became obvious that the order to go out was meant for all of us. One by one we started to go into the yard. I saw that the whole school was surrounded by the rebels. Some of them seemed to be only children, but they all held machine guns firmly in their hands. They ordered us to line up against the wall on one side of the yard. One big red-haired rebel in dirty jeans came up to Yadusrestha and took off his wrist watch. “It’s your gift for me,” he said, “You won’t need it any more.”

Another bearded rebel stepped out from the group of soldiers, and smiling he prepared his AK-47 for action. “It seems that he is going to do the job himself,” I thought. Kalikrit was the only one dressed in a *dhoti*. Stepping forward he started to preach, but no one was listening to him.

"WE GOT AN ORDER TO SHOOT ALL RUSSIANS"

It was a calm, bright summer morning. The sun was rising slowly, illuminating the ruins of the school with its warm rays. I fingered my beads mechanically. Remembering a picture of Srila Gurudeva and a Deity of Lord Nrsimhadeva that I kept on my shelf, I started to chant prayers to Him. My voice was weak but sincere. Suddenly all my fear was gone. My hand held the beads firmly. "It's a test," I thought. "It's the last one I have to go through."

Time seemed to stand still. The man with the AK-47 raised the rifle and prepared to shoot us. Suddenly another rebel began talking to someone on his walkie-talkie. They spoke in their native language, and I couldn't understand anything but the word "shoot," which is similar in the Russian language.

But one moment later he said to us, "You are free. We got an order to shoot all Russians, but you guys are lucky. Our commander is a religious man. He respects humanitarians. He knows that you've been distributing food to our people." The bearded rebel who was ready to shoot us spat in frustration as he locked the trigger on his machine gun and turned away.

Together with the Chechen soldiers we entered the school. One rebel said to me, "What do you have to eat?" Because it was so early and our cooks hadn't prepared anything, the only eatables we had were a plate of *mangala* sweets, which we gave to the rebels. They finished the plate in a few moments.

"They got mercy," I thought. As they left they ordered us to prepare lunch for one hundred of them.

9:15 a.m. We are all confused and disoriented by what has happened this morning. We started our morning program, but could hardly hear Kalikrit leading the *kirtan* because of the constant shooting and explosions outside. When it became more quiet, we had *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class.

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

9:30 a.m. Morning *prasadam*. Chanted *japa*.

12:20p.m. I just completed sixteen rounds. With all the events of the morning it was difficult to concentrate. The shooting outside started again, but this time it was more intense, being mostly artillery fire.

Alas, today I won't manage to call my mother on her birthday. She will probably be upset with me, but at least I'm alive.

1:40 p.m. I helped to put *prasadam* in metal cans for distribution. Different groups of old ladies regularly come to our kitchen for *prasadam*. They walk here through the streets where there is danger at every step.

Very bad news came to us. Andrei was wounded in the thigh. The rebels shot him as he was climbing a wall to escape. The news is that a bullet went through his thigh. Because it was a special bullet with a shifted gravity center, he lost a lot of blood. Sergey, who was with him, dragged him to the hospital.

2:20 p.m. Lunch *prasadam*.

3:10 p.m. Two Chechen fighters had us carry cans of porridge and bread to the next block of flats where some other Chechen soldiers and local citizens were hiding in the basement. Then the rebels demanded that I drive them in the van to deliver ammunition to other rebels in another part of the city. What could I do? I had to comply.

7:00 p.m. Feeling uneasy due to the whole situation that we are in, I took the Deity of Lord Nrsimhadeva from the shelf and put Him on the altar. I prayed very intensely: "My dear Lord in the form of half-man and half-lion, please protect us."

Taking harmonium and *karatalas*, we all started to chant *bhajans* with Kalikrit. The chanting chased away all the fear from within

our hearts. A prayer of Maharaja Parékñit came to my mind: "Oh *brähmaäs*, just accept me as a completely surrendered soul, and let Mother Ganges, the representative of the Lord, also accept me in that way, for I have already taken the lotus feet of the Lord into my heart. Let the snakebird—or whatever magical thing the *brähmaëa* created—bite me at once. I only desire that you all continue singing the deeds of Lord Viñëu." [*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.19.15]

As I was praying, a large missile from a passing helicopter exploded in the yard of the house next door, throwing debris in all directions. But the explosion couldn't cover the sound of *kirtan* that flowed from the hearts of surrendered souls who helplessly prayed to Krsna. When we finished the *kirtan*, we went out of the temple room into the courtyard and saw that all the windows in the school were broken due to the explosion.

8:00 p.m. We had a meeting and discussed what we would do if the bombing by Russian federal troops increased. But actually we have no choice but to remain in the school. The city is surrounded by Chechen fighters. We have to stay and depend on Krsna. But we decided to sleep with all our clothes on from now on in case we have to run in an emergency.

8:45 p.m. Took a bath in the darkness with only a small amount of water.

9:40 p.m. Read *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in the dim light of an oil lamp.

10:50 p.m. I tried to fall asleep but found it difficult while recalling all that has happened today. I reflected how as devotees our faith is tested in such extreme situations. And this is only the beginning. Who knows what's going to happen tonight? I remembered a Bengali proverb that is often quoted by my spiritual master, Srila Indradyumna Maharaja: *rakhe Krsna mare ke mare Krsna rakhe ke*. ("If Lord Krsna protects a person, who can kill him? And if Krsna

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

desires to kill someone, who can protect him?') I feel that this will be the motto for me until I get out of this situation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"THEY MAY COME BACK AND KILL US FOR ENTERTAINMENT"

AUGUST 7

6:20 a.m. The night was relatively peaceful. Some devotees say that there were a few explosions, but luckily I didn't hear anything and had a deep sleep.

7:25 a.m. Took a bath and applied my *tilaka* carefully. Water is limited now, so each of us has only one bucket to wash clothes and bathe ourselves.

9:00 a.m. I chanted *japa* in the temple room. I found myself taking shelter of the holy names. Our situation here is practically hopeless. We are surrounded by fighting soldiers on all sides. Somehow it's easy to call out to Krsna the way a young child cries for its mother. Completed twelve rounds.

10:00 a.m. Bad news again. We were told that the hospital where Andrei was admitted was totally destroyed by missiles from Russian helicopters last night. Yesterday, Yoginatha visited him and brought him beads and *prasadam*. He said that Andrei, although in pain, looked cheerful and was accepting that everything was happening by Krsna's will. But now the hospital is completely finished.

We ventured outside and saw that the area where the hospital was is simply a mass of bricks, cement, glass...and bodies. Just yesterday people were moving around there, talking, working, and thinking. Now it's a horrible picture.

We couldn't find Andrei among the dead bodies. So there is some hope that he somehow survived and was evacuated elsewhere: *rakhe Krsna mare ke mare Krsna rakhe ke*. ('If Lord Krsna protects a person, who can kill him? And if Krsna desires to kill someone, who can protect him?')

12:00 p.m. Back at the temple we sang prayers together and had *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. No one has to be encouraged to come to class here. It's a real shelter for us.

Sergey came back from the farm where we are hiding the van. He intelligently let the air out of the tires and took a few parts from the engine so that no one could take the van. Now we are all together again, except for Andrei.

1:00 p.m. The fighting in our neighborhood is increasing. We took *prasadam* in the corridor because bullets are coming in the rooms through broken windows and ricocheting off the walls. Now when we move somewhere inside the building, we have to crawl on our stomachs.

3:10 p.m. I was lying on the floor of the temple room listening to a *bhajan* tape of Srila Gurudeva, but I fell asleep. I was exhausted.

5.30 p.m. Tried to chant *japa*. To chant attentively is more important to me now, but I managed to concentrate on only a few rounds. Some of us talked *prajalpa* about military topics. It's hard not to discuss those things in this situation. Shooting outside is still very fierce. Only God knows when all this hell is going to stop.

7:50 p.m. I was reading from the Second Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* when the electricity cut off. So I took a bath in the darkness again.

8:50 p.m. Two Chechen fighters came into the school. One of them was just a boy of about 13. He was carrying an AK-47. They started to look for something to eat. Not finding anything, they took Anila's Walkman and Kalikrit's wrist watch. When Kalikrit tried to resist them, they hit him. They also took my shoes.

When they started to leave, I followed them and tried to explain that what they had done was not right. I started to explain the law of karma, but when I mentioned the name of Allah, they became furious.

The young boy pointed his machine gun at my chest. "You want me to shoot you?" he shouted. The eyes of a religious fanatic stared me in the face. I started to chant Hare Krsna in my mind. He hesitated and didn't pull the trigger.

His friend said, "Hey Musa, either kill him or let's go. We've got no time." The boy took his gun away from my chest and walked away: *rakhe Krsna mare ke mare Krsna rakhe ke*. ('If Lord Krsna protects a person, who can kill him? And if Krsna desires to kill someone, who can protect him?')

I ran back into the school and leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. I thought, "I made Krsna serve me by risking without any need."

10:00 p.m. This evening we all discussed that we should be very careful not to upset the rebels. Immediately the fear of death again appeared in my heart. If the Chechens are not pleased with us, they may come back at any moment and kill us, simply for the sake of entertainment.

After the meeting, I started to chant *japa* again. The only way I can keep my mind clear of all anxieties and fear is to chant. We held another meeting later in complete darkness, but after thirty minutes we were chanting Nrsimha prayers because missiles started exploding

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

all around the school. I looked outside (a risky thing to do) and saw that a broken gas pipe nearby was burning furiously due to leaking gas. We decided to leave the school tomorrow morning. It is simply too dangerous to remain. We have to go somewhere else.

CHAPTER NINE

BHAKTA ANDREI LEAVES HIS BODY

AUGUST 8

6:00 a.m. Upon awaking I took a bath, applied *tilaka*, and washed my clothes. It rained heavily all night. One couldn't distinguish the sounds of thunder and lightning from the artillery and missile attacks all around us.

After *maigala-arati* we prepared to leave the school. Before going we tried to hide all our temple belongings, books, utensils, and other valuables from unwanted guests. We sent two *bhaktas*, Sergey and Garik, to scout the area for a way to escape. They came back and reported that there were not many Chechen fighters around.

Neither were there any civilians. It appeared they were still hiding in the basements of buildings because Russian helicopters were bombing everything in sight. The sad thing is that, although the helicopters are trying to kill Chechen rebels, they are mostly killing civilians.

We left, but Garik decided to stay back to look after the kitchen equipment and go on feeding the few old people who still regularly come for *prasadam*. None of us thought it was a good idea, but he joined our mission voluntarily from Suhumi and is not under the jurisdiction of Moscow Food for Life. Besides, he is much older than us, and we can't force him to act otherwise.

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

7:00 a.m. O Krsna! Some really bad news came just as we were leaving. Someone came running into the school and said that the boy from Hare Krsna who was wounded had just died. I sat down on the ground and cried. Yesterday I had wanted to go looking for Andrei, but due to the constant fighting outside, I couldn't go. We are completely helpless: *rakhe Krsna mare ke mare Krsna rakhe ke*. ('If Lord Krsna protects a person, who can kill him? And if Krsna desires to kill someone, who can protect him?')

11:00 a.m. We left the school with our personal belongings and a white flag on a stick. We decided to try to make it to the van. As we quickly ran through the city, we couldn't recognize anything. Everything was in ruins. Somehow Krsna guided us, and by the end of the morning we safely reached the farm.

The owner of the farm warmly welcomed us and offered us a small brick house to stay in. All the windows in the house were broken from explosions of missiles, but still it was some kind of shelter. We settled in.

12:00 p.m. Completed sixteen rounds. From the hill where the farm is situated we can see the whole of Grozny. The city is covered by smoke from the fighting.

1:00 p.m. Listened to *bhajans* by Srila Prabhupada. His transcendental voice makes me peaceful as soon as I hear him. We offered *prasadam* cooked by Amita. It is amazing that he was able to cook in such unfavorable circumstances. As soon as we sat down to honor the *prasadam*, a group of Russian soldiers attacked some Chechen rebels who were hiding in the bushes just 200 meters away from us. The shrapnel from the explosions flew into the house, and a few pieces even dropped into my plate of porridge.

5:15 p.m. I read *The Nectar of Book Distribution* and occasionally looked up to see Russian helicopters attacking Chechen rebels.

BHAKTA ANDREI LEAVES HIS BODY

Sometimes they came straight for the house and then turned away without firing. It was quite scary. It's like playing Russian roulette: you never know whether you'll be alive the next moment or not. Krsna, please protect us.

7:00 p.m. I looked through different photo albums the devotees have and talked about topics not connected to our present situation. It is a way to be distracted from this horrible reality.

There is a shortage of water here, so we decided to go back to the school to get some. The battle is going on in some other part of the city now, so we thought it wouldn't be very risky to go. We decided to go there accompanied by a few local residents for safety. In the morning the radio said that the Russians were entering the city, but as we proceeded along the road we could see the Chechen rebels were still occupying their positions. We made it to the school and brought back a big can of water from the city. But it is enough for only half a day.

8:20 p.m. I read *Prayers by Queen Kunti* until it got dark.

9:00 p.m. We ate fresh baked corn. Luckily we had enough water to wash our hands. But there is not enough water for brushing our teeth, what to speak of taking a bath.

9:30 p.m. It is very dark, and the only lights I can see are the fires raging through the city below. The fighting near the house is increasing as the Russians try to flush out the Chechen rebels in the forest around us. Shells are flying by us with sharp whistling sounds. But by now we are accustomed to it, and strangely enough we don't seem to take much notice. We had a short *kirtan* in the darkness and then went to sleep. I'm lamenting because we didn't have a real spiritual program the whole day.

CHAPTER TEN

"DEAR LORD NRSIMHADEVA, PLEASE REMOVE THE SEED OF FEAR FROM MY HEART"

AUGUST 9

6:35 a.m. Last night before falling asleep, I was thinking to myself, "Why did Andrei decide to run to some other place when I ran back to the school, when we saw that Chechen rebel?" If there is any safe place in the universe, it is where the devotees are.

Had only one glass of water with which to take a bath this morning.

9:00 a.m. Completed twelve rounds of *japa*.

10:45 a.m. We fashioned a temporary altar and brought out our Nrsimhadeva Deity and all the altar pictures. Kalikrit gave *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class from the First Canto.

12:00 p.m. Listened to a lecture of Srila Gurudeva but fell asleep and woke up suddenly from sounds of explosions very near to our place.

1:15 p.m. Chanted *japa* and read from *The Nectar of Book Distribution*.

BHAKTA ANDREI LEAVES HIS BODY

6:40 p.m. Listened to the Radio of Russia to find out more about the situation around us. But I concluded it was *prajalpa*, and instead I started to read *The Nectar of Instruction*. But alas, I couldn't concentrate because of the sounds of the fierce fighting going on around us.

7:20 p.m. It is getting dark, and this note will be the last for today. All day we were fasting because we had no food. I feel very fatigued. This is the fourth day in our uncertain situation, but I realize the main disturbance comes not from flying shells but from our forgetfulness of the Lord's protection.

O my dear Lord Nrsimhadeva, please remove the seed of fear from my heart so that I may fully fix my mind on Your lotus feet.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“MY DEAR LORD KRSNA, YOUR PLAN IS PERFECT”

AUGUST 10

6:20 a.m. We had only a half cup of water each for taking a bath. I managed only to brush my teeth. We thought about going again to the school to take some water, but the fighting has increased again around there, so we decided not to take the risk.

8:00 a.m. Again no *prasadam* to eat. I’m very weak. I can’t even chant properly. Orditi has gone to look for Andrei’s body.

9:20 a.m. We had a morning program with *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class.

11:00 a.m. Orditi returned. Doctors from the hospital where Andrei was gave us his watch. They showed Orditi his grave in the yard of the hospital.

12:00 p.m. Finished eight rounds of *japa*. I am wondering how Garik is doing at the school with all the increased fighting going on there now. We decided to make the van ready and leave the city with a caravan of refugees that we heard will be going today. Local residents say the Chechen rebels and Russian Federal troops let refugees leave without any problem.

2:15 p.m. We got the van ready. Pumped up the tires and attached all the engine parts we had removed before. It started to rain. We filled all cans with rainwater. It should be enough for bathing for one day.

3:30 p.m. The rain became heavier. I took a bath under the rain, my first bath in two days. Immediately I started to feel better. I carefully applied my *tilaka* after the bath.

6:00 p.m. I read from the First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Took some *prasadam*. We all made plans to economize what little food, water, and gas we have.

7:30 p.m. Washed my clothes. By Krsna's grace the rain continued, so we put our buckets in the attic to catch the water from the leaking roof. Somehow or other Krsna takes care of those who serve Him. Already we have six full cans of water, which should be enough for two to three days.

Received news that the school is now occupied by Russians. How is Garik doing there? Today our spirits are a little higher, but still we all desire to leave this place at the first opportunity. Our future here is as uncertain as it was at the school. I can only imagine what the devotees in Moscow must be thinking. We have had no connection with them for four days. They are probably in much anxiety.

Mayuradhvaja's heart is not so strong, and I'm sure that not getting news from us will not be good for him. How will he handle a report that the Food for Life devotees are lost in the burning city of Grozny? And how will we ourselves deal with this reality? But my dear Lord Krsna, Your plan is perfect. We simply have to follow.



Nitai Nityananda, Indradymna Swami's Deities



Sri Sri Laksmi-Nrsimbadeva, Indradyumna Swami's Deities



(right) Book storage
“Within hours the
entire shipment was
safe in the temple
compound.”



“Janukanya
dasi (left) and
Hamsahina dasi
(right), who
lived alone here
throughout the
war...”



Indradyumna Swami with some of his traveling group and the Sarajevo devotees in front of the temple



(left) "Harinama: walking past tombstones" "Fifty-thousand people had died during the fighting, and because they were surrounded, the local population had to bury their dead within the city limits. Thus there were graves in every available space." (right) "As we weaved our way through the old streets, suddenly the mosque loomed ahead. The moment I saw it I wanted to turn around, but it was too late."



The house next to the temple was bombed a few days into the war.



“H.H. Sacinandana Maharaja spent the entire festival in the third tent speaking to hundreds of young people.”



“At 9:00 p.m. The Celibate Lovers performed on the main stage...”



“On the last day of the festival, I conducted a Vedic marriage ceremony for seven devotee couples in the village tent.”



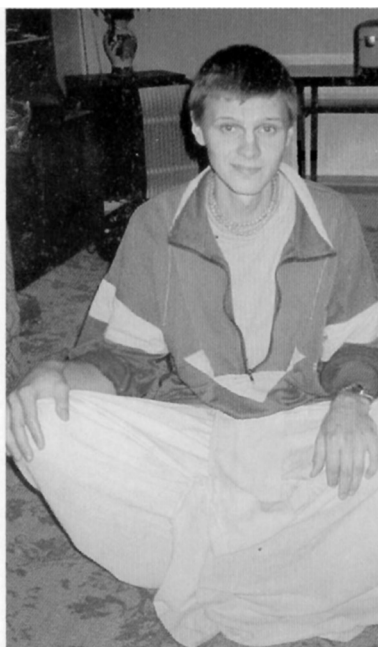
Jurek and his family were guests of honor at the wedding ceremony.



(left) “Before the last song, I brought Jurek forward...and offered him a one ton cake.” (right) On the way to the main stage...



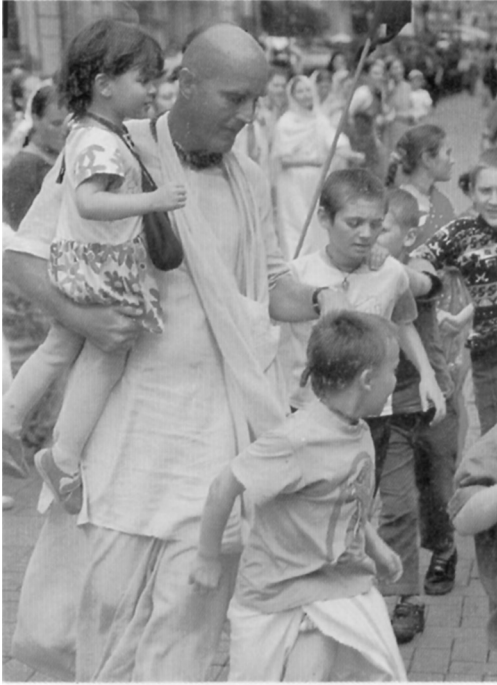
Theater: The Birth of Lord Krishna. “Devaki! give me the child!”



(left) Russian soldiers checking a Hare Krishna cake for bombs. (right) Vladivostock "Tribanga Sundara das was part of a small team of ISKCON devotees who had been distributing prasadam in Grozny before the war..."



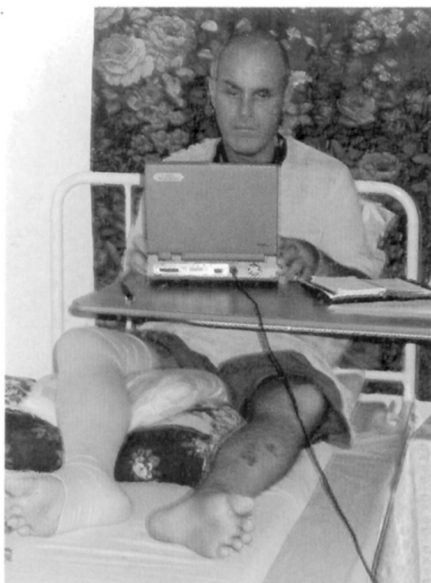
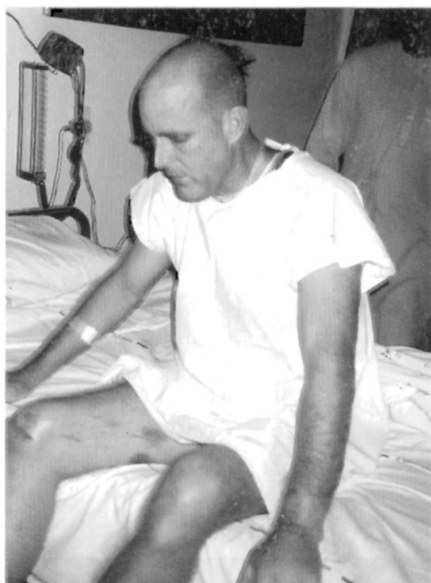
Baku temple devotees



(left) Moscow. I am dancing with children on Harinama. (right) Moscow. Sri Prahlada leads Harinama.



Devotees at the Moscow temple



At Hospital. "My injuries were limited to a severe concussion, torn ligaments and badly bruised and sprained legs and hands. The doctors said I would recover in about six weeks, but I needed rest."



CHAPTER TWELVE

"O MY LORD, HOW CAN WE GET OUT OF THIS CRAZY PLACE?"

AUGUST 11

7:00 a.m. Today is the sixth day of our isolation from the real world. Of course, this is also the real world. According *Bhagavad-gita*, the material world is a place of misery.

We just listened to the news on the radio. They said that the fighting will go on for a long time. The Chechen rebels were certainly right when they said that they came "not to leave again." The news report said that international charities are going to try to organize a humanitarian corridor through the fighting to let the local people leave.

10:30 a.m. Completed eight rounds of *japa*. Kalikrit gave a very interesting *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class.

12:00 p.m. Took *prasadam*. We are running out of *bhoga*. Chanted eight more rounds. How difficult it is to control the mind! My mind is getting more and more restless due to the uncertainty of the situation and the enforced inactivity.

1:35 p.m. Some local residents who were passing by told us that Chechen fighters now occupy the state-controlled food stores and

"O MY LORD, HOW CAN WE GET OUT OF THIS CRAZY PLACE?"

have opened them for everyone who needs food. It reminds me of the activities of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution of 1917. All this pseudo charity is done for gaining cheap popularity. Because we have practically nothing left to eat, we sent a few devotees to get some *bhoga*. The devotees returned sometime later with a big bag of spaghetti and three cases of cheap Italian butter.

8:25 p.m. We were unable to leave this place today because the fighting is so intense in the area. I laughed at myself because I am now able to identify a weapon by the sound of the missile that it has shot.

For the safety of the van, I again separated a few parts from the engine and took off the front wheel.

9:40 p.m. This note is the last one for today. We ran out of candles, and I'm writing these lines under the lights from the van. Tomorrow is exactly one week since the fighting for control of the city began. I feel like running away somewhere just to be engaged in some active service.

Sergey said that he heard the voice of Madana-mohana dasa on a radio broadcast, and Madana-mohana expressed his concern regarding the lost group of Food for Life devotees in Grozny. O my Lord, how can we get out of this crazy place? We are just eating and sleeping here. I wonder why on earth we returned the Merlin mini-radio we used to have before? And we did it just three days before the fighting started. We could have used it to contact the outside world.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THEY THOUGHT WE WERE RUSSIAN SOLDIERS DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES

AUGUST 12

7:10 a.m. Our water supply is limited again. We each have just enough to wash our faces and brush our teeth.

10:00 a.m. Managed to chant eight rounds before *arati*. Today I gave the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class.

12:40 p.m. Listened to a tape of *bhajans* by Srila Gurudeva and one of my favorite lectures given by him in Moscow in 1990. It is from the Second Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. It is very relevant to our situation here now. The verse reads:

*anta-kale tu puruṇa
agate gata-sadhvasah
chindyd asaṅga-sastrena
sprham debe 'nu ye ca tam*

“At the last stage of one’s life, one should be bold enough not to be afraid of death. But one must cut off all attachment to the material

THEY THOUGHT WE WERE RUSSIAN SOLDIERS DRESSED IN
CIVILIAN CLOTHES

body and everything pertaining to it and all desires thereof.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.1.15)

Garik came from the school. We were glad to see him alive.

2:40 p.m. Held a meeting about our situation. All ten devotees were present. Some say that we should stay here; others say we should try to leave. I argued that by staying here we are taking the greatest risk. I said, “Where is the guarantee that one of the missiles or shells that fly all day long over our roof will not hit our little brick house?”

At last everybody agreed that we have to leave.

We decided to send a few men to scout the countryside around us to find a road out of here. I was appointed to try to go back to the school to secure some parts for the van, which we might need to go a long distance. Just as we finished our meeting, Chechen fighters attacked a nearby building.

6:45 p.m. I left for the school with Garik, but as soon as we were a little distance from the house we were arrested by Chechen rebels. They thought we were Russian soldiers dressed in civilian clothes. They pushed us down a road to see their commander and on the way forced us to carry a big bag of frozen fish. Their headquarters were not far away, and their commander turned out to be an intelligent elderly man. He looked through our documents, talked to us a little, and set us free.

When we reached the school, we found it in a very bad condition. I took the parts we needed for the van and also found a map of the roads in and around Grozny. We left quickly because we heard shooting start nearby. On the way back, I saw the headless body of a Chechen rebel. I tried to keep my mind fixed on Kṛṣṇa.

9:00 p.m. We had *kīrtana* together. We decided not to listen to the news any more to save the batteries in our radio and not to become unnecessarily disturbed. The news is always bad, and half of it is lies.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"O KRSNA, HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO TEST US HERE?"

AUGUST 13

12:00 p.m. While falling asleep last night, I remember praying, "O Krsna, how long are You going to test us here?" The fierce fighting around us continues, so we cannot leave.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HERE WE'LL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH THE MOST SERIOUS TEST SO FAR

AUGUST 14

8:00 a.m. After waking up this morning, I read my spiritual master's *Vyasa-puja* homages to Srila Prabhupada throughout the years.

10:15 a.m. We set up an altar and had *kirtana*. With the last remaining batteries in our tape recorder, we listened to a lecture of Srila Prabhupada.

1:20 p.m. Took *prasadam*. Completed twelve rounds. Glued my torn shoes. Again we started to discuss how to leave this place as soon as possible.

2:30 p.m. This morning some Chechen fighters came, and one of them introduced himself as the State Security Chief and demanded the van. We couldn't resist them. They had a driver with them who tried to attach the necessary parts to the engine. I volunteered to help him with the intention of making the process as slow as possible in the hope they would become discouraged and go away. The van is our only hope of getting out of here.

Kalikrit approached me and asked in English if they would be able to start the engine?

I replied back in English, “No.”

The Chechens looked at us suspiciously. They couldn’t start the engine, but they managed to push the van out of the yard and down the road.

7:20 p.m. After some time the State Security Chief came back with some of the soldiers and started to rough us up. They threw us out of the house and demanded that we walk towards the van. We realized that we were leaving that place forever. Sergey asked our host to keep our Deities. The van was surrounded by a number of Chechens trying to start the engine. They put us in the back of the van and then told me that unless I started the engine they would shoot us.

Meanwhile, a crowd of local residents gathered around us. They recognized us as Hare Krsna Food for Life devotees and inquired from the officer where he wanted to take us. He explained that we were being taken away for interrogation. I started the van and they drove us away. Forty-five minutes later we arrived at a house where they had some type of impromptu office. Inside they searched us one by one, taking all our documents, papers, and anything they liked. When the time came for them to question me they asked for my possessions.

All I had was a simple cloth bag with my *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, a notebook, a pen, and two pictures, one of Srila Gurudeva, and the other of his Nrsimha-salagrama, which he always carries around his neck. None of this interested them. Because the sleeves of my sweater were quite long they didn’t notice my wrist watch. After questioning me they pushed me into a dark room with the other devotees.

Later on a few young Chechen fighters came in and brought us some fruit. They asked us to tell them about our faith. Eventually

HERE WE'LL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH THE MOST SERIOUS TEST SO FAR

the older soldiers took us to the van and then to the ruined office of an oil refinery. We watched from the window as they removed the canvas tent from the back of the van on which was written in bold letters, "Hare Krsna Food For Life." What a foolish thing to do! They didn't know that our sign and the reputation associated with it were safer than any armor.

After some time we were escorted out of the oil refinery to the van and driven outside the city. The road was quite dangerous because Russian federal troops supposedly had checkpoints along the way and could attack us. Thus the entire way I was chanting prayers to Lord Nrsimhadeva. I noticed that the other devotees were also chanting with great concentration.

By Krsna's grace, we reached our destination safely. The van stopped at the gate of a big coal factory. The Chechen soldiers who brought us explained that their authorities wanted to exchange us for their soldiers who had been captured by Russians.

8:30 p.m. We waited in the van at the gates of the coal factory. I tried to read *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. One of the Chechen fighters started to look attentively through the illustrations in the *Krsna* book given to him by Mahābuddhi. In a joking mood he started to ask some questions, and we again got a chance to preach. At last the gates opened and we drove in. By the mood of the Chechens we could understand that we were something valuable for them. In the twilight they pushed us roughly into a tiny room with boarded up windows.

9:00 p.m. I have chanted two more rounds of *japa*. I feel that here we'll have to pass through the most serious test so far. Maybe it will be our last test. Kalikrit started to describe the courage and devotion of Prahlāda Maharaja. I thought, "Yes, sooner or later we'll have to leave this material world." In the end, we offered our humble obeisances to each other. We wanted to encourage each other till the last moment.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WE COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT WE HAD MANAGED TO GET OUT OF HELL

AUGUST 15

8 a.m. At midnight a Chechen fighter came and ordered us to go out. It was dark and cool outside. There was not a trace of any noise. It meant that Grozny was quite far from where we were. The soldiers put us in a small bus, and hitting us very hard on our necks, forced us to bend down and look at the floor. There were so many armed soldiers accompanying us that it seemed we were some dangerous group of criminals.

After about thirty minutes they brought us to a desolated enterprise. They led us inside and through a corridor, on both sides of which soldiers with machine guns were standing. From behind came the terse order, "If you look up, we'll shoot you without any further warning."

All ten of us, along with one old Chechen man, were pushed into a small dark room about two by two meters. By touching all the walls in the darkness, we understood that it was a large refrigerator. If they shut the door, we would suffocate. But they left the door a little open and put some wire on it as a symbolic lock.

WE COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT WE HAD MANAGED TO GET OUT OF HELL

After some time they took us out one by one to go to the toilet. When it was my turn, the soldier accompanying me put a machine gun at the back of my head. He kept it there until I returned to the refrigerator. After an hour they took us individually for interrogation. When Yadusrestha returned, he said that the Chechen rebels took us for Russian scouts under the camouflage of a humanitarian mission. They said that if we didn't tell them the truth about ourselves they would simply shut the door of the refrigerator and finish us off. Another option they gave was that we would dig our own graves and they would cut off our heads.

I started thinking about our last days. Krsna was preparing us for the final exam. What could be done if this was His plan? *rakhe Krsna mare ke mare Krsna rakhe ke*. ('If Lord Krsna protects a person, who can kill him? And if Krsna desires to kill someone, who can protect him?')

I decided to take some rest and relieve my headache until they called me for interrogation. Bending on the floor of that tight box, I just switched myself off for some time. By 4:00 am they had interrogated only three of us. There in that foul-smelling dark box, I realized the necessity of always being fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord and constantly chant His holy names.

The soldiers who were guarding us would sometimes ask questions, and after a while they became favorable to us. One of them said that if he was ordered to shoot us, he wouldn't do it. I thought, "If this is my last day, I have to complete my rounds as soon as possible," and I started to chant. What bliss it was! How sincerely I was calling out for Krsna!

At dawn they took us out of the refrigerator and told us to wait in the corridor. Just then a group of rebels came back after fighting all night in Grozny. They were very agitated and were talking loudly in their native language. We found ourselves in the center of them chanting *japa*.

All of a sudden one of them came up to me, and pointing at my bead bag asked, “What is this?” I took the beads out and showed him.

“And what are you murmuring?” he demanded. Fingering the beads, I chanted the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra softly. “Louder!” he ordered. Loudly and clearly, I continued chanting the holy names. Everyone became absolutely silent. I chanted the whole mantra about ten times. The soldier and all his companions were stunned.

Then he sat on a bed in the corner of the room, and taking out his Muslim beads from his pocket, he began chanting a Muslim prayer. Then he kissed his beads, put them back in his pocket, and immediately fell asleep. Just then a large Chechen officer arrived. He was tall and strong, about 40 to 45 years old, with a black band around his forehead.

He started to ask us questions, and unlike his colleagues, he attentively listened to our answers. As we found out later, he was the one who ordered over the walkie-talkie to set us free when they wanted to shoot us in the front yard of the school.

After speaking to us for a few minutes, he ordered that we be released. “They fed my people, and now it is my turn to take care of them,” he said.

He later told us that the other officers considered us secret-service agents and were just about to execute us by firing squad. Kṛṣṇa had sent him at the last moment. *rakhe Kṛṣṇa mare ke mare Kṛṣṇa rakhe ke*. (‘If Lord Kṛṣṇa protects a person, who can kill him? And if Kṛṣṇa desires to kill someone, who can protect him?’)

We were taken to meet the chairman of the Chechen Republic Security Department, as he introduced himself. He apologized for the way in which we had been treated and said, “War is war, you know.”

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Then he told us that the commander who had set us free had invited us as guests to his house. Before we left his office, the chairman promised to get in touch with our Food for Life office in Moscow and tell them of our whereabouts. We asked if we could take the rest of our documents from the house on the hill. The documents were important for getting back into Russia. If we didn't have them, we could be put into a so-called filter camp for people without any identification cards and might be stuck there for months.

2:00 p.m. Aslan, our well-wishing commander, received us warmly in his house. He gave us all possible facilities: water with which to bathe, *bhoga* to cook *prasadam*, and rooms to stay. We were walking around his big house chanting *japa* and couldn't believe that we had managed to get out of hell.

5:10 p.m. Took *prasadam* and then fed our hosts. Afterwards we washed the dishes and took some good rest for the first time in many days.

7:30 p.m. Read from the *Kṛṣṇa* book. Talked with Aslan. He turned out to be a simple man, just an auto mechanic. Two years ago when military activities in Chechnya started, the Russians bombed his village, and many of his relatives were killed. His little son became an invalid. After that, Aslan decided to take *gazavat*, a Muslim vow, and become a fighter. He explained that the Chechens didn't want to fight, but they were obliged to according to the old laws of *shari'ah*.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WE BID FAREWELL TO OUR HOSPITABLE CHECHEN WELL-WISHERS

AUGUST 16

7:45 a.m. Completed twelve rounds. Managed to concentrate nicely.

9:00 a.m. Had a morning program.

10:20 a.m. A Chechen soldier arrived and told us that Mayüradvaja Prabhu was coming up the road. He had come all the way from Moscow to rescue us. I couldn't believe that someone would find us here. I ran out and embraced Mayüradvaja Prabhu and Sriman Prabhu, who accompanied him. We were so glad to see them. They said they had been searching for us for three days.

12:00 p.m. We bade farewell to our hospitable Chechen well-wishers. I said, "Barrkalo, Aslan. Adik yoil." ("Thank you, Aslan. All the best to you!") On the way out of Chechnya, we passed long caravans of refugees. Sometimes military officials stopped us and checked our documents, but Mayüradvaja had everything in order. We reached Moscow in three days.

Postscript: Two weeks later, together with Kalikrit, I again came back to Grozny. We spent two days with Aslan. He and his rebel

WE BID FAREWELL TO OUR HOSPITABLE CHECHEN WELL-WISHERS

fighters took us to the little house on the hill so that we could get the rest of our belongings. We also visited the school. Everything was chaotic. All the food was gone, and only a big box with our books was in the middle of the room. Garik had been arrested by a group of Chechen fighters and later released, but not before they broke his ribs and head with the Deities. But now, by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, we are all safe.

All except Andrei, who gave his life in service to Srīla Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. I pray the Lord took him home, back to the spiritual sky.

END OF TRIBUNGA SUNDARA'S DIARY

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"SHOW THEM HOW TO BE FEARLESS AND INSPIRED AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH"

MONDAY OCTOBER 21

After *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class, I asked to see a *gāhastā* couple, disciples of H.H. Prabhavisnu Maharaja and H.H. Bhakti Vaibhava Maharaja. The *matāji* had recently given birth, but the baby died two minutes after being born. I had been told that although they accepted everything as the arrangement of the Lord, they were still struggling with the ordeal.

After they came in, they thanked me for taking the time to speak to them. I could appreciate how much personal attention devotees need, and I thought for a moment how I wished I had more time to spend on the personal lives of devotees. But my life, at least at this point, is so full of organizing festivals and visiting temples all over the world that I hardly have time for such attention.

I told the couple what Srila Prabhupada had said many years ago in Los Angeles when one of his disciples had also lost her baby just after birth. Srila Prabhupada told the mother that her baby was a

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devotee who simply needed a brief moment of purification in order to be qualified to go back home, back to Godhead.

In the afternoon, Vrajendra Kumara drove me to the Vladivostok apartment of my disciple Damodara dasa, who has been seriously ill for the past year with Parkinson's Disease. The doctors say he doesn't have long to live.

I spoke with Damodara for an hour, once again preparing a disciple for the final test:

"In some ways Damodara, you are fortunate. Your situation is very similar to that of Maharaja Pariksit, who was cursed to die within seven days. This means he knew he didn't have long to live, so he became very serious about Krsna consciousness. Most of us are under the illusion that we have a long time to live. You should follow in the footsteps of Maharaja Pariksit. He asked the sages, 'What is the duty of one who is about to die?' Their reply was to hear, chant, and remember about the pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"Krsna has given you a little more time. Why? Because leaving the body can be a difficult task, and we need to prepare ourselves. But for someone like you, who has suffered for so long, it shouldn't be that difficult to relinquish the body. Srila Prabhupada wrote a posthumous letter to Jayananda dasa, that Krsna had taken away his diseased body and given him a body which was suitable for his desires to serve Him in the spiritual world. Most people are intoxicated with the false promise that their body can give them pleasure, but you should know for sure, because of your disease, that the body is simply an abode of suffering.

"Sometimes we take service for granted, but the next time you get active service it will be like pure nectar. You'll think, 'How fortunate I am to engage in active service for Krsna.' When something

important is taken away from us and is given back to us again, we appreciate it a million times more. When you get the opportunity to perform active service again, you'll be very, very appreciative.

“Death serves the devotee's interest to come closer to Kṛṣṇa. Thus there's absolutely nothing to fear at death for a devotee. Especially for you. What do you have to lose by giving up this diseased body? If someone loses his body in the prime of his youth, when he's healthy and strong, he may try to hold on. He's afraid: 'I don't want to lose this situation.'

“But Kṛṣṇa is teaching you to be renounced before death. People may look at you and lament, but you can smile and say, 'Better lament for that person who is in a healthy and sound condition and is still thinking that he'll find some happiness in this world.'

“Absorb yourself in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, His dealings with His devotees, His loving exchanges with them, His form, His dress, His ornaments, His lotus eyes. Kṛṣṇa says, 'One who knows the transcendental nature of My activities doesn't take birth again.' You don't have to hear so much about the material world any more, because you're at the last stage of life.

“Of course, you can hear something about the nature of this world, because there may be lingering attachments in your heart. But the main thing is to hear about Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is so attractive that you can't help but be enchanted by Him.

“Great devotees sometimes retire at the end of their lives for the purpose of immersing themselves in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa. Even Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ōhākura gave up all his duties and responsibilities and went into *samādhi* for the last four years of his life, simply meditating on Kṛṣṇa. His purpose was to give us an example of how important it is to prepare ourselves for the final test. In real life, whatever's left of it, one should just be fully immersed in Kṛṣṇa.

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"This is your service now: to prepare for death. It's also a service to the Vaisnava community in order to show them how to be fearless and inspired at the moment of death. Please remember these instructions and also share your realizations with other devotees. Our Krsna consciousness is often accelerated at the end of life. We're forced to develop a true sense of renunciation and dependency on Krsna. It's your duty to share those realizations with others. Keep a little journal or a little diary and help the devotees in general prepare for that inevitable moment we all must face."

This evening, before taking rest, I downloaded my e-mail and found the following message from a devotee in St. Petersburg. He was responding to my preaching to the devotees in Moscow that devotees in Russia should, as far as possible, wear Vaisnava dress:

Dear Indradyumna Swami,

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

I have heard that while staying in Moscow, you emphasized again the importance of wearing Vaisnava dress. I was told that you even said you won't accept a disciple if he or she is not accustomed to wearing a *dhوتي* or *sari*. I understand the importance of the dress. But still, I have my doubts if this should be so much obligatory, especially for Russian devotees. My arguments are as follows:

Some devotees in the former Soviet Union tend to be very fanatical. They take any *Diary of a Traveling Preacher* instruction as a rule without exclusions. When one wears a *dhوتي* or a *sari*, it means that he or she is representing ISKCON. With the low spiritual and cultural standards of many Russian devotees, I do not trust them to represent ISKCON in public. Many devotees can't represent ISKCON properly even in the temple. They don't know how to preach to their parents and friends, what to speak of representing the movement in the streets.

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The public opinion in Russia is still not very nice. And I don't think that a bunch of strange-looking guys in saffron bedsheets will help improve the situation. The cases of devotees beaten by some drunkards and nationalistic youngsters (many of them even in the cultural capital of Russia, St. Petersburg) will increase.

Since some devotees are fanatical, and the weather here (especially in St. Petersburg) is quite cold, many will have colds very soon. Chronic diseases are guaranteed in the nearest future. Since some devotees already have troubles with their digestion, it is not really wanted to add colds to their poor health.

Maybe I don't understand something. Please enlighten me.

Your servant.

I immediately sent the following reply:

Dear Prabhu,

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

Thank you for your email.

Yes, I did stress the importance of wearing Vaisnava attire to the devotees while I was in Moscow. I was shocked to see that a number of devotees were wearing *dhoti* and *sari* to the morning program and then putting on blue jeans the rest of the day for their temple services. I was also surprised that although many devotees gathered throughout the day on the temple property, it was rare to see anyone in Vedic dress. I was also amazed that, when I visited Radio Krsnaloka, none of the devotee staff were in Vaisnava dress, although the studio and offices belong entirely to ISKCON.

So I discussed my concern with Ekanātha Prabhu and then spoke

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to the general devotees, because I don't feel that this should be the standard. I certainly didn't say that I won't accept a disciple who wears nondevotee attire. Nondevotee dress is appropriate for *sankirtana* [book distribution] and business. There may be other exceptions as well. For example, if devotees are in a sensitive area that is extremely nationalistic, like Armenia or Tajikistan. But in general, devotees should dress like devotees. It creates a nice spiritual atmosphere.

You say in your message that many devotees shouldn't wear Vaisnava dress because of their low cultural and spiritual standards. Yes, there certainly may be some devotees whose standards are so low that they shouldn't represent ISKCON by dressing in public in Vaisnava attire, but that shouldn't be the general practice for most devotees. The unnecessary wearing of nondevotee dress itself encourages a mentality of low standards. For most devotees, wearing Vaisnava dress helps them to act in an exemplary way.

You say that public opinion toward devotees in Russia is not nice. I say you are dead wrong. I travel all over this country in a *dhobi*, and in general I find most people are respectful, many people interested, or at worst indifferent. No doubt there are the exceptional cases of demoniac people getting upset when they see us—, but that is the exception, not the rule as you seem to indicate.

Devotees like you, who preach your misconception about the public's opinion of us, create an unnecessary paranoia among the devotees. Some people may take offense when they see us in devotee dress, but the general public doesn't look upon us as "strange-looking guys in saffron bedsheets." Maybe you don't know this because you never wear a *dhobi* in public. *Atmavan manyate jalgat*. "A person tends to assess others according to his own mentality."

I know a number of Russian devotees who even do *sankirtana* in devotee dress and rarely, if ever, have problems. One of them is my disciple, Uttama Sloka dasa. He's done *sankirtana* for three years

in a *dhoti* and has never been attacked. In fact, he carries on all his regional secretary affairs (meeting VIPs, contacting public officials, etc.) and has never once had a person even speak harshly to him. He says he finds people more receptive because he's in devotee attire.

I don't say that this has to always be the standard. I myself did *sankirtana* for eleven years. I know the necessity of wearing *karmi* clothes to facilitate book distribution. But my point to the devotees in Moscow was that many of them have gone too far.

I think your argument about the weather is ridiculous. Long underwear is much warmer than jeans, and can easily be worn under a *dhoti* or *sari*. I did *harinama* in the winter snows of Paris for six years in a *dhoti*, wearing long underwear.

I'd like to remind you that during Srila Prabhupada's time, we didn't wear nondevotee clothes, except for the obvious reasons I mentioned above. We didn't put on jeans to leave the temple simply to buy a bottle of milk, as many devotees do these days. The American and European public didn't know much about us at that time either, and some of them may have been hostile, but we didn't change our dress because of that.

When Srila Prabhupada was here we always wore traditional Vedic dress. We were proud to wear the symbols of a Vaisnava. People thought of Kṛṣṇa when they saw us. Now it's almost as if devotees are embarrassed to be seen in traditional Vaisnava dress and *tilaka*, or paranoid to wear it, because devotees like you instill a false conception that the people in this country have a bad opinion of us. Many people don't even know we exist, because they never see devotees in attractive Vaisnava attire any more.

You say that some Russian devotees "take an instruction as a rule without an exception." But in my preaching on the benefits of wearing Vaisnava dress for oneself and the public, I made it very

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clear that there are obvious exceptions to this rule—again *sankirtana*, business, or areas where the public may actually be hostile to us. I feel my preaching in Moscow was well balanced, as opposed to your preaching, which I feel lowers the spiritual standards of the devotees and leaves room for more and more compromise.

Your servant,

Indradyumna Swami.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HELPING MY DISCIPLE ACHIEVE A GLORIOUS DESTINATION

TUESDAY OCTOBER 22

This morning when checking the telephone-answering service, I found a message from Kartikeya that Hari Bhadra had left her body at midnight. It came as no surprise, but I wanted to know the details of her departure, so I asked Uttama Sloka to call Kartikeya and find out under what conditions she had left.

I waited anxiously as Uttama Sloka tried all day to get through to Moscow. It wasn't until late that evening that he spoke to Kartikeya's wife. The report we received was satisfying. The devotees saw an emphatic change in Hari Bhadra after my visit. She had fixed her mind on my instructions and had absorbed herself in hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa. An hour before she passed away, she lapsed into unconsciousness, but by Kṛṣṇa's mercy she awoke several minutes before she left her body.

In full consciousness, she looked intensely at a picture of Radha and Kṛṣṇa, then accepted a *tulasī* leaf on her tongue. While devotees poured Ganges water on her head and had a tumultuous *kīrtana*, Hari Bhadra left for that place upon achieving which one never returns to this world of birth and death.

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Uttama Sloka asked me if I was sad. He was a bit surprised by my smiling reply. “No, I’m not,” I said. “I’m very happy for her. I’m also very satisfied because I’ve done my duty. I’ve helped her achieve Krsna’s lotus feet.”

I was satisfied. By Srila Prabhupada’s mercy I felt I’d accomplished something by helping my disciple achieve a glorious destination.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"EXCEPT FOR THE UNCONTROLLED AND MISGUIDED MIND, THERE IS NO ENEMY"

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 23

Today I accepted four new disciples: Gétä Mala dasi, Acintya Rupa dasi, Janaki Vallabha dasi, and Irävaté dasi, bringing the total number of disciples to 622. During the initiation ceremony, I thought of the day in 1989, seven years ago, when I accepted my first disciples in New Mayapura, France.

Like many responsibilities one accrues in the service of guru and Gauranga, accepting disciples has had its sublime and difficult moments. The sublime moments are to see the disciples make advancement and become valuable assets to Srila Prabhupada's mission. The difficult moments are when they waver and in some cases fall to the side.

After the ceremony I fell sick in my room with a terrible stomach ache, but I had to ignore it because we were leaving for Ekaterinburg in the Urals and had to be at the airport in two hours. The usual last-minute chaos in our departure routine had set in. I was packing, answering phone calls, meeting the leaders to evaluate the visit, and

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offering suggestions based on what I'd seen and heard. Devotees were waiting outside to ask me questions:

"Should I accept his marriage proposal?"

"Should I give up my family and live in the temple?"

"Should I continue to run from the army?"

All these were questions that "only I could answer." Of course, in many cases I encourage the devotees to find the answers themselves. It is not that I can always be there giving answers. But in a number of cases they can find no solution and pray for a miracle with my decision.

But I'm not a miracle maker. I'm only the humble servant of Srila Prabhupada, and I pray to him for the intelligence and ability to guide my disciples in the best way possible, depending always on his mercy.

Miraculously, I did everything I had to do, saw everyone that needed to be seen, and I even had time to meet the children once more to encourage them. Their young eyes flooded with tears at the prospect of my departure and touched my heart.

"Get rid of them fast," said one of the *brahmacaris*, "so we can finish up all the business."

"This is our business," I replied, "ensuring the future of our movement: our children." And I saw to no other business.

On the way to the airport, I stopped at Damodara's apartment and went upstairs to quickly give him the *gayatri* mantra. Withering in pain on his bed, he sat up and gratefully accepted the divine mantra through his ears and into his heart. I was gone as quickly as I had arrived. How times have changed from days of yore, when disciples lived with their *guru* in the forest and learned Vedic knowledge from him in his personal association!

DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

The plane was on time, and Uttama Sloka and I boarded for the five-hour flight over Siberia. Vrajendra Kumara saw us off with a smile. “This will be an easy flight,” he said. “It’s only five hours.”

He couldn’t have been more wrong. We boarded the flight in typical Russian fashion: with all our luggage.

It’s something I’ve never seen anywhere else in the world. At the ticket counter you have to check in only overweight bags. Your other luggage, you may carry on. Surprisingly, you can also carry on cats and dogs. On this flight I counted two dogs and three cats. It’s amazing, considering the seats are much smaller than on Western airlines. It’s also common to see luggage piled up next to the emergency exit or in front of the toilets. The safety standards on Russian airlines are horrendous.

Seats are not usually allocated, and it’s a question of first come first served. There is always a struggle as everyone jostles for seats after entering the plane. This time I considered myself lucky. I was one of the first on the plane, and found a seat at the back with a few inches more leg room. As I stuffed my bags under and around my seat, I collapsed into it in exhaustion.

“For once I’ve got a little room,” I said to Uttama Sloka, “even if it’s only a few extra inches.”

Suddenly a large man appeared from the bathroom and challenged me in broken English. “I’m sorry,” he said. “That’s my seat. I was here first. Please move.”

I was devastated. All I could do was close my eyes and hold on to the cushion of the seat. The only way I was going to go was if he removed me. There were a few moments of tense silence, and then he sat in the seat next to me. “Well, all right,” he said.

After five hours, I turned to Uttama Sloka, who was seated in front of me. “Will we be landing soon?” I asked.

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He went to ask the stewardess and came back with a grim look on his face. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "this isn't a five-hour flight; it's a bit longer. There's a stopover in Irkutsk, Siberia. But the pilot just learned that the Irkutsk airport is closed because of a blizzard. So we're going to land in Ulan-Ude in half an hour and wait until Irkutsk is open."

I thanked Kṛṣṇa for the few extra inches of leg room.

Ulan-Ude seemed the penultimate stop at the earth's forgotten places. We were asked to leave the plane and walk through the snow to the terminal and wait inside. There was a pack of wild dogs on the tarmac. When we reached the terminal we discovered there was no heat in the building. I tried to sleep on a wooden bench. Four hours later Uttama Sloka woke me up and we boarded our flight to Irkutsk, which took two hours.

There we waited another two hours for a five-hour flight to Ekaterinburg. The total trip took eighteen hours. If this had happened in any Western country, the passengers would have made a fuss about it, but Russians are used to such austerities. I appreciate them for their tolerance under such situations. In fact, I can honestly say I have learned a lot about tolerance and austerity from traveling and living with the people of this country. In a sense I feel indebted to them.

Srila Prabhupada once said that he was indebted to his American disciples. He wrote the following to one of them:

"From your report it appears that everything is progressing very nicely. What can I say? I am so much indebted to all you nice American boys and girls for helping me to execute the order of my guru *Maharaja*. May Kṛṣṇa bless you American people for helping him in his mission." (August 19, 1973)

As we were about to leave the plane, the man who had given me

his seat in Vladivostok picked up my luggage, and with a smile indicated he would carry it to the terminal for me. I was surprised. He struggled with my bags through the aisles and on to the airport bus. I thanked him for the seat and for carrying my bags.

He smiled again. "I could see that you are a foreigner," he said, "and you are not used to the austerities of my country."

I was touched by his kindness. I couldn't believe that once I had been taught to see him as my enemy. During the Cold War, Americans were taught by their leaders that the Russians were their enemies. Such are the ways of politics.

Srila Prabhupada spoke about this in a room conversation in Mäyapura on March 23, 1973:

"Russian people are bad. That is a mistake. Some of them...are good. That I have experienced. Otherwise, how that Anatole came to become my disciple? And there are many like that, mostly they are like him. It is by artificial suppression that it has been advertised 'the Russian people are all communists.' That's not fact. Most Russians, they want to leave that country, and some of them already done so...they don't like this communist philosophy."

Prahlāda Maharaja also discusses the false idea of friend and enemy:

"Prahlāda Maharaja continued: My dear father, please give up your demoniac mentality. Do not discriminate in your heart between enemies and friends; make your mind equipoised toward everyone. Except for the uncontrolled and misguided mind, there is no enemy within this world. When one sees everyone on the platform of equality, one then comes to the position of worshipping the Lord perfectly." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.8.9)

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

I CHANTED LOUDLY ON MY BEADS TO BE AWAKE WHEN WE ARRIVED

THURSDAY OCTOBER 24

Because it was 3:00 a.m., only a few devotees were at the Ekaterinburg airport to greet us. As I collapsed into the car, the temple president gave me a schedule for the next two days. My eyes opened wide as I saw the schedule began at 7:00 a.m., only four hours away:

Day 1

7:00 a.m. Greeting Srila Gurudeva

9:00 a.m. Lecture

11:00 a.m. *Darṣana* with disciples

12:00 p.m. *Prasadam* with *gurukula*

2:00 p.m. Meeting with city officials

5:00 p.m. Theater with guruku1a

6:00 p.m. Public program

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Day 2

4:30 a.m. *Mangala-arati*

5:00 a.m. Chant with disciples

7:00 a.m. Class

9:00 a.m. Meet guruku1a teachers

11:00 a.m. *Prasadam*

11:45 a.m. Television interview

12:00 p.m. Theatre with guruku1a

2:00 p.m. *Darçana* for discp1es

5:00 p.m. Class

It also stated that my flight for Baku, Azerbaijan, left at 4:00 a.m. on the third day. As we drove into the city, I was told that more than a hundred of my disciples were eagerly awaiting me. I chanted loudly on my beads to be awake when we arrived at the Ekaterinburg temple for the reception.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

THE RUSSIAN VEDA

FRIDAY OCTOBER 25

The Russian government has proposed a law restricting the activities of new religious movements, which according to definition is anything that is not Russian Orthodox or Muslim. The devotees arranged for me to meet Professor Alexander Vasilyevich Medvedev of the State University of the Urals, who is also the Chairman of the Religious Affairs Committee of the Ural Region, which investigates new religious movements.

The devotees hoped that by meeting Professor Medvedev, we might persuade the government that the law would not be in accordance with basic rights of liberty or freedom of choice of religion.

I agreed to meet the professor, not so much because I thought we could make much progress with the government, but to please the devotees. I have seen that Russian bureaucracy is like a thick wall. If those in higher positions don't like what you're doing, that's it. Besides, how much would a professor in the Urals know about ancient Vedic culture?

The devotees accompanying me wanted to wear non-devotional

dress to the 12:00 p.m. meeting, but once again I insisted that we let our tradition speak for itself and dress as proper Vaisnavas.

We arrived early, which is always my policy with meetings of any kind, especially with public officials. We were shown to the professor's office. Within a few minutes Professor Medvedev arrived, looking exactly as I imagined a Russian professor might: bespectacled, with a white goatee, and dressed in a wrinkled suit. He looked at us curiously as he took his seat.

I began by expressing our concern about the proposed law. I emphasized that freedom of religion is part of the new Russian constitution and that the Kṛṣṇa conscious movement is following a religious tradition which is more than 5,000 years old.

I was speaking, I thought about the situation. "I never imagined the day would come," I said to myself, "when I would be deep in the heart of Russia defending religious freedom."

When I finished, Professor Medvedev agreed that all bona fide religions should, in theory, be excluded from the proposed law.

"Professor," I asked, "do you have enough knowledge of our tradition to understand that we are, in fact, bona fide?"

His answer took me by surprise. "By definition a Vaisnava is one who worships Lord Viñëu," he said. "There are a number of Vaisnava movements in India, and all of them originate in the Supreme Lord. You adhere to a *sampradaya* that accepts Kṛṣṇa as supreme, but of course, you know that many scholars say that Kṛṣṇa is the eighth incarnation of Viñëu. Be that as it may, the cult of Kṛṣṇa is indeed very old and followed by the greater number of people in India.

"So I know something of the worship of Kṛṣṇa. But bear in mind that my expertise is the study of the *Vedas*, which for the most part glorify Indra, the king of heaven. The name of Indra is mentioned more times in the *Rg Veda* than any other deity."

I was surprised. “We’ve got a chance here,” I thought.

He continued. “The problem among our leaders,” he said, “may not so much be in having to accept your movement but to accept the fact that the Vedic culture could have very well been the original culture here in Russia. You know, in Russia practically all scientists accept that the Vedic culture once flourished here, the center being in the Volga River region. The debate among our scientists is only if the Aryans came from India or if they originated here. There is much evidence to the fact that the Vedic culture existed here, most notably the Russian *Veda*.”

“The Russian *Veda*?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “It is famous among our people. It is as old as Russia, and the stories are exactly like those found in the Vedic scriptures. The central figure of the Russian *Veda* is a personality called Krishen. He is the upholder of spiritual truth and the killer of many demons. His killing of a witch and a snake are exactly like the history of child Krsna killing the Putanu and Agasura demons in the *Bhagavata Purana*. But the Russian *Veda* is not intended for children. It is full of spiritual truths.”

Professor Medvedev gave me a moment to catch my breath, then continued. “The Vedic culture was once all over the world,” he said. “Did you know that in the former Yugoslavia there is a very ancient cave drawing with Lord Jesus Christ in the robes of a *brahmacari*. My theory is that he went to India, and among other things, learned mystic powers from the yogis there. This would explain why he didn’t die on the cross and was able to leave his tomb. India has always been the motherland of religions.”

Now I really felt we had a chance. I liked the professor and felt he could help, but our one-hour meeting was almost over. I gathered courage and asked him if there was any way he felt we could get the

public behind us, because it was the public who would vote on the law. He suggested we hold a media conference after the New Year. With that he announced he had to go.

I paused. "Professor," I said, "can we continue our relationship on a more personal level? I find you to be a very interesting person, unique among all the people I've met in your country."

He smiled, "Of course," he said. "It would be my pleasure."

"Would you be my guest at our temple, to visit our *gurukula* and have lunch with me?" I said.

"On one condition," he said. "If you teach my course, Great Religions of the World, for one week at the university."

I was touched by the offer. "It's a deal," I said. "When would you like me to come?"

"In the first week of February," he said.

I took some time to think "But I'm supposed to be in Australia then," I said to myself.

Nevertheless I agreed, not wanting to pass up such a unique opportunity. I could postpone my trip to Australia for seven days.

He saw me hesitate. "Is there a problem?" he said.

"Oh no, Professor," I said. "Everything's fine. I was just remembering that someone told me it gets to forty degrees below zero in Ekaterinburg in the winter."

He laughed. "A great Russian author said no one has seen Russia until they've seen her in the winter," he said.

I departed, marveling once again at the ways of the Lord. As we walked out of the building, a devotee turned to me. "But we didn't get him to agree to address the government over the constitutionality of the law," he said.

“A hundred-mile journey begins with the first step,” I said, quoting a Chinese proverb.

The older temple children were eager to show me their *Ramayana* play. I was tired when I returned from my meeting with the professor, so I hesitated. In the end, I thanked Kṛṣṇa that the children convinced me to go, as it was one of the best plays I had ever seen.

How could children put on one of the best plays I had ever seen? First, my disciple Subudhi Rāya dasa, who is an excellent dramatic performer, trained them.

Second, (or could it be first?), was their desire to please me. Third, was obviously their dormant devotion to the Lord.

When young Nastya dasi, who was playing the part of King Daṣaratha, saw “his son,” Lord Rāma, leaving for the forest for fourteen years, she appeared truly devastated. As she bade him farewell, tears streamed down her cheeks, and she fell on the ground sobbing.

I turned to a *gurukula* teacher. “Are those real tears?” I asked. “Is she really crying?”

“Yes,” he said, “she’s really crying. Those are real tears.”

It was truly moving. The whole play was full of real-life action and emotion: the intrigue of the evil Kaikeyé, the kidnapping of Sita, the death of Jātāyu, the fight for Lākṣhāṇa, and the reunion of Sita and Rāma. I sat on the edge of my seat the whole time. The play could not have been done better by professionals. In fact they couldn’t even come close, as they would never have the most important ingredient: devotion for the Lord.

After the play, the children came to see me, still in their costumes. When I told them how much I liked their play, they beamed with happiness. I then awarded them the greatest treasure they could

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imagine. I invited all of them to Poland for our 1997 summer festival tour. With that invitation came tears of joy from all. How wonderful this Kṛṣṇa conscious movement is, where we can feel true transcendental emotions in service to the Lord!

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

"A DEVOTEE OF KRSNA CAN CREATE VRNDAVANA EVERYWHERE"

SATURDAY OCTOBER 26

We rose at midnight to catch the 4:00 a.m. flight to Baku, Azerbaijan. Russian flights often leave in the early morning hours. It's another austerity to be accepted if one desires to preach in this country. On the way to the airport, I realized that we were into the first hours of Kartika, the auspicious month of Lord Damodara. I thought that many devotees must be on their way to Sri Vrndavana *dhama* in India at that moment. Devotional service to the Lord is magnified many times in the holy atmosphere of Vrndavana in the month of Kartika, and traditionally devotees go there to make spiritual progress.

Thus, it could be said that I was headed in the wrong direction: Azerbaijan. A Muslim country north of Iran could hardly be considered an auspicious place by any strict Vaisnava. Nevertheless, I was happy to be going there. I like to go to India when the opportunity arises, but even when I'm there I find myself praying to the Deities of Vrndavana—Madana-mohana, Govindaji, and Gopinatha—to please give me service in the *sankirtana* movement in the West. So this morning I somehow felt closer to Lord Damodara

by going to Baku, rather than Vrndavana. I was serving Their Lordships' desires.

Srila Prabhupada sent a letter to Kirtirāja dasa in 1976:

"If you can preach vigorously in Poland it will be a great asset. You may come to Vrndavana if you like, but preaching in Poland is my greater interest. So, now Vrndavana is somehow being managed. Now the most important work is that side in the communist countries. If you can do something there, it is more than if you come here. Our business is to glorify Kṛṣṇa as the Lord of Vrndavana and to popularize Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu's Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement.

"I was a resident in Vrndavana, but at the age of seventy I tried to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness a little bit, and now this institution has come out. So, I think it is more profitable to preach about the master of Vrndavana, Kṛṣṇa, outside of Vrndavana. A devotee of Kṛṣṇa can create Vrndavana everywhere by preaching the glories of Kṛṣṇa."

Because Azerbaijan is at war with neighboring Armenia, at Ekaterinburg Airport we went through a grueling three-hour routine of three security checks. The atmosphere was tense as the crowd, ninety percent Azerbaijani men, submitted to the ordeal. I mentioned to Uttama Sloka how strange it seemed that there were no women.

He smiled. "In Muslim countries," he said, "women don't travel very much. They stay at home and take care of the children."

Every one of the men checking in had tough-looking features. They were all burly, and each had a moustache and was dressed in a dirty black leather jacket and a typical fur hat. Altogether it made me a bit uneasy.

"Are they as mean as they look?" I asked Uttama Sloka.

"They're mean because all of them have fought in the war with Armenia," he said, "but they're not as tough as the Chechens."

While I was meditating on Uttama Sloka's unusual reply to an unusual question from his Guru Maharaja, one of the men startled me when he approached me abruptly.

"Are you Hare Krsnas?" he asked.

Not knowing if he was friend or foe, I took the risk to extend my hand and answer. "Yes," I said, "we're devotees of Krsna."

His steel-like grip around my hand indicated he was favorable, and we started talking. He admitted he knew nothing about us, but was eager to learn. All eyes were upon us as I asked Uttama Sloka to give him a Russian *Bhagavad-gita*. Within a moment the man had bought the book and then took it back for his friends to see. Thus, by the time we had finished with the security and were waiting to board, we had become a sensation. A large crowd of men gathered around us and in a respectful way began asking questions.

"Why are you coming to our country?" a man asked. "We are Muslims."

"We're coming to encourage the people in devotion to Allah," I replied.

"But you're not a Muslim," he said.

"God is one and is called by many names: Allah, Jehovah, Buddha, Krsna. We want to encourage people in religious principles," I said.

"What do you think of our Azerbaijani soldiers?" he said.

"When I was a young man in the army," I said, "my commander used to praise the courage of the Azerbaijani soldier."

"We like you," the man said. "You are our brother. May Allah bless you!"

When it came time to board, the men cleared a path for us so we could enter the plane first. They stepped aside to let me on.

“Salaam alekum! May God be with you!” they said, nodding their heads.

We arrived at Baku two hours later. The Azerbaijani customs officers were just as difficult as the Russian officers had been, questioning and searching everyone. As we stood nervously in line, a large man in front of me turned around and smiled. “You have nothing to worry about,” he said. “I will be your bodyguard.”

And our fears were for naught. When we came to the combined immigration and customs desk, the men in uniform were respectful. They asked about our faith and even our philosophy, and quickly processed us. As we entered the reception hall, we met a large crowd of Azerbaijanis, but this time they were dressed in *dhobis* and saris.

In many ways the devotees looked similar to their countrymen—the black hair, the dark eyes, and the Muslim jewelry—but their faces shone with enthusiasm and purity as they greeted us with the chanting of the holy names. They looked like angels to me. Seeing this contrast to the men I’d traveled with, one of my favorite verses came to mind:

*kirata-hunandhra-pulinda-pulkasa
abhira-çumbha yavanah khasādayah
ye ‘nye ca paṇa yad-apasrayasrayah
sudhyanti tasmai prabhavīṣṇave namaḥ*

“Kirata, Huēa, Andhra, Pulinda, Pulkasa, Abhira, Sumbha, Yavana, members of the Khasa races and even others addicted to sinful acts can be purified by taking shelter of the devotees of the Lord, due to His being the supreme power. I beg to offer my respectful obeisances unto Him.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.4.18)

"A DEVOTEE OF KRSNA CAN CREATE VRNDAVANA EVERYWHERE"

Every preacher has his favorite places, and the Baku temple is one of mine. I am always happy to be back in this Islamic country, where it is so fascinating to preach. It is usually extremely difficult to preach Krsna consciousness in the Arab world, but we are registered in Azerbaijan as a bona fide religion with limited rights to propagate our faith.

Certainly the limitations are restrictive: no public assemblies, no public programs, no *harinama sankirtana*, and no television or radio shows. And the government recently blocked a shipment of twenty-three tons of books sent by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. However, I was surprised when temple president, Ameya dasa, told me the government had recently put a ban on all foreign preachers in order to curtail their activities in Azerbaijan.

"Then how did I get in?" I asked.

"They don't see us as a real threat yet," he replied.

Through the years, the Baku temple has built up a sincere and devout following of more than a thousand devotees and members. From the rented house that serves as a temple, one can see the local mosque. The neighborhood is always bustling with devotee activity. The temple has an open courtyard, which often resounds with *kirtana* that can be heard for blocks, but no one complains. In fact, a number of the local people have become devotees. When I arrived at the temple, many neighbors were standing among the devotees, and some of them even greeted me with "Hare Krsna."

I smiled back and in appreciation of their politeness in addressing me so, replied, "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great").

I also appreciate Azerbaijan because Islamic tradition has similarities to Vedic culture. For example, men and women don't mix freely. Women are taught to be chaste and shy, and gambling and intoxication are discouraged, although not forbidden. There is also a strong sense

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of respect for one's superiors within Islam. Young boys and girls are trained to be respectful to their elders, and they are.

This is an invaluable quality that devotees who join ISKCON in Azerbaijan bring with them. I find it most helpful in my relationship with my thirty disciples here. Their mood is always one of deep respect and veneration for their spiritual master. It is helpful in training them in Krsna consciousness.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

THE IMPORTANCE OF COWS AND THE HOLY NAME OF VISHNU

SUNDAY OCTOBER 27

Today one of my disciples has told me that she is constantly being harassed by ghosts. Before coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I didn't believe in ghosts. But through the Vedic literature, we can understand that they do exist.

Srila Prabhupada writes: “Ghosts and mischievous hobgoblins are also the creation of Brahma; they are not false. All of them are meant for putting the conditioned soul into various miseries. They are understood to be the creation of Brahmā under the direction of the Supreme Lord.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.20.40 purport)

My advice to my disciple was to take shelter of the holy names. This is the remedy for ghosts given in the Vedic scriptures and emphasized by Srila Prabhupada:

“Thus Mother Yasoda began to chant different names of Viñēu to protect the child Kṛṣṇa's different bodily parts. Mother Yasoda was firmly convinced that she should protect her child from different kinds of evil spirits and ghosts—namely Dakinis, Yatudhanis, Kusmandas, Yaksas, Raksasas, Vinayakas, Kotara, Revati, Jyestha, Putana, Matrkas, Unmadras, and similar other evil spirits who cause

persons to forget their own existence and give trouble to the life-air and the senses. Sometimes they appear as old women and suck the blood of small children. But all such ghosts and evil spirits cannot remain where there is the chanting of the holy name of God. Mother Yasoda was firmly convinced of the Vedic injunctions about the importance of cows and the holy name of Visnu; therefore she took full shelter in the cows and the name of Viñëu to protect her child Krsna.” (*Krsna* book, Chapter 6)

My disciple said that some devotees told her that for the holy names to be effective in dealing with ghosts, the name must be chanted purely. But the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* glorifies the effects of even unconscious chanting of the holy names:

*apannah samsrtim ghoram
yan-nama vivaso grnan
tatah sadyo vimucyeta
yad bibhetti svayam bhayam*

“Living beings who are entangled in the complicated meshes of birth and death can be freed immediately by even unconsciously chanting the holy name of Krsna, which is feared by fear personified.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.1.14)

There are other references:

“O *Harinama*, O name sung by the sages, O transcendental syllables that bring bliss to the people, even if You are spoken only once, and even if You are spoken disrespectfully, You at once remove the harsh sufferings of everyone.” (*Sri Namastaka*, Text 2)

“The *Vedas* declare that although meditation on impersonal Brahman cannot bring freedom from past karma, O Holy Name, Your appearance at once makes all karma disappear.” (*Sri Namastaka*, Text 4)

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

IN THIS FAR-OFF CORNER OF THE WORLD

MONDAY OCTOBER 28

For the morning program, I performed an initiation ceremony and accepted as new disciples Govinda Caraëa dasa, Rupa Raghunātha dasa, Nilamaëi dasi, and Syamali Priya dasi. As they came forward for their beads, I marveled at how Lord Caitanya's movement is spreading here in this far-off corner of the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

"I'VE NEVER HEARD OF ANY HARE KRSNĀS IN AZERBAIJAN"

TUESDAY OCTOBER 29

I left Azerbaijan this afternoon to return to Russia. At the airport we had to go through five security checks. As we lined up for the first one, a group of about twenty Americans arrived and worked their way to the front of the line, causing much contention among the Azerbaijanis. I didn't bother saying anything, figuring that the plane wouldn't take off unless we were all on board anyway.

At the second security check one of the Americans spoke to me. "Excuse me, friend," he said, "are you from the Hare Krsna movement?"

"Yes," I replied.

"We studied about you in our Bible classes," he said a bit sarcastically.

I didn't bother asking whether what he had learned was favorable or unfavorable. I assumed it was unfavorable and just smiled back.

"I'm a born-again Christian," he said aggressively, "and I believe Jesus is the truth, and the light and that no man goes to the father but through him."

"I'VE NEVER HEARD OF ANY HARE KRSNA'S IN AZERBAIJAN"

I knew from twenty-seven years of experience in speaking with people like him that it would be useless to argue. "That's great," I said. "Good luck!"

Seeing that he couldn't draw me into a sparring match, he told me that his church, The Church of the Good Word, was quite successful in Azerbaijan, but he'd never heard of any Hare Krsna's in the country.

"Oh," I replied, "we're quite popular here."

He again took up his sarcastic mood. "I doubt that," he said.

I decided not to go on with the conversation and thought of going elsewhere, but I couldn't move an inch from where I was in the line.

The security officers were trying to speed up the flow of passengers, and so they started checking two people at a time. As fate would have it, my "friend" and I approached the second security check together. When the security officer, a large man with a scowl on his face, saw us, he suddenly smiled.

"Hare Krsna!" he said and took my passport first. From the corner of my eye, I saw my "friend's" jaw drop open. The security officer cleared me without any difficulty, but grilled my "friend" with several questions.

We soon found ourselves together in line for the third security check. This check involved putting our bags through an X-ray machine. As we put our bags on the belt together, the woman in charge on the other side called out "Hare Krsna!" enthusiastically, and my "friend" turned pale.

This story would have been unbelievable if the same thing happened at the fourth security check, but it didn't.

But when we were together on the tarmac just about to board

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the plane, the officer who was frisking people at random smiled the friendliest smile you can imagine when he came to me. “Hare Kṛṣṇa!” he said. He didn’t bother frisking me but immediately began searching my “friend.”

After the security officer was finished, I turned to my “friend.”

“Still have any doubts that we’re quite popular here?” I said. He turned bright red and stormed up the steps of the plane.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

PREPARING FOR DURBAN RATHA-YATRA

THURSDAY OCTOBER 31

I left Russia for South Africa to begin preparations for Durban's Ratha-yātrā Festival in December. It will be the festival's ninth year in Durban, and we hope to make it the biggest yet in honor of Srila Prabhupada's Centennial.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR LEVEL OF KRSNA CONSCIOUSNESS

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 1

I received a wonderful reception from the devotees at Durban's Radha-Radhanatha Temple of Understanding. In my arrival address, I said that as a traveling sannyasi, I had the opportunity to visit many of the rooms within Srila Prabhupada's house during the year and that all were doing well. (I was referring to the statement by a sociologist that Srila Prabhupada had built a house in which the whole world can live.) I went on to say that by the mercy of Srila Prabhupada, I was always able to live in a wonderful spiritual environment.

In the afternoon I received the following letter from one of my disciples, a young girl:

My dear Srila Gurudeva,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to Your Divine Grace. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Although my heart is gnawed by poisonous weeds, I am praying that my devotional creeper can blossom into a fragrant lotus flower. Some thoughts come to me. I am hankering to know who I am in the

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spiritual sky. I want to know by what name I am called there. I desire to know how to dress for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa. I want to know where I live in the eternal Vṛndavana, and I desire to understand my special service to the Divine Couple. I want to know more about the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their associates. Sometimes I am anxious to know what pastimes are taking place at Govardhana Hill or Rādhā-kuṇḍa.

I want to know who my spiritual master is in his spiritual form or *siddha deha*. I want to know who Śrīla Prabhupada is in the spiritual world and how he is serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their associates there. I know that my spiritual master is very dear to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Her loving associates. I am so anxious to taste a drop of the nectar that is flowing in such a pure heart. I am anxious to taste a drop of *Rādhā dasi bhava*.

Please place me in a situation conducive for such attainment. I surrender at your lotus feet, my beloved Gurudeva.

Your servant.

The following is my reply:

My dear disciple,

Please accept my blessings. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupada. Thank you for your letter.

I appreciate your desire to advance in devotional service. But you should know that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a gradual development from *śraddha* to *prema*, and we cannot jump ahead prematurely. The process is outlined by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī in his *Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu*:

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*adau sraddha tatah sadhu
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartba-nivrttih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah*

*athäsaktis tato bhavas
tatah premabhyudancati
sadbakanam ayam premnah
pradurbhave bhavet kramah*

“In the beginning there must be faith. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment. This is the way of *sadhana-bhakti*, the execution of devotional service according to regulative principles. Gradually emotions intensify, and finally there is an awakening of love. This is the gradual development of love of Godhead for the devotee interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”
(*Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* 1.4.15-16)

You are at the stage of *bhajana-kriya*, practicing the rules and regulations of Kṛṣṇa consciousness under the direction of your spiritual master. You are still a beginner. Your heart is full of impurities such as the desires for wealth, the opposite sex, and fame. You cannot claim to be beyond these things. These desires are deeply rooted in your heart. As a result you cannot fully realize the desires of liberated devotees. To think you can is called *sahajiyism*, or a cheap pretense of pure devotion.

You want to know who you are in the spiritual sky, what your name is, and how to dress for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa. You ask what your special service is to the Divine Couple and what pastimes are

taking place at Govardhana Hill and Radha-Krsna. But such pure realizations are bestowed only upon a devotee who has given up all selfish material desires and dedicated himself or herself to the menial service of the spiritual master for many lifetimes together. What service have you done for guru and Gaurāṅga that you can ask for such things? Srila Prabhupada once said, “First deserve, then desire.” You want the highest benediction in Krsna consciousness without having done hardly anything to deserve it.

You are a beginner in Krsna consciousness and should be asking your spiritual master what you can do for him. Srila Prabhupada asked his spiritual master only one question: “How can I serve you?” This is the example you should follow. You cannot become a pure devotee of Krsna unless you have become a pure devotee of your spiritual master: *yasya prasadaḥ bhagavat prasado*. First you must establish and develop a proper relationship with your guru before developing your relationship with Krsna. Can you honestly say you have a close relationship with your spiritual master based on inquiry and service? If not, then how can you possibly have one with Krsna?

In the 1930s, Srila Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī wrote in his newspaper, *The Harmonist*: “A true disciple knows his Gurudeva to be someone who is extremely dear to Krsna and who is the Servitor Lord (*Sevaka Bhagavan*). A sincere disciple has the same devotion for his Gurudeva that he has for the Supreme Lord. And he worships and serves him the same way. Those who do not serve their Gurudeva this way fall from their position as a disciple. No one can chant the holy name purely unless they see Gurudeva as nondifferent from Krsna, as Krsna’s manifestation.

“I shall serve Sri Sri Guru and Gaurāṅga with simplicity and sincerity under the guidance of Gurudeva. My Gurudeva has the words of the Supreme Lord, and I will be obedient to that word as the proper way. I will not disrespect my Gurudeva under the influence

of anyone in this world. If I have to become proud, if I have to become a beast, if I have to go to hell by carrying out the order of Gurudeva who is sent by Kṛṣṇa, then I want to sign a contract to go to hell for eternity. I will not listen to anything anybody says, other than the order of my Gurudeva. By the power that has come to me from the lotus feet of Gurudeva, I will throw out all other currents of consciousness of the world with a punch of my fist...a true disciple will have this kind of firm faith and determination.”

The actual fact is that you are simply a sentimental young girl. That’s it in a nutshell. You are the last one to be getting into *Radha dasi bhava*. Srila Prabhupada warned us all that if we delve into these matters prematurely, we can fall down from Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Why? Because if we try to enter into Kṛṣṇa’s conjugal pastimes while we ourselves are tainted by sex desire, we’ll become overwhelmed by our own material desires.

Srila Prabhupada wrote and spoke on Kṛṣṇa’s intimate pastimes. But he gave us these things in proper doses. The process he gave is perfect, and by following it you will some day achieve perfection. In this regard you need not read any other books than the books of His Divine Grace. Because you have become confused by reading other books, I request you to go back to the basics and read Srila Prabhupada’s *Bhagavad-gita* at least ten times. You need this, because the fact is that you have not actually realized that you are not this body. If you had realized you are not this body, then you would never be disturbed by material desires, which all neophyte devotees are. What right does anyone who has not yet realized the basic teachings of the spiritual master have to ask for the most advanced understandings? Don’t jump ahead.

Follow the standards Srila Prabhupada gave us. Chant sixteen good rounds daily. Sixteen quality rounds a day is more important than your chanting thirty-two rounds and asking for *Radha dasi bhava*.

BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR LEVEL OF KRSNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Ultimately, of course, I want that you waken your love for Kṛṣṇa. The spiritual master desires that for all his disciples. But you have to understand that such grace comes by serving the *sankīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya—and not otherwise.

If you at all hope to get *Kṛṣṇa prema*, you must work very hard to assist Lord Caitanya’s mission according to your abilities. If you want to be dear to the Lord, listen to what endears a devotee to Him:

*ya idam paramam guhyam
mad-bhaktesv abhidhāsyati
bhaktim mayi param kṛtvā
mā evāisyaty asamsaḥ*

“For one who explains this supreme secret to the devotees, pure devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 18.68)

*na ca tasmaṁ manusyeṣu
kaścin me priya-kṛttamāḥ
bhavita na ca me tasmād
anyaḥ priyataro bhūvi*

“There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 18.69)

In conclusion, be honest about your level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and act accordingly. Don’t try to imitate great liberated devotees. Serve your spiritual master as a humble servant and engage in the *sankīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya.

Your ever well-wisher,
Indradyumna Swami.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

THE MOST AMAZING THING IN THE WORLD

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 2

This morning I heard that a godbrother had died while on a visit to Bangkok. Then this evening Sukamari dasi, a very nice disciple of H.G. Partha Sarathi Prabhu, received a phone call to say that her mother had died. Once again, I found myself helping a devotee come to terms with death and speaking on the temporary nature of life and the need to become Krsna conscious. But when will I truly realize these things and become serious about Krsna consciousness?

*abanyahani bbutani
gacchantiha yamalayam
sesah sthavaram iccanti
kim ascaryam atah param*

“Every day hundreds and millions of living entities go to the kingdom of death. Still, those who are remaining aspire for a permanent situation. What could be more amazing than this?” (*Mahabharata*)

CHAPTER THIRTY

A SEVERE CONCUSSION, TORN LIGAMENTS, AND BADLY BRUISED AND SPRAINED LEGS AND HANDS

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 5

My chance to “realize these things and become serious about Kṛṣṇa consciousness” came today. I stared death in the face, and by Kṛṣṇa’s grace have lived to tell about it. This morning, Gadādhara dasa drove me into Durban for some routine errands. After visiting a shop, I was stepping into the car when a van that had gone out of control rammed into it. My door, which was open, took the full force of the collision and smashed into me, throwing me nearly eight meters away. I didn’t see the van coming, and because I was knocked unconscious, I have little memory of the event.

Gadadhara told me later that he quickly grabbed an umbrella and stood over me, protecting me from the pouring rain. Simultaneously, he tried to keep the driver of the van from escaping, while watching our car so it wouldn’t be stolen. (Durban has recently acquired the title of Most Crime-Plagued City in the World.) Gadādhara grabbed my mobile phone from my torn and blood-stained kurta and managed to call my disciple Sri Nāthjé dasa and have him send an ambulance.

On the ground, I was having an out-of-body experience. I found myself above the crowd looking down at the scene, including my body. I can remember contemplating whether I should go back into my body or go wherever I was destined to proceed. I decided that I should return to my body, and I suddenly found myself looking at the many faces around me until I lapsed into unconsciousness again.

The next hours were sporadic moments of consciousness, of waking briefly to see the faces of worried devotees, doctors, and nurses. The Durban temple president, Srutakirti dasa, a close friend of mine, had arrived at the scene of the accident and accompanied me to the hospital. Because I was unable to recognize many devotees during my moments of consciousness, I was taken to the neurosurgery ward for a brain scan and X-rays.

But after all was said and done, it appears Lord Nrsimhadeva was kind upon me. My injuries were limited to a severe concussion, torn ligaments and badly bruised and sprained legs and hands. The doctors said I would recover in about six weeks, but I required rest. The prospect of staying in bed for weeks seemed to frighten me more than anything.

Within hours, telephone calls and faxes of sympathy poured in from around the world. I was amazed at how fast news travels in this modern age. Suffering from temporary memory loss as a result of the accident, I sometimes had difficulty knowing who was contacting me, and often had to excuse myself to the party concerned. But when Girirāja Maharaja sent a short fax from Bombay, I had the nurses reply with my response. I was most inspired when he sent yet another fax the next day:

My dear Indradyumna Swami,

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

A SEVERE CONCUSSION, TORN LIGAMENTS, AND BADLY BRUISED
AND SPRAINED LEGS AND HANDS

Thank you for your fax today. During Vyasa-puja in Mauritius, we were appreciating the importance of friendship in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Sharing some thoughts with the devotees, I told them what a great friend you had been, how at first I did not want to initiate disciples, but you insisted I do it for the sake of the mission—and then you made phone calls all over the world to get approval of the GBC members. And then I told them of our eating contest at Sriniketana Prabhu's house, and how at the end we made a pact that we would all go back home, back to Godhead together. (I hope you remember our agreement and not leave me behind.)

We cannot understand the plan of the Lord. Still we feel very sorry about your accident. At the same time, we are very anxious to have your association next month.

We hope you feel better day by day.

Your servant,

Girirāja Swami.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

"ONLY OUT OF FEAR WILL I DETACH MYSELF FROM THE WORLD."

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 12

Today is Govardhana-pūjā, and I have been in bed for seven days. What news can I report about being in bed for a week other than the pain I am in? One nice thing happened though. The devotees arranged a ceremony in the temple room for Govardhana-pūjā, but because I am confined to bed, I couldn't go. So Sri Prahlāda decided we would have our own Govardhana-puja in my room.

He brought all the necessary paraphernalia for worshiping his Govardhana-*sila*. He even brought a little marble cow so we could do *go-puja* as well. We were alone, but when we began the ceremonies, devotees started to arrive, and soon the small room was filled to capacity with more than forty devotees. With the help of crutches I was even able to slowly circumambulate our little Govardhana Hill of *prasadam*. Sri Prahlāda spoke for an hour about the significance of Govardhana-pūjā, and afterwards we all enjoyed a sumptuous feast.

Later H.H. Tamal Kṛṣṇa Maharaja called me from America. During our discussion, he asked me what realizations I had had as a result of the accident. I told him I had three realizations. The first was from

"ONLY OUT OF FEAR WILL I DETACH MYSELF FROM THE WORLD."

a verse that I often quote, but previously with little understanding. Now it means much more to me:

*samasrita ye pada-pallava-plavam
mabat-padam punya-yaso murareb
bhavambudhir vatsa-padam param padam
padam padam yad vipadam na tesam*

"For one who has accepted the boat of the lotus feet of the Lord, who is the shelter of the cosmic manifestation and is famous as Mukunda, or the giver of *mukti*, the ocean of the material world is like the water contained in a calf's footprint. *Param padam*, or the place where there are no material miseries, or Vaikuëöha, is his goal, not the place where there is danger in every step of life." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 10.14.58)

My second reflection was that I had to be very careful not to make offenses to the devotees. Just this morning I had read the following in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*:

"When Sri Caitanya Mahäprabhu was instructing Rupa Gosvami at the Daçaçvamedha-ghäöa in Prayäga, He pointed out very clearly the seriousness of offending a Vaisnava. He compared the Vaisnava-*aparadha* to *hati mata*, a mad elephant. When a mad elephant enters a garden, it spoils all the fruits and flowers. Similarly, if one offends a Vaisnava, he spoils all his spiritual assets. Offending a *brahmana* is very dangerous, and this was known to Maharaja Rahügaëa. He therefore frankly admitted his fault:

"There are many dangerous things—thunderbolts, fire, Yamaraja's punishment, the punishment of Lord Çiva's trident, and so forth, but none is considered as serious as offending a *brahmana* like Jaòa Bharata. Therefore Maharaja Rahugana immediately descended from his palanquin and fell flat before the lotus feet of

the *brahmana* Jaòà Bharata just to be excused.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.10.17 purport)

My third realization, which I shared with Maharaja, was based on quotes from Srila Prabhupada in *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers* and concerned my duty as an initiating spiritual master.

Srila Prabhupada: “So Krsna is so powerful that He can immediately take up all the sins of others and immediately make them right. But when a living entity plays the part on behalf of Krsna, he also takes the responsibility for the sinful activities of his devotees. Therefore to become a *guru* is not an easy task. You see? He has to take all the poisons and absorb them. So sometimes—because he is not Krsna—sometimes there is some trouble. Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu has forbidden, “Don’t make many *śiṣyas*, many disciples.” But for preaching work we have to accept many disciples—for expanding preaching—even if we suffer. That’s a fact. The spiritual master has to take the responsibility for all the sinful activities of his disciples. Therefore to make many disciples is a risky job unless one is able to assimilate all the sins.

“We should be very much cautious: ‘For my sinful actions my spiritual master will suffer, so I’ll not commit even a pinch of sinful activities.’ That is the duty of the disciple. After initiation, all sinful reaction is finished. Now if he again commits sinful activities, his spiritual master has to suffer. A disciple should be sympathetic and consider this. ‘For my sinful activities, my spiritual master will suffer.’ If the spiritual master is attacked by some disease, it is due to the sinful activities of others. ‘Don’t make many disciples.’ But we do it because we are preaching. Never mind—let us suffer—still we shall accept them. Therefore your question was—when I suffer is it due to my past misdeeds? Was it not? That is my misdeed—that I accepted some disciples who are nonsense. That is my misdeed.”

Bob: “Your suffering is not the same kind of pain...” “

"ONLY OUT OF FEAR WILL I DETACH MYSELF FROM THE WORLD."

Srila Prabhupada: "No, it is not due to *karma*. The pain is there sometimes, so that the disciples may know, 'Due to our sinful activities, our spiritual master is suffering.'"

Finally, I concluded by saying to Maharaja that, painful as the whole experience was, it was no doubt Kṛṣṇa's mercy upon me:

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead, the controller of both the transcendental and mundane worlds, has graciously overtaken me in the form a *brahmaëa*'s curse. Due to my being too much attached to [material] life, the Lord, in order to save me, has appeared before me in such a way that only out of fear I will detach myself from the world." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.19.14)

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

THE REAL MEDICINE

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 13

My son, Gaura Çakti dasa, arrived from India. He brought me the real medicine: water that had bathed the Radha-Raman Deity in Sri Vrndavana *dhama*.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

AN OFFERING TO MY BELOVED SPIRITUAL MASTER, SRILA PRABHUPADA

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 14

Today is the anniversary of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance nineteen years ago. The occasion always causes a devotee to reflect on the mercy of his spiritual master, and his duty towards him. I end this volume of *Diary of a Traveling Preacher* with this offering to my beloved spiritual master:

Dear Srila Prabhupada,

Please accept my most humble obeisances in the dust of your lotus feet. All glories to you, my beloved lord and master.

Srila Prabhupada, you once said that everyone is your disciple, though some know it and others don't. My understanding of this statement is that everyone is benefiting from the sublime process of Krsna consciousness, which you alone spread throughout the entire world. People of all races, nations, and creeds continuously come into contact with the many varieties of programs you

established to spread the *sankirtana* movement of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Your greatness is shown when we speak of the results of your preaching, for we must always speak in terms of millions: millions of books gone out, millions of plates of *prasadam* distributed, millions of people who have heard the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa, and millions who have seen or heard about Kṛṣṇa through the public media.

Thus, who can dare challenge the fact that you are the most empowered devotee ever to appear on this planet? Of course, you will not take such credit, for you are the perfect example of humility. Whenever you were glorified for your successes, you would always bow your head and say, “It is all the mercy of my Guru Maharaja, Srīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvaté.”

Yes, that’s true, Srīla Prabhupada, but just as Kṛṣṇa empowered His most beloved devotee, Arjuna, to fight on His behalf, so Srīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvaté empowered his most faithful and beloved son—you—to execute his will. By his grace, you are the most successful of all in spreading the glories of the holy name.

Actually, once you did acknowledge your special position. In 1974, H.H. Tamal Kṛṣṇa Maharaja underwent a hernia operation in a hospital in Bombay, India. Without his knowledge, you came to the hospital during the operation and waited for him in the patient’s ward. When the operation was over, he was taken back to his hospital bed and was surprised to find you there. He immediately exclaimed, “Srīla Prabhupada, during the operation I had the most amazing dream about you.”

“O yes?” you said “What was it?”

He replied, “I dreamt that all the previous *acaryas* asked you to come before them to give a report on your preaching. You then appeared before Srīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, Srīla Gaurakiṣora dasa Babajī,

AN OFFERING TO MY BELOVED SPIRITUAL MASTER,
SRILA PRABHUPADA

and Srila Bhaktivinoda Öhäkura, shining like the sun. You began your report by saying that preaching is very difficult on this planet, because of the strong influence of the age of Kali. You explained that most people are addicted to sinful activities and are unable to perform the austerities necessary for spiritual life. You said that due to their gross ignorance they can't acquire any transcendental knowledge.

Exasperated, the previous *acaryas* inquired from you, "Is there any hope for them?"

"Yes," you replied, "there's hope. They seem to be attached to my lotus feet."

Srila Prabhupada, that "dream" has come true for countless souls throughout the world. By your grace only, so many people, like my fallen self, have been given the opportunity of serving your lotus feet.

Last week, however, I nearly lost that service by coming very close to death. I almost had to give up my life. It was most fearful, because this is a very special life: it is the life in which I met you, my eternal lord and master. It is the life in which I have been given the greatest privilege to serve your *sankirtana* movement. When you almost lose something you love, that person, or that object, becomes even more dear to you. Now you and your service are even more dear to me.

For now, I must rest and recuperate my health. But I vow to you on this most auspicious day, that the very minute I can walk again, the very moment I can move, I want to work hard with renewed conviction and determination to help you spread the holy names of Krsna to every town and village. I want to use every ounce of energy I have to spread the glories of devotional service far and wide. I want to help you organize huge programs that will show

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people the real nature of the spiritual world, where all walking is dancing, all talking is singing, and there's a festival every day.

Srila Prabhupada, I want to bring hundreds and thousands of conditioned souls to you, so that they may also feel relief from the miseries of material life and the happiness of devotional service to your lotus feet. Those lotus feet alone are the shelter for all conditioned souls, for you are the spiritual master of everyone and the refuge of all the worlds. May all of your disciples, those who know they are and those who don't, bow down to your lotus feet on this most auspicious day.

Your eternal servant,

Indradyumna Swami.

GLOSSARY

Ahimsa – nonviolence.

Acarya – one who teaches by his own example, spiritual master.

Bhajans – devotional songs.

Bhakta – a devotee of the Lord.

Bhajana-kriya – practicing the rules and regulations of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Bhoga – foodstuffs that have not been offered to the Lord.

Brahmacari – unmarried male devotee practicing celibacy.

Darsana – an audience with the Supreme Lord or His representative.

Dhoti – traditional Indian garment worn by men.

Food for Life – charitable food distribution program organized by Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees worldwide.

Gayatri mantra – a sacred hymn chanted by Vedic priests.

Grhastha – married devotee practicing devotional service.

Guru – spiritual master.

Guru-puja – worship of the spiritual master.

Gurukula – the school of the spiritual master, traditional Vedic education.

Go-puja – worship of the cow.

Halava – Indian sweet made from roasted farina and sugar, flavored with fruit or nuts.

Harinama – public chanting of the holy names of the Lord.

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Harmonium – an organ-like keyboard instrument with small metal reeds and hand-pumped bellows.

Japa – chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra for private meditation.

Kali-yuga – the present age, characterized by quarrel. It is the last in the cycle of four ages. and the present *Kali-yuga* began five thousand years ago.

Karma – material activities, for which one incurs subsequent reactions.

Kartika – an auspicious month in the Vaisnava calendar. Based on lunar calculations, it begins at varying times in the solar month of October.

Karatalas – small hand cymbals, traditionally used to accompany Indian devotional music.

Katak – traditional Indian style of dance.

Kichri – a preparation of rice and dhal.

Kirtana – congregational chanting of the holy names of the Supreme Lord.

Kurta – traditional hip-length Indian shirt worn by men.

Mantra – a. transcendental sound or Vedic hymn.

Mangala-arati – morning prayers in the temple.

Nṛsimhadeva – the half-man, half-lion incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who protected Prahlaḍa Maharaja and killed the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu.

Papadam – crisp, unleavened, fried flatbread.

Prasadam – the Lord's mercy in the form of food or other items spiritualized by being first offered to the Supreme Lord.

GLOSSARY

Prema – pure spontaneous devotional love for God.

Ratha-yatra – Festival of Chariots.

Sadhana-bhakti – execution of devotional service according to regulative principles.

Sisyas – disciples.

Salagrama-Sila – a Deity incarnation of the Supreme Lord in the form of a stone.

Samadhi – trance; complete absorption in God consciousness.

Sankirtana – congregational glorification of the Supreme Lord especially by chanting His holy name.

Sampradaya – a bona fide chain of disciplic succession.

Sannyasi – a celibate male in the renounced order.

Sari – traditional Indian dress worn by women.

Sastra – revealed scripture. A Vedic writing.

Siddha deha – the soul's eternal spiritual form.

Sraddha – faith.

Tilaka – clay from the Ganges or other holy rivers or ponds used to decorate the body of a devotee.

Tulasi – a species of sacred plant.

Vaisnava – a devotee of the Supreme Lord.

Vyasasana – the seat of Srila Vyāsadeva on which the representative of Srila Vyāsadeva sits.

Vyasa-puja – worship of the compiler of the *Vedas*, Srila Vyāsadeva, or his representative, the bona fide spiritual master.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Indradyumna Swami is a traveling preacher in the International Society for Krsna Consciousness. He joined the movement in 1971 in Detroit, Michigan, and soon after went to Europe to help establish Krsna conscious centers in France, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. In 1979 he accepted the sannyasa order of life (a renounced monk) and in 1986 began preaching in Eastern Europe and Russia. He continues to oversee the development of the movement there, as well as give guidance to his disciples. For the past seventeen years he has also organized a large festival program in Poland that introduces Vedic culture to hundreds of thousands of people. Traveling extensively in many parts of the world, he happily shares his experiences and realizations with others in the form of this diary. For further information about Indradyumna Swami, his preaching activities, the Festival of India in Poland, and his books, please visit his websites www.travelingpreacher.com and swami@pamho.net. His lectures are available at www.narottam.com