

DIARY OF A  
TRAVELING  
MONK

VOLUME 10

INDRADYUMNA SWAMI



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*shifting the paradigm*

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## DEDICATION



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# FOREWORD

to come





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once again I am indebted to Advaita Candra for printing my annual diary.

I am also indebted to both of my editors, Umapati Swami and Ken White who spend many hours refining my work.

I thank XXXX for the cover photo and Jal Keli for the cover design. I am also very grateful to Mayapriya dasi for the design and layout of the book and to Sri Thakur Mahasaya dasa for the file preparation work.

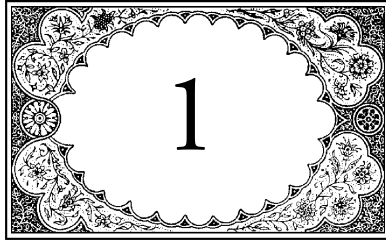
Indradyumna Swami



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# COMING HOME

| NOVEMBER 16 - 30, 2008 |

During the 1970s, I would get culture shock whenever I went to India. The crowded cities, the heat, the food, the occasional sickness, and the austerities of local travel would painfully remind me that I was a stranger in a foreign land. But as the years passed, my visits became more frequent and I began to feel at home there, especially in places like Vrindavan and Mayapur, where the Lord once performed His transcendental pastimes.

But this year, it was leaving India and going to Hong Kong that gave me culture shock. By modern thinking, I should feel at home in Hong Kong. It is as western a city as New York, London, or Paris, but I felt out of place before I even left the airport.

As Sri Prahlada and I passed through the glimmering halls of Immigration and Customs, I turned to him. "There's only one reason to leave Vrindavan," I said.

“What’s that?” he said.

“To share one’s good fortune with others,” I said.

I felt uncomfortable until the next day when we went on harinama with fifty Chinese devotees. As soon as Sri Prahlada began leading kirtana with his accordion, I felt that I was back in Vrindavan.

I waved to him over the sound of the karatalas and mrdangas. “Hey!” I shouted. “It’s like we never left the dhama!”

But when we went back to our hotel, the modes of nature set in again. I lit some incense and candles on my altar and sat down to chant japa.

“That’s better,” I thought.

Still, it was odd. I had always been able to adjust quickly when coming back from India. I wondered if the problem this time was that the two months of parikrama in Vrindavan had been so deep and enriching that the contrast of Hong Kong was too intense.

Several days later we left for the Philippines. On the flight I picked up a newspaper and read about a report by the US National Intelligence Council. The report, a year in the making, was meant to brief the incoming administration of the new president, Barack Obama. It was entitled “Global Trends 2025—A Transformed World,” and it gave dire predictions:

“The use of nuclear weapons will grow increasingly by 2025, forecasting a tense, unstable world shadowed by war.”

“The world of the near future will be subject to an increased likelihood of conflict over scarce resources, including food and water, and will be haunted by the persistence of rogue states and terrorist groups with greater access to nuclear weapons.”

“Widening gaps in birth rates and wealth-to-poverty ratios and the uneven impact of climate change could further exacerbate tensions.”

I leaned back and thought about what I had just read. “All this will make the challenge of staying Krsna conscious in the West even greater,” I said to myself.

That evening we went on harinama in Manila with more than a hundred devotees. I sweated in the humidity as we chanted past ramshackle buildings near the university. The streets were full of vendors, and there were crowds every inch of the way. Street children chanted and danced with us through the squalor.

“Watch your shoulder bag,” said a Filipino devotee as we stopped at an intersection. “These little street urchins will rob you blind.”

The harinama was as blissful as always, but as soon as it ended I found myself longing for the pure and sanctified atmosphere of the holy dhama, thousands of miles away.

I scolded myself. “This is not good,” I thought. “I have to make the change. The purpose of going to the dhama is to come back and preach in places like this.”

I revealed my mind to Sri Pahlada. “I’m still yearning to be home in Vrindavan,” I said.

Sri Pahlada smiled and quoted Advaita Acarya’s words to Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu: “acarya kahe—tumi yahan, sei vrndavana.” (Wherever You are, My Lord—that is Vrindavan.)

After a week in Manila we flew to Sydney, where we joined twenty-six devotees from my European summer program. We were starting a two-month festival tour around Australia, and our first program would be in Terrigal, a small town outside Sydney.

But we were busy practicing and did not have much time for harinama, so I went to see Pratapana Dasa, our sponsor and festival organizer. “I’m in anxiety,” I told him. “We’ll only have

time for one harinama to advertise the event. We may not get many people.”

“Don’t worry,” he said. “We’ve put up lots of posters and given out fliers in the markets. The town’s buzzing.”

The day before the program something terrible happened in India. I watched in shock on the Internet, along with many other people around the world, as a small group of Muslim terrorists attacked prominent locations in Mumbai, India’s financial capital.

The next afternoon I heard more about the horror of the attack. An e-mail came from Ashok Tiwari, an aspiring disciple in Mumbai. He is the stationmaster for Victoria Terminus, one of the places the terrorists hit.

Ashok told how he was just going to bed the night before when his terrified duty manager called from the station and said that two men with AK-47s were killing people. Ashok rushed to the station, several kilometers from his home, to find policemen in a shootout with the terrorists, who then somehow disappeared into the night. He helped the police put the injured into taxis and cars to go to the hospital. The worst part was discovering five of his staff among the fifty dead, lying in pools of blood on the station floor.

As we drove to the program I remembered the US report that in the near future terrorists would step up their activity. “‘The near future’ always comes too soon,” I said softly as we arrived in Terrigal.

Although the tragedy was thousands of miles away, it was a stark reminder of life in the material world and the need for preaching Krsna consciousness.

“Srla Prabhupada left Vrindavan for that purpose alone,” I said to myself as the doors to the hall opened and people began



pouring in. “I just wish I could focus more on giving these people the spiritual understanding they seek.”

Just at that moment a well-dressed man came up to me. “Excuse me,” he said, “are you Indradyumna Swami?”

I was surprised that a guest would know my name. “Well, yes, sir,” I said. “I’m Indradyumna Swami.”

“Will you be speaking tonight?”

“Yes, I will,” I said, “in just a few minutes.”

“I’ve come for your talk.”

“Have you?” I said, somewhat embarrassed.

“Well,” said the man, “I attended one of your festivals in the Sydney area last year, and the lecture you gave proved a turning point in my life.”

“Whatever I know I’ve learned from my spiritual master,” I said.

“Actually, I just stumbled in off the street that evening,” he said. “I was a homeless person. The stress of life had made me an alcoholic. I lost my well-paying job, and my wife kicked me out of our home. For two years I wandered around Sydney getting free meals at food kitchens or eating out of garbage cans. Whatever money I’d get from begging would immediately go on wine.”

A devotee interrupted us. “Guru Maharaja, excuse me,” he said urgently. “There are nine hundred people here, one of the biggest crowds we’ve ever had. You’re on in ten minutes.”

I hardly heard him as I focused on the man in front of me.

“Then last year I passed by a hall in Newtown,” the man continued. “There was a poster outside advertising your event, and it mentioned a free feast. I tried to arrange my dirty clothes and my hair so as to look presentable and walked in. It was dark inside except for the stage, and you were just beginning

your talk. I didn't see anything to eat, so I just sat in a chair to listen.

"I didn't understand much. But I did hear you explain what you called the four regulative principles: no meat eating, no intoxicants, no illicit sex, and no gambling. Somehow your words entered my heart and changed me. I left immediately after you finished, and as I walked down the street, I decided right then and there to follow those rules.

"Can you believe that from that day I've never touched a drop of liquor? I cleaned up my act. And to make a long story short, my wife took me in again and I even got my job back."

"What a wonderful story!" I exclaimed.

"And that's not the end of it," he said. "I always wondered where I could meet you people again. Then six months ago one of your members approached me in the street with a book: the *Bhagavad-gita*. I remembered it because you had spoken about it in your talk. I bought it and began reading it that night.

"The addresses of your centers in Sydney were inside, so the next day I went to one and heard another talk. The man said that along with the four principles one should chant the Hare Krsna mantra, so I bought a set of beads. For these past few months I've been chanting sixteen rounds a day."

"That's amazing," I said. I glanced toward the stage to see what point the program had reached.

"And my wife and I are planning a trip to India next year, to Vrindavan."

"What?" I said. "You want to go to Vrindavan?"

He smiled. "Yes," he said. "Have you been there?"

"Yes, I have," I said softly, "many times."

"I so much want to go there," he said.

Just then another devotee interrupted us. "Maharaja," he said, "you're on."

I hesitated for a moment. Then I turned to the man. “Thank you for sharing your story with me,” I said.

“It is I who must thank you,” he said.

“We can speak afterwards,” I said as I turned to leave.

“No need,” he said. “I’ll be leaving as soon as you’re done. I’m hoping that by hearing your talk I’ll become even more inspired to chant the holy names.”

I walked onto the stage and sat down to give my lecture. I looked over the large crowd waiting for my talk. Then I saw the gentleman I’d spoken to sitting in the front row.

“How many others will there be like him?” I thought. “How many others will take the mercy of Lord Caitanya tonight?”

Just the thought made my heart start pounding. The devotee adjusting the microphone could sense my excitement. He leaned over next to my ear. “Maharaja,” he whispered, “is everything all right?”

“Yes,” I said. “I’m fine. Everything’s fine.” Then I remembered the words of Advaita Acarya: “Wherever You are, My Lord—that is Vrindavan.”

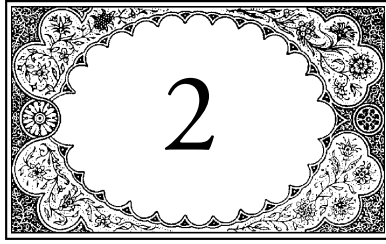
I felt a smile come over my face. “I’m fine,” I said. “It’s good to be home again.”

Note: On November 29, 1971, the Chairman of the Vrindavan Municipality, its members and secretaries, and the citizens of Vrindavan Dhama offered the following words of praise to Srila Prabhupada:

“O great soul! Today we, the inhabitants of Vrindavan, known as Brijbasis, all combined offer our humble welcome to Your Holiness in this holy place of Vrindavan and in doing so feel very proud. For many years you stayed at the Radha-Damodara Temple and worshiped Her Majesty Srimati Radharani in a meditative mood, and thus you now have the transcendental vision to deliver the entire world. As proof of

your perfection, we can see these foreign disciples before us, and we feel very proud to see how you have transformed them. We take it for granted that you are one of us in Vrindavan. We are sure that wherever you travel, you must carry with you the impression of Sri Vrindavan Dhama. The culture, religion, philosophy, and transcendental existence of Sri Vrindavan Dhama travel with you.

“Through the great message Your Holiness carries, all the people of the world are now becoming very intimately related with Vrindavan Dhama. We are certainly sure that through your preaching alone the transcendental message of Vrindavan will spread all over the world.”



# DOWN IN THE PITS

| DECEMBER 1 - 30, 2008 |

Our festival programs continued in the Sydney area with great success. I had come with twenty-eight devotees from various countries, and many of them were staying in rooms at the Sydney temple. Devotees from other parts of Australia were also staying there for the Christmas Marathon. They would go out every day, distributing books and prasada or chanting on harinama.

Every room in the building was occupied, and the morning programs were especially sweet. Devotees chanted, danced, and listened to class, preparing themselves for a day on the street.

One morning as I looked around during japa, I realized that I was two or even three times the age of everyone else. When the kirtan and dancing started, a young man grabbed my arm. “Come on, Maharaja!” he shouted.

“Not possible!” I shouted over the sound of the kirtan, pointing to my knees. I mouthed the word “finished.” He let

go and went back to the kirtan, whirling and jumping up and down.

“Those days are over,” I thought, “but by the Lord’s mercy I can still go out on harinama.”

As we readied our harinama van after prasada, I turned to a local devotee. “How’s the book distribution in downtown Sydney?” I asked.

“It’s really crowded this week,” he said, “and very passionate. Everyone’s hurrying to buy presents before Christmas. The main shopping area on Pitt Street is the toughest. I think the heat makes people irritable. It’s hard to get them to stop.”

“Pitt Street,” I muttered. “Down in the pits.” I smiled at my little joke.

“What did you say, Maharaja?” the devotee asked.

“Oh nothing,” I said. “It’s just something we say in America.”

Shortly before noon, our harinama van arrived near the Pitt Street Mall. The street was packed with shoppers, and we would have hardly any room to maneuver. As we stepped out of the van onto the concrete, we were hit with an inner-city heat blast.

Drivers started honking their horns. “Move it, boys!” I shouted. “We’re blocking traffic!”

We began chanting down a side street leading to the outdoor mall when suddenly five tough-looking young men moved in close to the women devotees and began making jokes and rude remarks. I looked at Gaura Hari dasa, who was playing mrdanga next to me.

“Best to ignore them,” he said. “They’ll go away.”

The boys stayed with us for a whole block, but just as I was about to step forward and say something, they disappeared into a bar.

As we rounded a corner onto Pitt Street, I saw a sign in a menswear store: “Santa—define what’s good.” It was a play on the words of a song about Santa Claus: “He’s knows when you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness’ sake.”

“Gee,” I thought, “the spirit of Christmas gets more mundane every year.”

That very morning I had read a prediction by a leading retail trade body: during the holidays, more people would be shopping online in Australia than going to church.

But this spirit was not limited to the West. I thought about the Diwali festival in New Delhi this year, when devotees celebrate the return of Lord Ramacandra to Ayodhya. More people were out shopping and lighting firecrackers than going to the temple.

As our party merged into the dense crowd, Sri Prahlada dasa stepped up the beat of the kirtana. At first, the people were so absorbed in shopping that no one noticed us, but after a few minutes, people began to smile and a few even waved.

After thirty minutes the devotees were exhausted. It was just too hot. So we went to sing under the shade of a tree in the middle of the mall. A small crowd broke away from shopping to watch us chant, many of them accepting invitations to our festival the next day.

Then I saw a policeman heading our way through the throng. “Oh no,” I thought. “He probably got a complaint from one of the shopkeepers and he’s going to stop us.” But as he pushed his way toward us, people started booing and shouting at him:

“Leave them alone!”

“Let them sing!”

“It’s Christmas!”

“Give them a break!”

The crowd began booing again, and the policeman merged back into the shopping frenzy.

Our kirtan party soon left the shade of the tree and began moving around the mall. "It's quite passionate down here," I thought, recalling the words of the sankirtana devotee. Then I looked down the street and saw devotees distributing books. Across the street some devotees were selling prasada from a table, and a little farther down, others were collecting donations for the temple's food-distribution program. It seemed we were everywhere.

I smiled. "Lord Caitanya's mercy," I said to myself.

Suddenly a storm blew in. We ran under the awning of a bank and tried to make the chanting heard over the downpour. As the rain got heavier, a number of people took shelter beneath an overhang on a flight of steps near us. After a few moments many of them began clapping their hands in time with the kirtana.

Suddenly a uniformed security man rushed out of the bank. "This is private property!" he shouted. "You have no right to be here! Move on! Now!"

The kirtan stopped. Then a well-dressed woman came out of the bank, wearing a badge that said "manager."

"Let them stay," she told the security man. "They're no threat to the bank. As long as they are orderly, let them sing. They're bringing Christmas cheer."

The bystanders applauded, and the kirtan struck up again. A roving television crew, recording holiday events around the city, came by and filmed the kirtana.

When the rain stopped, the crowds came back and we joined them, meandering through the wide mall. A shoeshine man reached into his pocket and pulled out a two-dollar coin,



which he handed to Gaura Hari. “We need you guys down here,” he said. “Hope this helps.”

We remained on harinama for about three hours, and in the van on the way back to the temple the devotees slept.

“They’re exhausted from the heat,” I thought. “I hope all their hard work brings a good crowd to the festival.”

The next day, in a nearby suburb, we held our festival. When we opened the doors, a large crowd came in, quickly filling the five hundred seats. I winked at Sri Prahlada. “Looks like the Pitt Street kirtana paid off,” I said.

The program went smoothly, with the audience applauding every act. At the end of the show as people milled around speaking to devotees and buying books, I saw an elderly man looking at me. I went up to him and introduced myself.

“Lovely program,” he said.

“Thank you,” I said. “What part did you like the best?”

“The singing,” he said. “And it’s odd that I would say that.” He smiled.

“Why’s that?” I said.

“In the early 1970s I owned a high-end furniture shop in the Pitt Street Mall,” he said. “You people used to come and sing for hours in front of my store. I would get so upset. Sometimes I’d call the police, and they’d chase you away. I even filed an official complaint with City Hall. Your singing parties finally stopped, and then I used to see the boys and girls selling books around town.

“But I never forgot the singing. I had a recurring dream at least half a dozen times a year, where you’d all be singing your song in front of my store. Sometimes I’d wake up singing the song myself.

“Eventually I retired, but I still had that dream. After many

years I found the courage to approach one of your boys distributing books, and I asked about the song. I bought a *Bhagavad-gita*. I found it fascinating. I went through it in a few days.

“And yesterday I was shopping for Christmas presents when suddenly I saw your group chanting. I was stunned. And you know what happened?”

“What?” I replied.

“Tears came to my eyes,” he said, pausing for a moment. “And when you all passed by I took an invitation to the festival from a young girl.”

“And you came,” I said.

“Yes,” he said. “I wanted to hear more of the singing. It’s had such an effect on me. I must have had that dream a hundred times.”

He took my hand. “And I hope to have it again and again,” he said and squeezed my hand tightly. “I’m really grateful I saw all of you yesterday. It was just like old times.”

He began to walk away, but after a few steps he turned around. “Oh,” he said, “there’s one more thing.”

“What’s that?” I said.

He smiled. “Please,” he said, “don’t ever stop singing downtown.”

On the way back to the temple I taught the devotees a beautiful song I’d recently learned. It captured the mood of our kirtana on Pitt Street and the happiness we’d experienced in sharing the nectar of the holy names:

*aju gora nagara kirtane  
sajiya calaye priya parikara sane*

“Surrounded by His dear devotees, Lord Gaura performs sankirtana in the city.”

*angera su-besa bhala sobhe  
nace nana bhangite bhubana-mana mohe*

“His well-dressed form is glorious. Dancing in many graceful ways, He charms the hearts of everyone in the world.”

*prema barisaye anibara  
bahaye ananda nadi nadiya majhara*

“He continuously showers the bliss of ecstatic spiritual love. He makes a river of spiritual bliss flow in Nadiya.”

*deba-gana misa-i manuse  
braise kusuma kata manera harise*

“The demigods stay amongst the human beings. Their hearts are joyful. How many monsoons of flowers do they shower?”

*nagariya loka saba dhaya  
manera manase goracandra guna gaya*

“The people run to greet Him. With all their hearts they sing Lord Gaura’s glories.”

*mudhegana suni simha-nada  
ha-iya birasa mana ganaye pramada*

“Some bewildered people, their hearts withered by fear, think the tumultuous kirtan is a host of lions roaring.”

*lakhe lakhe dipa jwale bhala  
upama ki abani gagana kare alo*

“Millions and millions of glistening lamps shine. With what shall I compare the light that fills the ground and sky?”

*narahari kahite ki jane  
matila jagata ke-u dhairaja na mane*

“What shall Narahari say? He does not know. The whole world has become wild with bliss. No one is peaceful at heart.”

[*Kamoda-raga*, Song 24, by Narahari das. Translated by Kusakrata Dasa]



# FOLLOWING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

| JANUARY, 2009 |

Our festivals in Sydney were a huge hit. We had given the event a French name, *Le Carnaval Spirituel*. During December we averaged more than five hundred people a show. After the New Year, we traveled north to Brisbane and held another round of successful programs on the Gold Coast. Finally, toward the end of January, our troupe of thirty performers went south to finish our festivals in Melbourne.

The devotees were excited about visiting Melbourne because the temple has a history rich in stories of Srila Prabhupada, who visited the center twice in the 1970s. The rooms he stayed in have been well maintained.

When we arrived, a devotee came to receive us. “You’re a big group,” he said. “We’re going to have to squeeze you into every corner of the building.”

He took me upstairs and opened a door. Then he turned to

me with a big smile. “Maharaja,” he said, “you’ll be staying in Srila Prabhupada’s bedroom.”

I stopped in front of the door. “Are you sure?” I asked. I felt uncomfortable about sleeping in my spiritual master’s room.

“The furniture has been shifted to his other room,” he said. “During big festivals we have to have senior devotees stay here.”

I entered the room in a mood of awe and reverence. I saw photos of Srila Prabhupada on the wall and the mantelpiece. A soft morning light came through the windows, and a bhajan of Srila Prabhupada played in his other room, next door. It was easy to feel his presence.

I paid my obeisances and thanked His Divine Grace for the privilege of spending a few days in such a sacred place. I also prayed for the energy to finish the last ten days of our tour. After two months on the road, the devotees were showing signs of exhaustion, and I was wondering whether they would survive the daily harinamas needed to advertise the remaining festivals.

What’s more, Melbourne was in the grip of the biggest heat wave in a hundred years, with temperatures in the mid-forties Celsius (115°F) for several weeks running. The fire department put all forested areas in the region on high alert after massive forest fires broke out and, fanned by warm winds, swept across the Victoria bush. A thousand homes were destroyed, and more than two hundred people lost their lives.

Because of the heat, rail lines buckled and some trains into Melbourne were canceled. An explosion at an electrical substation left three hundred thousand homes without power, and some traffic lights in the city had stopped working.

I met with the devotees the next morning as we readied our vans to go into town. “It’s our duty to go out,” I told them.

“Srila Prabhupada said that it may be hot during the summer, but a woman still has to cook, and it may be freezing in the winter, but one still has to take one’s bath in the river.”

Mathuranath dasa spoke up. “I like the example you often quote, Guru Maharaja,” he said. “It’s appropriate today. ‘Preaching is like drinking hot sugar-cane juice. It’s so hot it burns the lips, but so sweet you can’t stop drinking it.’”

We jumped in the vans and headed downtown. “It’s a fact,” I thought. “The sheer joy of sharing Krsna consciousness with others far outweighs any austerities or opposition met in delivering the message.”

Even in Melbourne, where most people liked our chanting parties, there were still some who stared at us disdainfully, made rude remarks, and brushed away our invitations. A few people even called city officials to complain about our kirtana and advertising.

On an especially hot day, a woman bystander watched as a number of people refused our invitations. Then she came up to me. “The problem,” she said, “is that people think you’re Hare Krsnas. They don’t know you’re advertising a carnival. You’re dressed like Hare Krsnas, and you sing like them too. Just change your dress so they don’t misunderstand.”

Devotees had to hold back their laughter as I politely thanked her for the advice.

Despite the heat and disturbances, devotees persevered, and throughout the week we were rewarded with large crowds at our programs.

On the first night of a two-day program in a prestigious hall near the center of the city, six hundred people attended. Afterwards, a well-dressed woman came up to me. “Thank you so much for your lecture,” she said. “I’ve had a question all my

life that no one could ever answer. But tonight you answered it perfectly in your talk.”

Before I could ask what the question was, she rushed over to the book table, bought a *Bhagavad-gita*, and left.

When we returned to the temple that night, I entered Srila Prabhupada’s bedroom and paid obeisances. I could feel his presence in the sanctified atmosphere, and I gave a spontaneous report on the success of the evening. Then I went to sleep.

The next day on harinama we met a number of people who had come to the festival the night before. As we chanted up and down the main shopping street, a woman came and stood in front of the devotees.

“Please,” she shouted over the roar of the kirtana, “I’d like to take a photo.”

Several of our women dancing in front looked back at me to see what they should do. We often stop the kirtana party when people want to take photos of us, but stopping here would mean blocking the flow of people along the crowded street.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” I shouted. “We can’t stop here. The police won’t let us. They’ve already given us a few warnings.”

“My father is dying of cancer,” she said. “He has only a few days to live. He saw you singing from the window of his apartment and remarked how happy you all are. He wants a photo of you to look at when he passes away.”

I called out to the devotees to stop. A small crowd gathered to watch as the women continued their choreographed dancing and the boys played their drums and karatalas. The devotees were covered in sweat, but big smiles radiated from their faces.

The woman took several photos. “I’m very grateful, sir,” she said to me.

We chanted for several hours and distributed thousands of



invitations. When I saw that the devotees couldn't continue, I told Gaura-hari dasa to stop the procession.

"But we have a couple of thousand invitations left," he said.

"I know," I said. "But don't forget we also have to put on a three-hour show tonight."

As we were singing and dancing on the way back to the vans, the owner of a large flower stand opposite city hall threw handfuls of rose petals on the devotees.

"Keep up the good work, fellas!" he yelled.

When we got to our vans I noticed an elderly couple waiting for a bus. When the man smiled at us, I asked Sundarananda Gopal dasa to ask him to come over. The man came forward and shook my hand.

"I met your spiritual teacher," he said with a big smile, "the founder of your movement."

"Really?" I said.

"Yes," he said, "it was in San Francisco in 1967."

All the devotees pressed forward. They could sense that some nectar was coming.

"I was walking through the Haight-Ashbury district," he said. "I passed a storefront and saw him sitting on a small dais, speaking to a group of young people. I was curious, so I walked in and sat down to listen. He gave a wonderful talk about the soul. After everyone left I went up to him and we had a nice chat for forty-five minutes. I felt I had met a genuine holy person for the first time in my life."

"Thank you for sharing that with us," I said.

As we started to drive away, a devotee turned to me. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "we're getting so much of Srila Prabhupada's association here in Melbourne."

I looked at the devotees and thought about their two months

of constant service. "You deserve it," I said.

Eight hundred people showed up for the second night of the festival. The program went smoothly and we received a standing ovation at the end. Afterwards, a large group of people lined up at the book table to buy books and have them signed. I noticed a well-dressed couple waiting patiently with their teenage daughter. After fifteen minutes, their turn came and they stepped forward.

"We'd be honored, sir, if you'd sign our book," the man said. "We really appreciated the show, especially the talk. We've never heard spiritual knowledge explained so clearly and logically."

"Wait until you read the words of my spiritual master," I said.

"We almost didn't come," his wife said. She looked at their daughter who was smiling, standing next to them.

"We weren't happy that our daughter was eating at your restaurant downtown and frequenting your programs," the man said. "We thought you were a dangerous cult."

"But that's all changed now," the wife said.

"Yes" the man said. "We've given her the green light to go ahead with her new-found interest in your movement."

He put his hand out to shake mine.

"And we're very proud of her decision."

After they left I turned to Mathuranath. "It's all worth it," I said. "That exchange was worth all the effort we've put out these past two months."

Next in line was an older man. "I attended your spiritual master's program in a public hall in Melbourne in the 1970s," he said.

"That's wonderful," I said.

"There was a tense situation when he was challenged by

some students,” the man said, “but he handled it well. He remained undisturbed. I was impressed.”

“It’s nice of you to say that,” I said.

“And I really enjoyed the show tonight,” he said. “It’s like you’re all following in his footsteps.”

“Thank you,” I said. “That’s the nicest comment you could ever give us.”

The next person, an Indian man, handed me his *Bhagavad-gita* to sign. “My father took me to meet Swami Prabhupada in London when I was eight years old,” he said. “Swami Prabhupada gave me a sweet from his plate.”

Mathuranath, who was selling a book next to me, whirled around. “Guru Maharaja,” he said, “that’s the third person we’ve seen today who met Srila Prabhupada. Is that a sign from His Divine Grace?”

I smiled. “Could be,” I said.

After an hour most people had left and we were just about to close the book table when a man rushed forward.

“Wait!” he said. “I want to buy a book.”

“I would recommend the *Bhagavad-gita*,” I said and put a copy in his hands.

He took out his wallet.

“How did you like the show?” I asked.

He smiled. “The show?” he said. “I didn’t see it. I heard about it from some people who had just left. They directed me up here. I’m excited about getting a book and reading all about it.”

That night I returned to Srila Prabhupada’s room, exhausted. I could barely stand, and the devotees had to help me up the stairs. I collapsed on the bed and folded my hands to give another report to Srila Prabhupada.

“My dear spiritual master,” I said, “this evening eight hundred people came to our festival. Everyone was fed delicious

prasadam and we sold thirty-two copies of the *Bhagavad-gita*. Many people expressed their appreciation and interest, and ... “

I fell asleep.

That night I had a wonderful dream. I dreamed that several devotees and I had returned to a temple after a difficult day of sankirtana. While we were sitting in the prasada room a devotee came rushing in. “Maharaja!” he shouted. “Srila Prabhupada wants to see you!”

“What?” I said, “Srila Prabhupada wants to see me?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Come quickly.”

I entered His Divine Grace’s room and paid obeisances.

Srila Prabhupada smiled. “You’ve done well,” he said. “And what would you like to do now?”

I thought for a moment. “Srila Prabhupada,” I said, “If it’s all right with you, I’d like to go to Vrindavan for a short break to get spiritually rejuvenated.”

“Very good idea,” Srila Prabhupada said. “And I will accompany you and show you the real Vrindavan.”

Suddenly, all of us were in Vrindavan on parikrama walking alongside Srila Prabhupada.

“This is Kesi Ghat, where Krsna killed the Kesi demon,” Srila Prabhupada said with a smile. Then he pointed with his cane. “And over there,” he said, “is the Madan Mohan Temple, established by Sanatana Goswami, and in that direction is Vamsi-vat, where the Lord played His flute, calling the gopis.”

Then the dream changed. I was walking with my friend BB Govinda Maharaja along the banks of the Yamuna River. “Wasn’t that a wonderful parikrama?” Maharaja said.

“Yes, it was.” I said.

“So what will you do now?” Maharaja said.

“I’d like to stay here forever,” I said.

Maharaja smiled. “It’s possible,” he said, “but in order to

get that, we have to preach the glories of Vrindavan till the very end of our lives.”

Then I woke up.

Later that morning I searched for quotations from Srila Prabhupada about dreams and found the following from Hayagriva Swami’s book *Vrindavan Days*.

“After aratik, I chant my rounds in the Radha-Damodar courtyard. Dawn brightens the sky. I go up to Srila Prabhupada’s room. Sruta Kirti is packing, and Prabhupada is seated behind his desk. No one else is in the room. I offer obeisances.

“ ‘Jai! Hare Krsna,’ Prabhupada says.

“ ‘I had a wonderful dream last night,’ I say.

“ ‘Oh?’

“ ‘I dreamed of Krsna.’

“ ‘That is no ordinary dream,’ he says.

“ ‘It’s the first time I’ve ever dreamed of Krsna,’ I say.

“ ‘Dreams of Krsna and the spiritual master are not ordinary,’ he says. ‘If the spiritual master gives you instructions in a dream, you should follow them.’

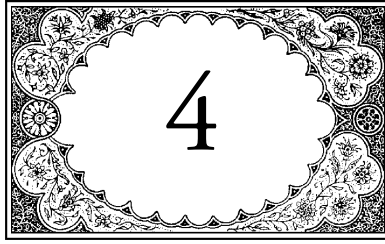
“ ‘It was all very clear,’ I say. ‘Not like a regular dream at all. And when I woke up, I could remember it all.’

“ ‘Jai! When you are in full Krsna consciousness, you think of Krsna always. You act for Krsna, you breathe for Krsna, you see and hear Krsna, you touch and taste Krsna, you smell Krsna, you dream of Krsna. Krsna is everything for His devotees. That is Krsna consciousness.’

“ ‘I’ll never forget that dream,’ I say.

“ ‘Yes. That is Krsna’s blessing. Never forget Krsna.’ ”

[*Vrindavan Days: Memories of an Indian Holy Town*,  
chapter 5, by Hayagriva Swami]



# A DIFFICULT PLACE

| FEBRUARY 2009 |

The America that Sri Prahlada das and I flew into after our Australian tour was not the America I had visited a year earlier. The country was mired in recession, sinking into despair with financial problems. Unemployment had hit a twenty-five-year high, with 5.1 million people having lost their jobs since the beginning of 2008.

More than a million foreclosures had cast a shadow over the housing industry and sent a ripple of despair throughout the country. Particularly disturbing was a report that 1.5 million children would be homeless this year. Car sales had fallen by fifty percent, the U.S. Post Office was considering dropping one day a week from its delivery service, and tourism had dropped by twenty percent.

Everyone seemed to be affected. Many people I spoke to said they would need second jobs and were opting for shorter vacations and less-expensive homes. A storeowner told me that

his sales of wedding gowns had decreased by thirty-three percent. “Brides are just being frugal,” he said. “They’re using their friends’ old wedding gowns.”

In California, a state senator went so far as to propose selling San Quentin, a 432-acre penitentiary with a breathtaking view of San Francisco Bay.

“Our inmates don’t need an ocean view,” he said. He estimated the property could realize \$2 billion, even in a depressed market. It would boost the coffers of the world’s eighth largest, but slumping, economy.

Toward the end of our tour, while I was walking around the grounds of New Vrindavan in West Virginia, a devotee turned to me. “Maharaja,” he said, “has the recession affected your fundraising in the U.S.?”

“Of course it has,” I replied.

“Will you be able to do your festival tour in Poland this summer?” he asked.

“We’ll manage,” I said.

“Wow,” he said shaking his head, “these are really difficult times.”

“That’s not always negative,” I said. “Difficult times are the best for preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I was reading the other day that church attendance has risen by ten percent in many parishes in this country.”

“Really?” he said.

“In *Bhagavad-gīta*,” I said, “Kṛṣṇa lists distress as one of the four reasons people turn to Him.”

*catur vidha bhajante mam  
janah sukrtino ‘rjuna  
arto jijnasur arthahi  
jnani ca bharatarsabha*

“O best among the Bharatas, four kinds of pious men begin to render devotional service to unto Me—the distressed, the desirer of wealth, the inquisitive, and he who is searching for knowledge.”

[*Bhagavad-gita* 7.16]

My godbrother Akhilananda das spoke up. “Yes,” he said. “I have plenty of experience about how difficulties push people to take up spiritual life. I work with ISKCON’s Prison Ministry, preaching in prisons throughout the state of Ohio. Many prisoners are receptive to our teachings.”

“A prison ministry would be an unusual service,” I said.

“Srla Prabhupada began prison preaching at Tihar Prison in Delhi in 1962, before he came to America,” Akhilananda said. “Similar attempts were made by ISKCON devotees here in the U.S. during the early ‘70s, but it was the late ‘80s before a devotee named Chandrasekara das actually developed the ministry.

“He was staying in the New Orleans temple and noticed that many of Srla Prabhupada’s books were lying around unused. He sent some of the books to the state-prison libraries in Louisiana. Inmates began writing to him, and eventually he started visiting them. Now he writes more than fifteen hundred letters a year to U.S. prison inmates and has a team of devotees who help him all over the country.”

“How did you get involved?” I asked.

“I heard about the program a few years ago,” said Akhilananda, “and I wrote to Chandrasekara asking if I could help. Afterwards I contacted a prison in Youngstown, Ohio, near where I live. I told the prison authorities I was a priest and would like to minister to the inmates. They enrolled me



in a course that taught me about the prison system. It included dealing with prison riots, what to do if taken hostage, how to use mace—all that kind of stuff.”

“That’s interesting,” I said.

“Then I started a weekly evening program at the prison,” he continued. “The day before I began, the main chaplain told me, ‘This will be the best experience of your life.’ And I did find it to be so. Some inmates take Krsna consciousness very seriously, possibly because of the constant reminder of the miseries of material life. A few of them make quick spiritual progress. One man I’m ministering to recently took initiation in prison.”

My eyebrows went up.

“That’s right,” Akhilananda said. “Aaron was a convicted murderer, Jamaican by birth. Several years ago three white supremacists attacked him in a bar. They broke a bottle over his head and beat him. An hour later, in a fit of rage, he ran over them with his car and killed one of them. He was sentenced to fifteen years to life. He became remorseful and suffered in prison. By the time I met him he was searching for an alternative in spiritual life. He took to Krsna consciousness immediately.

“He had plenty of time to chant and read Srila Prabhupada’s books because they have no work for the two thousand prisoners in Youngstown. He told me if you don’t get into something positive like Krsna consciousness, you’ll get into gang activity, and there are plenty of gangs in the jail like M13 or the Aryans or the Black Brotherhood. Sometimes there’s violence between them. Some of them even continue their drug trade from within the prison.”

“How’s that possible?” I asked.

“Somehow they do it,” he replied. “They use codes in phone conversations or in talks with visitors. They get notes out

through family members and sometimes even bribe guards to pass messages for them. It's a whole other world in there.

"After his initial contact with us, Aaron began regularly practicing Krsna consciousness. After three years he asked me if I could put him in touch with a spiritual master in ISKCON. He began corresponding with Bhaktimarg Swami, and the next year we arranged for Maharaja to come to the jail and initiate him.

"It caused quite a stir in the prison. All the inmates were talking about a mystic event. Of course, we couldn't have a fire yajna, but Maharaja gave a lecture, chanted on Aaron's beads, and gave him the name Arjuna dasa.

"A few days later Arjuna had another prisoner tattoo the mahamantra on his back. Tattooing is strictly forbidden in prison, and if a prisoner is caught with a new tattoo, he's immediately put into solitary confinement. But Arjuna took the chance. He said gang members are identified by their tattoos and he wanted to make it clear he was part of the Krsna group, even though he was the only initiated devotee in the prison."

"How in the world did another prisoner give him a tattoo?" I asked.

"They use a small spinning motor that they take out of a tape recorder and a staple dipped in baby oil that's become black by being burnt," he replied. "It's a crude method, but I've seen some pretty amazing tattoos on the prisoners.

"Arjuna's an artistic person himself, and he's now doing paintings for several devotees' books. With good behavior he could be released in ten years. When he does get out he'd like to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books because he's seen how much they've helped him."

“Have any prisoners become active in Krsna consciousness after they were released?” I asked.

“Many,” replied Akhilananda. “Ben Baker, a former member of the Aryan Brotherhood, did time and is now a dedicated preacher. He has a contract out on his life for renouncing the gang and taking to the non-violent path of Krsna consciousness.

“Another devotee who comes to mind is Sankirtan-yajna das, a disciple of Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja. In the early ‘70s, before he went to prison, he joined the movement and traveled for several years, distributing books with the Radha-Damodar traveling sankirtana party. Unfortunately, after some time he left the movement and got involved in dealing drugs. He was eventually caught and did a number of years in prison. After his release he’s again become very active in distributing books as well as helping with Food for Life in Washington, D.C.”

“Huh?” said a devotee. “Why was he put in prison for selling a few drugs?”

“Not a few drugs,” said Akhilananda. “He was known as Mr. Weed among the drug dealers of his time. Once he smuggled an entire shipload of marijuana into the country. He owned five homes, a Lear jet, a thirty-five-foot yacht and a Mercedes limousine. He had two hundred people working for him. He was big time.”

“Wow!” said the devotee.

“During his drug runs he would sometimes meet devotees selling books in the airports,” continued Akhilananda. “He’d always surprise them by giving a thousand-dollar donation for a book.

“At his trial he was convicted of bringing marijuana worth more than three hundred million dollars into the country. The

judge threw the book at him and gave him ten years in federal prison. Faced with a decade in jail, he had a change of heart and decided to become a devotee again.

“When he arrived at the prison to begin his sentence, some of his associates, who had already been jailed, had arranged a special cell for him, complete with a television, and someone to do his laundry. It was big news around the jail: ‘The Weed is coming.’

“But when he arrived he surprised his former cronies. He wasn’t interested in the facilities they’d provided for him. Each day he would invite them to his cell to chant with him and have a *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. He encouraged them to become vegetarian. He devised a program where he taught some illiterate prisoners to read, using the *Bhagavad-gita*. On special days he’d arrange programs in the chapel, where he would make Jagannatha deities out of bread and have arati and big kirtans.

“Like Arjuna das, he used his time wisely, and thinking of his future devotional service, got an associate degree from Ohio University and a degree in agriculture from Penn State.

“When he saw that the members of the Sikh religion were allowed to wear turbans in jail, he successfully campaigned for the right to wear neck beads and carry a bead bag at all times. He even got the prison system to pay for sannyasis to come to lecture. He had at least five to ten bhaktas practicing Krsna consciousness at any one time.

“He attracted the attention of the prison authorities by keeping the yard clean and using small rocks and cement scraps to make a garden, complete with a fountain. When it came time for his release the warden joked with him. ‘Maybe you could stay a little longer,’ he said.

“After his release he received initiation from Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja and immediately took up the services I mentioned in Washington.”

A devotee chuckled. “Seems like prison is a good place to get serious about Kṛṣṇa consciousness,” he said.

“That’s true,” I said, “but we are already in a difficult place and don’t have to end up in prison to become serious about spiritual life. The world we live in is called Durgā-dhama in Sanskrit, which means the prison of material existence. There are four high walls around this gigantic prison: birth, disease, old age, and death. When one realizes this, one become serious about devotional service and tries to go back home, back to Godhead, as quickly as possible.”

That evening I found a quotation from Srila Prabhupada:

Sometimes in New Delhi I was invited to give some good lessons to the prisoners. So I have seen so many prisoners. They were shackled with iron chains, iron chains. So we are also chained up here, and what is that chain? That is our sense enjoyment. Yes. We are chained in this material world by sense enjoyment. That’s all. So if we want to cut our prison life, then the first symptom will be to minimize this sense enjoyment or to regulate the sense enjoyment.

[ Lecture, *Bhagavad-gita*, New York April 27, 1966 ]



# IT'S KRSNA!

| MARCH 2009 |

After my American tour, I went back to Poland to prepare for my next stop: South Africa. I was excited because once again I would be traveling with my Radha-Krsna deities, given to me by an elderly sadhu several years ago in Vrindavan.

In recent years it has become more and more difficult to travel with Them because of their antique appearance. Actually, They are relatively new, but Their antique finish makes Them appear old, and I am often questioned by customs officials in airports about Their origin. On two occasions the deities were temporarily confiscated by Polish authorities after passing through a luggage-screening machine. The same thing happened in Moscow last year. So as not to put the deities at further risk, I left Them with a householder couple in Warsaw several months ago.

Just before leaving the United States I thought of getting the deities an ATA carnet, an international customs document that

allows merchandise or equipment to be temporarily imported into most countries without payment of duties and taxes. Nandini dasi applied for the document, and when I arrived in Poland I was relieved to find the papers that would allow me to take the deities anywhere without hindrance.

The day I left for South Africa I packed the deities in a special box and dressed myself in pants and a shirt just to be sure there would be no problems. On the way to the Warsaw airport I remembered how rude the officials had been when taking the deities from me. "You won't be seeing Them again soon," said one of them.

"If they try to take the deities again," I thought, "I'll enjoy seeing the shock on their faces when I hand them the ATA carnet."

When I arrived at the airport I carefully put the documents in my carry-on bag. After checking in I went smoothly through immigration and then approached the security checkpoint. I felt a return of smoldering anger. "This is where they took away Radha and Krsna," I thought.

I placed my carry-on bag, along with the deity box, on the belt of the screening machine. I walked through an x-ray machine and waited on the other side.

As the deities passed through the screening machine, the officer watching the screen stood up and picked up the box.

"Whose box is this?" he said in Polish.

"Mine," I said.

"We're going to have to check it," he said, this time in English. "Can you open it?"

"With pleasure," I said, pulling the customs papers from my side-bag with one hand and opening the latch on the box with the other.

“Please step back,” he said as he pulled the box towards him.

“Sure,” I said confidently.

In my mind, I smiled. “Just try to take Them away,” I thought, “and I’ll show you a thing or two.”

As the officer pulled the deities out of the box I placed the customs papers on the table in front of me. Suddenly he stopped. “Oh look!” he exclaimed. “It’s Krsna!” “He’s so beautiful!”

My mouth opened wide.

He picked up Radharani with care and attention. “And who is this?” he asked. “Uhh ... It’s Krsna’s consort.” I said.

“She’s also very beautiful,” he said.

He looked up. “But isn’t Krsna supposed to be blue?” he said.

I was so surprised I could hardly speak. “Well ... yes,” I said, “He is, but ... these forms are made of brass.”

“And very old too,” he said, looking at Them even more closely.

“Actually, They’re not old,” I said. “Here are the papers ...”

But before I could finish my sentence and hand him the documents, he carefully placed the deities back in the box.

“I believe Krsna plays a flute, doesn’t He?” he said as he closed the lock himself.

“Yes,” I replied.

Smiling, he handed me back the box.

“May I ask how you know Krsna?” I said.

“From the Festival of India,” he replied. “It’s a big event that happens along our Baltic Sea coast every summer.”

I looked at him intently.

“If you ever come in the summer you might want to go,” he said. “My family and I visit the festival every July in Rewal.”

With that he returned to the screening machine.



I stood for a few seconds more and then started walking to the departure gate. On the way I noticed on the departure board that my flight was delayed, so I sat on a bench chanting on my beads, all the while marveling at what had just happened. As the time of my flight approached, I got up and continued walking to the gate.

At the gate I was surprised to see the same security officer, and I handed him my documents. Suddenly the line slowed down as some handicapped passengers were assisted in boarding in front of us. The officer took my passport and boarding pass.

“The festival I was telling you about is an amazing event,” he said. “They have Indian music, dance, theater, and puppet shows for children.”

I smiled. “Is that right?” I said.

“O yes,” he said. “My wife and I have learned a lot about Indian culture by attending the festival through the years.”

“Is that so?” I said.

“Definitely,” he replied as the handicapped people continued moving slowly onto the plane. “My wife even bought a sari at the festival last year.”

“Really?” I said, feigning surprise.

The line began moving again, and the officer turned his attention to my documents.

“And what is your favorite part of that festival, if I might ask?” I said.

He thought for a moment. “It would have to be the talk from the stage near the end of the festival,” he said.

My eyebrows went up.

“There’s an American man, a monk actually, who speaks philosophy in such a way that even my wife and I can understand,” he said.

“And we’re not philosophers,” he continued with a chuckle. “That’s how I learned about Krsna.”

“Have a safe flight,” he said as he handed me my boarding pass and passport.

“Thank you,” I said as I took a few steps towards the boarding passage. Then I turned around. “Oh!” I called to him. “I’ll try to make it to that festival one day.”

“Then I’ll see you there,” he said as he took another passenger’s passport.

“You most certainly will,” I said with a smile as I turned the corner.

In the plane, I thought about how people were appreciating our festivals. As we took off I closed my eyes and prayed to Lord Caitanya. “My dear Lord,” I said, “may I always swim in the nectarean ocean of your sankirtana movement, birth after birth.”

Then I picked up my notebook and turned to a song I’d copied there that morning. The song perfectly captured the pleasure I was feeling.

*nadiya akase sankirtan meha saje  
khola karatala mukhe gabhira garje*

“Filled with the sounds of karatala and deep rumbling khola, the monsoon clouds of sankirtana have come to the sky of Nadia.”

*hunkara bajra dhwani haya muhur muhu  
barikhaye nama nira ghana dui pahum*

“Thunder and lightning come again and again. The two clouds—Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityananda—shower a great monsoon of the holy names.”

*nace gaya parisada thamake  
thamake bhabera bijuli taya saghana camake*

“With beautiful movements, the two Lords sing and dance with Their associates. Lightning flashes of ecstatic spiritual love fill everyone with wonder.”

*premera badale naiad santipura bhase  
raya anantera hoye na bhulila rase*

“A monsoon of ecstatic spiritual love brings great floods. All of Santipura floats on those waters. Alas! Ananta-rayā’s heart was not swept away by those flooding nectaran waters.”

[*Suha-raga*, by Ananta-rayā dasa]



# ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE GOAL

| MAY, 2009 |

I arrived in Moscow last May for my annual Russian preaching tour. I had recently visited the United States, and as devotees drove me to the apartment where I'd be staying, I could see that Russia had also been much affected by the global recession. A sharp decline in the price of oil, maturing debts, a nosedive in industrial output, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs had made for a dramatic downturn in the country. In a desperate attempt to revive the economy, President Medvedev had injected the equivalent of 250 billion euros into the financial sector.

Along the way I saw the same massive factories I'd seen before, but during the communist regime the smokestacks were bellowing smoke. Now nothing was coming out of them.

"The economy is bad," I said to Uttama-sloka Dasa, "but

not as bad as it was during the communist era. In those days there was no free enterprise.”

“That’s true,” he said.

“Remember in the early ‘90s?” I said. “That propaganda mural on a train station wall in Siberia? It showed the communist idea of the evolution of prosperity in society. It began with a scene of cavemen, then people tilling the soil, then families praying in churches, and finally the perfection: men and women working happily in factories.”

Uttama-sloka nodded. “Yes,” he said, “but capitalism and free enterprise have brought greed and corruption. They are building a ring road around Moscow costing seven million dollars every kilometer, twice as much as in the United States, and much of it going for bribes. That’s why it’s so expensive here. Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin are trying to curtail the corruption in Russia, but it’s endemic here.”

“In the West we often hear negative things about Putin,” I said.

“A lot of that is politics,” said Uttama-sloka, “but at home he’s perceived as trying to make the country a powerful international player again after it struggled with communism’s demise. Russians are a proud lot.

“I’ve heard he respects our movement,” he continued. “At least he respects our principles, and he doesn’t drink. He joked about it a couple of years ago at an important function. Someone offered him a drink, and he said, ‘No thanks, I’m a Hare Kṛṣṇa.’”

“And Medvedev practices yoga every day. During a television interview, someone asked him how deeply he was interested in yoga, and he said that he had memorized all the Patanjali Sutras. I’m not saying they’re devotees, but they are anti-corruption.”

The next morning we drove to Vladimir, a city of 400 thousand people three hours to the east.

In the evening we had a hall program with more than four hundred devotees. They listened carefully to my lecture and danced blissfully in kirtana at the end. On the way back to our apartment I thought about how Krsna consciousness continues to grow with leaps and bounds in Russia.

I saw something similar in America during the '70s and '80s, but in Russia it just keeps on going. I could only attribute it to the piety of many of the Russian people. It may also have something to do with the fact that life in Russia has often been difficult. Now, with the recession, things have become even harder. That's fertile breeding ground for making devotees, whichever faith or denomination one chooses to follow.

The next day I asked Uttama-sloka to arrange a walk in the woods beyond the city. My schedule in Russia is so busy with giving classes, counseling devotees, and answering e-mail that I rarely get an opportunity to go outdoors. We dressed warm and drove with several other devotees to a forested area near a village. We had walked and chanted for forty-five minutes when I looked up and to my surprise saw the ruins of a large castle.

We stood staring at what was once an opulent estate. "In the West," I said, "something like this would have been restored long ago."

"Lucky it's still here," said Uttama-sloka. "In the revolution the communists destroyed many things connected to the bourgeoisie."

A local devotee spoke up. "It belonged to a Russian noble two hundred years ago," he said. "It consisted of eighty rooms, with hot running water and central heating. There was even a private railway coming to the castle."

“This area must be rich in history,” I said.

“It certainly is,” Uttama-sloka said. “Vladimir was established in 990 AD by King Vladimir Svyatoslavich the Great, making it one of the oldest cities in Russia. Historians say he was a pagan king who later converted to Christianity and built the first church in the city. Some say the so-called pagan culture was the remnant of Vedic culture, which flourished in Russia for some time.”

“That’s interesting,” I said.

“There are a number of signs that Vedic culture existed here,” Uttama-sloka continued. “We have several rivers in Russia with Vedic names, for example Indra, Kama, and Moksa.”

“And in 2007,” said Mahavan Dasa, “archaeologists unearthed a Visnu deity in Staraya Maina, an ancient town in the Volga region. They say every square inch of the place is filled with antiques.”

Uttama-sloka went on: “Historians who support the idea of Vladimir’s Vedic culture say that after conquering the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine, Vladimir asked Emperor Basil II for his sister Anna’s hand in marriage. But she was a devout Christian and said she would marry him only if he converted to Christianity. Madly in love, he agreed and was baptized in Kherson.

“After they were married Anna convinced him to convert all in his kingdom to his new faith. Those who refused were beheaded. Some historians say Vladimir ultimately destroyed all traces of Vedic culture, including a Visnu temple on the site where he built a large church, and to this day that church is revered as one of the most sacred places in the Russian Orthodoxy.”

“That’s an amazing story,” I said.

“It’s history,” Uttama-sloka said, “although many scholars contest it.”

“Well,” I said, “Srila Prabhupada did say that Vedic culture once thrived all over the world. Just the other day during class we read about this in the Caitanya-caritamṛta, in Madhya-līla, chapter 25. It mentioned that Vedic culture once dominated the earth but gradually broke up because of religious and cultural divisions.”

Uttama-sloka continued. “And there is further support that Russia once embraced Vedic culture,” he said.

“What support?” I asked.

“The city of Arkaim,” he said. “It was discovered in the Urals in 1987. Archaeologists call the site Swastika City or Mandala City, and they say it is an ancient capital of the Aryan civilization, as described in the Vedas. They found many articles there related to Vedic culture. The name Swastika refers to the city’s layout, which looks like a swastika, a symbol of auspiciousness in Vedic culture, and there’s other evidence even more compelling.”

“And what would that be?” I asked.

“The Russian Veda,” he said.

“Yes,” I said, “I know that book. Several years ago I met the chairman of the religious affairs committee of the Urals region, Professor Alexander Medvedev, who told me that many Russian scientists agree that Vedic culture once flourished in Russia, notably in the Volga River region. And he confirmed the existence of the Russian Veda. He said it is as old as Russia and the stories are exactly like those in the Vedic scriptures.”

“Years ago I mentioned in my diary that the central figure in the Russian Veda is a person called Krishen. He is the upholder of spiritual truths and the killer of many demons. His killing



of a witch and snake are exactly like the child Krsna killing the Putana and Aghasura demons in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.”

“Gurudeva,” said Mahavan, “your disciple Jananivasa Dasa recently obtained a copy of the Russian Veda.”

“Wow!” I said. “Get him on the phone.”

“You mean now?” said Mahavan.

“Yes,” I said, “now.”

Within moments Mahavan had Jananivasa on the line.

“Jananivasa,” I said, “I’m curious to hear something from the Russian Veda. Can you just translate the first few sentences for me, so I can get an idea what it’s like?”

“Sure,” he said. “It’s just in front of me on the table.”

I turned the cell phone speaker on so the other devotees could hear, and Jananivasa began reading: “This great knowledge, the Vedas, was imparted to the Russians, the grandsons of Dazhbog [the god of rain], by the Almighty Himself. The Russians carefully keep this knowledge that He gave to them. It is the essence of everything. It is the very blood of Russia and the revealer of our divine path.”

After the call to Jananivasa, Uttama-sloka turned to me and sighed. “Gurudeva,” he said, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we could somehow revive Vedic culture here in Russia?”

“That’s exactly what we’re doing,” I said.

“It seems impossible,” another devotee said, “at least on the scale it may have been before.”

I smiled. “There’s a proverb,” I said. “The difficult is done at once; the impossible takes a little longer.”

“But,” said the devotee, “how do we know we’re making progress toward that goal?”

“Whenever we make a new devotee,” I said, “we’re one step closer to the goal. Remember that: one step closer to the goal.”

Two days later we drove back to Moscow to catch a flight to Ekaterinburg, where my disciples were to hold my Vyasa-puja. After checking in we waited a little distance from the departure gate for the boarding announcement.

After a few minutes a young woman walked by quickly, intent on reaching the gate in time. When she noticed us, she looked surprised. She stopped for a moment and studied us carefully. Then she smiled and moved on. After taking a seat she glanced our way several times.

“Uttama-sloka,” I said, “would you ask the young woman sitting by the departure gate to come here? I’d like to talk to her.”

“Yes, Guru Maharaja,” he said. He walked over and began speaking with her. After a minute or so, the two of them came to where I was sitting.

“Hare Krsna,” I said. “My name is Indradyumna Swami.”

“Hare Krsna,” she said. “I’m Tanya.”

“Oh?” I said. “You know us?”

“A little,” she said. “Four months ago, when I received my Ph.D in philosophy, my professor gave me a set of your spiritual master’s book as a present.”

“Really?” I said.

She smiled. “I wasn’t particularly interested in them at the time,” she said, “so I put them on a shelf in my apartment. Two months ago I picked up the *Bhagavad-gita* out of curiosity and began reading it. Once I started, I couldn’t put it down. After finishing it I realized I’d just read the most perfect philosophy.”

I smiled. “That’s really saying something for a person with a doctorate in philosophy,” I said.

She nodded. “It also awakened within me a desire to practice yoga,” she said, “so I found the nearest yoga school and enrolled. It turned out the teacher was a Hare Krsna devotee. After the course finished he moved with his family to Mayapura

in India. I took two weeks leave from my teaching position at a local university to visit them.”

“That’s wonderful,” I said.

“I’m on my way back home now,” she said. “I loved it in Mayapura. Just before I left, your disciples invited me to your birthday party which they were going to celebrate in a few days. But I had to leave.”

“Oh?” I said. “So you know me?”

“I met your disciples in Mayapur,” she said, “and they told me about you. I saw pictures of you in their homes. That’s why I was so surprised to see you when I walked by a few minutes ago.”

“We call the birthday party Vyasa-puja,” said Uttama-sloka. “We’re going to Ekaterinburg for the same celebration. Why don’t you join us tomorrow?”

“Oh, I’d love to!” she said.

Uttama-sloka gave her directions to the hall in Ekaterinburg where the program was scheduled, and we boarded the flight.

We arrived in Ekaterinburg late that night and went to bed. The next morning at the hall we were greeted by five hundred devotees having a rousing kirtan. They escorted me to the vyasasana where I sat and took over the kirtan, playing the harmonium. We chanted for a long time.

At one point I opened my eyes and suddenly saw Tanya enter the hall. When she saw the kirtan she stood mesmerized. After a few moments one of the women pulled her in, and within no time she was dancing in great happiness.

After I brought the kirtan to a close and was saying the prema-dvani prayers, I saw Tanya bowing like all the devotees, repeating “Jaya!” along with them after each line. When she finally sat up, her face was radiant.

As is customary at Vyasa-puja, devotees came onstage one by one to read their offerings. With each offering I remembered the lotus feet of my own spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, and begged for his mercy to guide my disciples to those lotus feet.

An hour passed and we were about to finish, when suddenly I saw Tanya walking up the steps to the stage. I asked Uttama-sloka what was happening.

“She wants to read an offering,” he said.

“All glories to Lord Caitanya,” I thought. “It is simply His causeless mercy that this girl has come so far so quickly.”

Tanya walked up to the microphone and spoke. “Please forgive me if I’m a little nervous,” she said.

Then she began reading her offering:

“Dear Maharaja,

“After we spoke at the airport yesterday, a devotee suggested I bring you some flowers on this special day. Last night I was wondering what kind of flowers to bring, and I decided I would bring you the lotus of my heart. After reading the *Bhagavad-gita* last month, I prayed to Lord Krsna to help me become His devotee. Now He has clearly revealed the path, and I pray I will become His worthy servitor. Thank you so much for giving me your kind attention yesterday and for becoming such an important part of my destiny.

“On this special occasion I feel it would also be appropriate to glorify your spiritual teacher, Srila Prabhupada. You know him much better than I do, but I would like to share my feelings about him with you today. Nearly four months back, I came in contact with him through his books. I realized that he was a person I could take shelter of and become purified. Since that time I have met many devotees, and most important, I have met you.

“It seems amazing how this process works. I learned about you during my pilgrimage to India. I had a strong desire to attend this celebration in Mayapur, but I had to leave. Then I met you and the other devotees in Moscow, and now, somehow, I am present at your Vyasa-puja in this remote city in the Ural Mountains. I can only attribute this to the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and I thank Him from the bottom of my heart.

“I teach philosophy every day. I am never at a loss for words. But on this special day I cannot fully express my feelings. Let me say only that one day I pray to become a petal in the lotus flower of the devotees who help you in your devotional service to Srīla Prabhupada.

“With respect and reverence,  
“Tanya.”

I struggled to hold back my tears. “How fortunate I am!” I thought. “I am part of this movement, inundating the world with loving sentiments in service to the Lord.”

I gave a lecture thanking all the devotees for their heartfelt offerings and then left the stage. There was a large group of devotees waiting at the bottom of the steps to greet me. Suddenly, Tanya pushed through the crowd and stood in front of me.

“Excuse me,” she said. “Please give me just one more moment of your valuable time.”

The force of the crowd then pushed me forward, and I lost sight of her. A few moments later, as we surged on, she reappeared.

“Please,” she said, “I know it may seem early, but everything I’ve ever learned tells me I should not pass up the opportunity to ask you the most important question of my life.”

I managed to stop. “Yes, of course, Tanya,” I said. “What is your question?”

She paused for a moment and took a deep breath. “Would you,” she started, “would you please accept me as an aspiring disciple? I promise to follow all the rules and chant sixteen rounds every day.”

I wasn’t prepared for this. The devotees closed in, eager to hear my answer.

“But you’ve just come ...” I started to say.

She stood with palms joined in front of me.

“You need to learn more philosophy ...” I continued.

She smiled.

“There are other spiritual masters,” I said.

“I respect them all,” she said.

I thought for a moment. “All right,” I said. “I accept you.”

The devotees cheered.

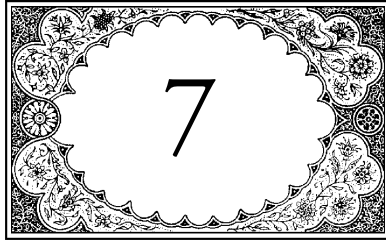
As we walked away Uttama-sloka turned to me. “Guru Maharaja,” he said, “that was very kind of you.”

“Yes, Uttama,” I said happily, “and we’re one step closer to the goal.”

Srila Prabhupada says:

I have been in Russia also. It is not that they are godless. The population is as good as in other country, but the government is suppressing. So that is another chapter. We have some devotees in Russia, very young men. They are very much interested in Krsna consciousness, and they are chanting, although silently, so that [the] government may not hear. So Krsna consciousness is so nice, and it is a great science.

[Art-gallery lecture, April 16, 1972, Auckland, New Zealand]



# A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

| JUNE 1, 2009 |

In early June, I arrived in St. Petersburg, one of the last stops on my Russian preaching tour. St. Petersburg is rich in history and culture. It was founded by Czar Peter I in 1703, and was the capital of the Russian Empire for more than 200 years.

It is one of my favorite places in the former Soviet Union, and our movement has a strong presence there. The devotees do regular harinama and book distribution, and they hold a well-publicized Ratha-yatra each year. Because of setbacks in the 1980s, the devotees lost a beautiful temple, but they meet each week in a hall near the center of the city and hope to some day buy a property of their own.

As we drove through the city on the way to a program, I couldn't help marveling at the architecture and at the serenity of the parks and waterways. But I knew that much of the

beauty I was seeing was reconstruction. During World War II, St. Petersburg, then known as Leningrad, was blockaded by German forces for nine hundred days. More than a million people died, mainly from starvation and aerial bombardments. There are a great many memorials honoring the soldiers and citizens who died protecting the city. For me, these memorials are reminders of the urgent need to spread Krsna consciousness, as history tends to repeat itself.

Many of my first disciples in Russia are from St. Petersburg, and each time I visit I ask about their welfare. It had been many years since my last visit, and I was going through the list with Uttama-sloka das and the devotee in charge of the yatra, Acyutatma das, when I came upon the name of Krsna-jivani dasi.

“I haven’t heard from Krsna-jivani in six years,” I said to Acyutatma. “She was my secretary in Russia in the early 1990s. She and her mother, Dhara dasi, are both my disciples, and in 2003 I took them to India for our parikrama in Kartika. At that time Krsna-jivani could barely walk because she had caught a disease the previous year. Where is she now?”

“Sometimes her mother comes to the programs,” said Acyutatma, “but we never see Krsna-jivani. She and her mother share a flat, but Krsna-jivani can’t walk now so she never goes out. Sometimes devotees visit her, but mostly she lives a reclusive life. They’re quite poor, living on a small government pension.”

Just at that moment we arrived at the hall. A large group of devotees were having kirtana to receive us. I waved as I got out of the car and was surprised to see Dhara approaching.

“Welcome back to St. Petersburg, Guru Maharaja,” she said as she handed me a bouquet of flowers and an envelope.

“Dhara!” I said. “We were just talking about you.”



I handed the gifts to Uttama-sloka.

“How are you?” I asked

“Well,” she said, “I’m quite old now. Eighty-three, to be exact.”

“And how is Krsna-jivani?” I asked. “It’s been so long since I’ve heard from her.”

Dhara’s expression became serious. “She’s fifty-four now,” Dhara said, “and she hasn’t left our flat in six years.”

I was taken aback. “Six years?” I said.

Dhara nodded, her eyes welling with tears. “Yes,” she said, “six years, and she can’t walk at all now.”

“I’m so sorry,” I said, and I motioned to Uttama-sloka to note the address of the flat.

“We will visit you tomorrow afternoon,” I said.

Dhara’s face brightened. “Thank you so much,” she said.

The program in the hall was wonderful. More than five hundred devotees listened to the lecture and then danced enthusiastically in the kirtana. I was happy to be back, but heading to our apartment that evening, all I could think of was Dhara and Krsna-jivani.

“It must be very difficult for them,” I thought. “They are poor, one of them is old and the other crippled, and they are confined to a small apartment. My Lord!”

Just then I remembered the envelope. “Uttama-sloka,” I said, “Would you please translate the letter from Dhara and Krsna-jivani.”

He opened the envelope. “Guru Maharaja!” he exclaimed. “There are several thousand dollars in here!”

“How’s that possible?” I said. “They have almost no money.”

Uttama-sloka shook his head. “I don’t know,” he said. “You’ll have to ask them tomorrow.”

The next afternoon, we were getting ready to visit Dhara

and Krsna-jivani. "Take that jar of honey," I said to Uttama-sloka, "and some of those sweet balls the devotees gave me yesterday. There's also a carton of milk in the fridge and some yogurt. And take that pen-and-pencil set I got yesterday. Pack it all nicely."

On the drive to their apartment I prepared myself for a sobering experience. The first shock came when we pulled up in front of the building.

"Look at this place," said Mahavan das. "It's so rundown."

"Now look, guys," I said, "I want you to be real positive when we're in there. Don't get caught up in their dejection. We're here to cheer them up."

"Yes, Guru Maharaja," said Mahavan.

The elevator was broken so we walked up the five flights of dirty, smelly stairs and graffiti-covered walls. As we arrived at the door, I braced myself and knocked. Dhara answered with a somber look on her face.

"Come in," she said.

We took off our shoes and stood in the dimly lit hallway. "Where is Krsna-jivani?" I whispered.

"Come with me," Dhara said.

As we turned the corner into the one-room apartment, our eyes adjusted to the soft light from the window filtering through a white curtain. The room was sparsely decorated with only a few pieces of furniture, but it was immaculately clean. A large vase of flowers, looking opulent in the simple surroundings, stood to the side of a small altar that held only pictures of the Lord. Finally, my eyes came to rest on a lone figure sitting on the floor absorbed in chanting the holy names.

"Krsna-jivani?" I said softly. "Is that you?"

Krsna-jivani turned her face upward then opened her eyes and smiled radiantly. For a moment I was taken aback. It was

not what I had expected. She seemed composed, sitting peacefully in a simple sari without make-up or jewelry. Her hair was cut short.

“She can’t pay obeisances,” Dhara said. “Her legs.”

“Mother, it’s okay,” said Krsna-jivani, cheerfully deflecting Dhara’s concern.

She joined her palms and bowed her head as she offered me her obeisances.

“I’m so sorry to hear about your condition,” I began.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about, Guru Maharaja,” she said with the same radiant smile. “I’m fine.”

“But I can see that you’re severely disabled,” I said.

“It’s not a problem,” she said. “It gives me more time to chant.”

“Well,” I said, looking for the right words to continue the conversation, “how do you keep yourself engaged?”

“I chant,” she said.

“I mean after you’ve finish your sixteen rounds, what do you do?”

“Continue chanting,” she said.

“She chants day and night,” Dhara said. “She sleeps only two or three hours a night. If she’s not chanting, she’s reading Srila Prabhupada’s books or those of Sivarama Swami.”

“I see,” I said. I was struck to think how she had turned misfortune into fortune.

Krsna-jivani blushed a little. “Mother,” she said, “please don’t say any more.”

“He’s our gurudeva,” Dhara said, “and he’s entitled to know what you’re doing.”

Krsna-jivani bowed her head in agreement.

“She’s very austere,” Dhara said. “She only eats every two days or so, and then not much more than a bowl of porridge.”

My eyebrows went up.

“She’s always been like that,” Dhara continued. “When she was a little girl, I’d offer her and her sister cookies. Her sister would grab them, but Krsna-jivani? She just wanted porridge, and with no sugar. Often she’d just eat dry oats or buckwheat. My little girl!”

Krsna-jivani smiled.

“She didn’t want any toys,” Dhara continued, “and she wouldn’t wear anything but cast-offs. When she was three years old she started singing songs in words we couldn’t understand. One day a language professor from a local university visited us and was stunned to hear her singing. ‘She’s reciting Sanskrit verses!’ he exclaimed.

“She’s always woken early, well before dawn, and taken cold baths. And she still takes cold baths, even in winter. Whenever she’s sick she fills the bathtub with freezing water and lies there for hours at a time.

“She was an unusual girl. She never associated with boys, and she chose her friends carefully. When she grew up she went to three universities simultaneously and graduated with three different degrees: medicine, Spanish, and English.

“She never married, and as a qualified doctor she practiced medicine for fourteen years. In 1991 she was out walking and met a devotee distributing Srila Prabhupada’s books. She wanted to buy one but had no money. She came home, took some money and went back to buy the books, but the boy had gone. She went out three days in a row looking for him, but couldn’t find him.

“One day her brother got some of Srila Prabhupada’s books from a friend. He brought them home, and she grabbed the books and immediately began reading. The next morning she

started chanting sixteen rounds a day. A week later she moved out of our apartment and joined the temple, all the while continuing her work.

“Six months later you came to St. Petersburg, and she took initiation. In 1993 she gave up her medical career and became your secretary in Russia, translating your letters to your Russian disciples.”

“That’s amazing,” I said. “I never knew these things about Krsna-jivani’s life before she became a devotee.”

“She doesn’t like to talk about herself,” Dhara said. “And who would she talk to anyway? She has just been sitting here and chanting twenty hours a day, going on six years now. It’s something we’d all like to do one day, but I worry about her. Her legs were bad when you took us to India, you know, and the situation got much, much worse after we returned.”

I looked at Krsna-jivani. “I’m proud of her,” I said. “A lesser devotee might have used such a reversal to lament and sink into ignorance. It’s turned out to be a mixed blessing. She uses her time wisely, chanting the holy names. One time Srila Prabhupada visited a sick disciple in a hospital in Bombay. The young lady had a tropical disease and sat in bed chanting all day. When Srila Prabhupada arrived, she apologized and said that she couldn’t do any service and was just chanting. Srila Prabhupada said, ‘Actually, the goal is to chant continuously. It’s the best glorification of the Lord. But because you Western boys and girls are so restless, I have to create many services for you.’”

I pulled out the envelope with their donation inside. I thought about how they must have scrimped and saved the money, ruble by ruble, over many years, so I wanted to give it back.

When Dhara saw the envelope she seemed alarmed and looked at me as if to say, “You’re not going to give that back are you? It’s our devotional service to you.”

I slid the envelope back into my pocket. In my mind I vowed to spend the donation on some special preaching project.

It was getting late, and I had another program to go to. “I have to leave now,” I said with sadness, “but I’ve been inspired by my visit here. Nothing pleases the spiritual master more than seeing his disciples making tangible advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa-jivani, you are setting a wonderful example for all of us. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“You are already doing everything for me,” she said. “Please just bless me so I can chant the holy names purely. That’s all I want.”

As we started to go, her hand was already back in her bead-bag, her eyes were closed, and she was softly chanting the holy names with concentration. Just as I was about to walk out the door, she held up a folded sheet of paper.

“Gurudeva,” said, “this letter is for you.”

We stepped out of the apartment and into the stairwell and found ourselves back in the other world. As we made our way cautiously down the dark staircase, Uttama-sloka turned to me. “Guru Maharaja,” he said, “I don’t know many devotees who could do what she’s doing. Where does she get the determination?”

I thought for a moment. “Well,” I said, “In the *Bhagavad-gita* Kṛṣṇa reveals how an unsuccessful yogi takes birth again. Then He says:

“*tatra tam buddhi samyogam  
labhate paurva-dehikam*

*yatate ca tato bhuyah  
samsiddhau kuru-nandana*

“On taking such a birth, he revives the divine consciousness of his previous life, and he again tries to make further progress in order to achieve complete success, O son of Kuru.’

“Her determination must be coming from a past birth and a strong desire to go back home, back to Godhead in this lifetime.”

As we got into the car, Mahavan turned to me. “Guru Maharaja,” he said, “do you think she’ll make it?”

“She’s got a good chance,” I said.

As we drove away I unfolded the letter she gave me, glanced through it, and decided to read it aloud.

“Boys,” I said, “listen and take note. This is the sincerity needed to attain the supreme goal of life.” I began to read:

My dear spiritual master,

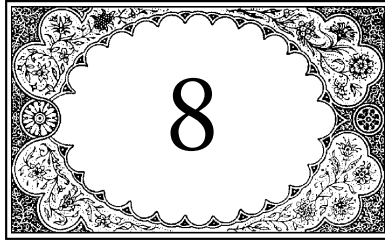
Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. All glories to you.

I am happy in Krsna consciousness. With each rising and setting of the sun, I come closer to the goal of my life. I constantly thank Krsna for allowing me to meet with Srila Prabhupada’s books and my eternal spiritual master in this life. And most important, at this last stage of my life, He has removed all unnecessary things and given me all facilities to fully engage in chanting His holy names. I pray that this time I’ll not lose the chance to make my life completely successful.

Hare Krsna.

Your eternal servant,

Krsna-jivani dasi.



# NEVER TOO LATE TO PRAY

| JUNE 4 - 6, 2009 |

One thing I appreciate about traveling in Russia is the constant reminders that this world is an unhappy place. I am reminded again and again to become serious and to focus on my devotional service. Russia is a G-8 country, but life is hard there, owing in part to the political situation, the economy, and the weather.

I was again reminded at the airport when I was leaving Moscow. A devotee woman asked me for guidance in her despair: her three-year-old daughter had recently drowned in a river near their house. The little girl would charm everyone with her singing. Even though she had a speech defect and could not talk properly, she sang Hare Krsna perfectly and learned complicated melodies instantly.

Another devotee broke my heart when she told me that her seventeen-year-old daughter, Visakha dasi, had been abducted



off the streets of Moscow a few years ago and had not been seen since. The police suspected it was organized crime, which kidnaps and sells young women as sex slaves around the world. I had watched Visakha grow up in the early days of the Moscow gurukula, and I couldn't imagine a sweeter, more sincere devotee. I consoled her mother, but I was shocked.

I also spoke with a devotee man in his mid-forties who had been disfigured in a car accident.

"My heart goes out to all these devotees," I said to Uttama-sloka das, as our flight took off for Baku, Azerbaijan.

"I know, Guru Maharaja," he said. "That's one reason devotees in Russia appreciate that you and your godbrothers come here despite the many inconveniences you go through."

"I wish we could do more to help them," I said.

"You're doing a lot by giving them transcendental knowledge," Uttama-sloka said.

"But that won't help Visakha," I said. "I still feel shaken by the story. It's one of the worst things happening to a devotee that I've ever heard about."

"I can see how much it has affected you," said Uttama-sloka.

"It's not only that," I said, "but I'm tired. We've been on the road for seven weeks. Before that I was preaching in South Africa and the United States. I haven't had a real break for a long time. I'd like to go to Vrindavan to read and chant for a while. Maybe we can continue this tour later."

"Please forgive me, Guru Maharaja," he said, "but many devotees are waiting in the cities we're supposed to visit, and many programs have been arranged. We can't cancel now."

I thought for a moment. "You're right," I said. "We have to keep going."

"If it's any consolation," he said, "Baku is supposed to be where the great sage and prajapati Kasyapa Muni had his asrama

on the Caspian Sea. I found this quote from Srila Prabhupada yesterday, and I was looking for a chance to share it with you.”

He handed me his computer, and I started to read: “The Caspian Sea was the place of Kasyapa Muni. From Kasyapa the [word] Caspian has come. Just like formerly the capital of Afghanistan was known as Gandhar, now it has become Kandahar.” [Lecture, Los Angeles, May 7, 1973]

“Guru Maharaja,” Uttama-sloka said gently, “while we’re in Baku you can bathe in the sea and take it easy. For spiritual inspiration we can visit the old Vedic temple in the desert, the Temple of Fire. You wrote about it in your diary after you went there many years ago. Baku devotees have told me that it was a place of pilgrimage in ancient times. Pilgrims used to travel three thousand kilometers from India to visit it.”

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll rest, and we’ll go to the temple on pilgrimage. I’d like to pray for Visakha there.”

When we arrived at Baku Airport I had to wait two hours to get a visa because the man issuing them was having lunch. When he returned I handed him my passport and visa application.

“Where are your two photos?” he asked.

“Photos?” I said. “What photos? There was nothing on your website about needing photos.”

“No photos, no visa,” he said firmly.

“But I don’t have any photos,” I said. “Can’t something be done?”

A little smile came over his face. “Of course,” he said. “In my country there are always ways to sort out these things.”

I could swear I saw dollar signs in his eyes as I handed him a “donation.”

“You see?” he said. “Problem is solved.”

Uttama-sloka and I then waited in the immigration line to have our passports stamped. Behind the immigration window was a woman with a black scarf covering her head. She looked up at me and smiled. “Are you from the Temple of Fire, sir?” she said.

I wasn’t expecting that, and I had to think for a moment. “Why...uh...Yes, ma’am,” I said. “I am connected with the Temple of Fire. It’s part of our tradition, and I’ve come here on pilgrimage.”

“Very nice,” she said, and stamped my passport.

As I stood waiting for Uttama-sloka to be cleared at another window, I overheard his conversation with the immigration officer.

“What organization are you with?” the official asked as he looked at the passport.

“The Hare Krsna Movement,” Uttama-sloka said.

The man looked up and smiled. “Oh?” he said. “Do you have any books?”

Uttama-sloka looked confused.

“Hare Krsna books,” the officer said. “Many years ago I bought one on the street. It was fascinating. I’ve been looking for more ever since.”

“Just give me your address,” said Uttama-sloka. “I’ll mail some to you.”

The officer wrote down his address and stamped the passport.

As we went to collect our luggage, I looked at Uttama-sloka and started to chuckle. “You know,” I said, “that’s got to be the most unusual clearing of immigration I’ve seen in all my years on the road.”

Outside the terminal we were greeted by a group of devotees

who escorted us to our car. On the way into the city I studied the scenery and buildings to get the feel of the country, as I often do when I come to a new place. We were driving on a new highway complete with picturesque barriers and architectural designs along the way, but I noticed there were no signs posting the speed limit.

Just then a police car raced by us, its siren wailing, and signaled to the car in front of us to pull over.

“What’s happening?” I asked our driver.

“The man was speeding,” he said.

I laughed. “How do you know if you’re speeding here?” I said. “There are no signs posting the limit.”

“The limit is ninety kilometers an hour,” the driver said, “but the city purposely doesn’t post it so they can give people tickets and generate revenue.”

Further on, I spoke to another devotee. “The last time I was here,” I said, “we were restricted in our preaching. Has anything changed?”

“Yes,” he said. “We have never gotten permission to do harinama or hold public programs, but we were allowed to distribute books throughout the country. Now we’re still allowed to distribute them, but only in Baku.”

“That’s unusual,” I said.

“It’s not a restriction applying to us alone,” he said. “The government wants to control any propaganda or proselytizing in the villages and towns because of the influence of the mujahideen from Dagestan. They preach a fanatic message that doesn’t sit well with the liberal Muslim community here.”

“Women don’t wear the burka,” he continued, “men and women mingle freely, and women vote. Still, it’s a Muslim country with Muslim customs, so we’re happy that at least

we're allowed to distribute books and preach within our congregation. We have our own temple and about three hundred devotees."

He smiled and lowered his eyes a bit. "You're the first senior devotee to visit us in more than a year," he said. "Do you have anything special you'd like to do apart from the temple programs?"

"Yes," I said. "I'd like to go on pilgrimage to the Temple of Fire."

He nodded. "Here we call it Ateshgah, the eternal flame," he said. "It's actually a place for demigod worshipers. Yogis would worship Agnideva there and perform austerities. It wasn't really a Vaisnava tirtha."

"Actually it was," I said. "I did some research on it after my last visit. A German geologist named Eichwald visited the temple in the late eighteen hundreds. He wrote that the worship of Lord Ramacandra and Lord Krsna was prominent there. A German poet, Friedrich Bodenstedt, who visited the temple in 1847, wrote that Visnu was the main deity."

"Besides," I continued, "Srila Prabhupada said that the sage Kasyapa Muni had his asrama near here. It is stated elsewhere that he washed his hands in the Caspian Sea after conceiving Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksa with his wife, Diti. He's the father of Upendra, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and he's the father of Garuda, the gigantic bird who carries Lord Visnu on his back. He's also the father of many demigods. I consider the area a sacred place of pilgrimage. I want to go there for inspiration to continue with my preaching and to pray for the soul of a devotee girl whose cruel fate haunts me."

That evening we had a wonderful program in the temple. It is an ISKCON center, but it has a touch of Muslim culture,

with colorful Persian rugs on the floors and walls and Arabic texts inscribed on the flower vases. The women dress in saris made from local cloth, bearing patterns that remind me of Muslim designs I've seen in other places. Even the Gaura-Nitai deities had clothes with a Muslim touch.

But there was no mistaking the sound of Kṛṣṇa's holy names, coming straight from Goloka Vrindavan, as the devotees chanted and danced with abandon. After the kirtan, devotees came forward, and I distributed baklava, a local sweet made from thin pastry, nuts, and honey.

But despite the wonderful association and the rousing kirtan, I had a terrible dream that night: Four bearded men were bundling a woman into a car in the street.

"Where are you taking her?" I shouted.

"None of your business!" snarled one of the men. "She's ours now!"

I woke up in a sweat and could not fall asleep again. I went on the internet and learned that human trafficking was the third most profitable crime in the world. Each year more than eight hundred thousand men, women, and children are kidnapped and sold into prostitution and forced labor.

Immediately after breakfast, I asked Uttma-sloka to arrange a car to take us and a small group of devotee men to the Temple of Fire.

"Now?" Uttama-sloka said. "But it's out in the desert near the oilfields, and you have several programs today."

"That's all right," I said, "but first I want to visit that temple."

We got into a jeep, and within an hour we were near the oilfields. I was surprised to see the outdated machinery, and I mentioned it to one of the local devotees.

"The Russians began drilling for oil here more than a

hundred years ago,” he said. “As a result the natural gas reserves underground gradually dried up. The yogis who still worshiped the fire on the site said the mlecchas had contaminated the area and that Agni had left in disgust. So they went to India.”

After driving for another half hour we reached the temple. Although the simple beauty of its design was still visible, I could see that little had been done to develop it as a shrine since my last visit.

I turned to another devotee. “They haven’t done much to develop it,” I said.

“To develop it?” said the devotee. “It’s amazing that it’s still here at all. It was saved only by the intervention of Indira Gandhi. When she was prime minister of India in the early 1980s, she asked then Soviet chairman Leonid Brezhnev to restore the dilapidated site to its original glory. Afterwards it was declared a national heritage, but few foreign tourists visit.

“Because of the temple’s Hindu origins, local Muslims have no interest. That’s ironic because previously we Azerbaijanis were Zoroastrians. We were converted to Islam by the sword. The Zoroastrian religion appeared in the fifth century, and it believes in a universal and transcendental God. Zoroastrians say that God’s greatness can be appreciated in material elements. Worshiping fire, in particular, is seen as a way to develop spiritual insight and wisdom. The site, with its natural gas fires, was important to our forefathers.

“Some scholars say we were originally part of Vedic culture and that Agni had been worshiped here since the beginning of time. There is evidence that this area was called Sura-hani. “Sura” means “of God,” and “Hani” means “kingdom.” Even more interesting is that it was called Rama-ni, which means “the place of Rama.” Nearby is a lake called Gopal.”

Inside the compound, we saw a stone shrine in the center, with a fire burning up from the ground through the middle of the shrine. A small sign said that the gas was now piped from Baku.

We began by visiting the rooms along the boundary wall, where yogis and ascetics performed austerities that were said to give them mystical powers to bless or curse. Merchants traveling on the Silk Road would visit the temple and make offerings to the sadhus to receive their blessings. But the sadhus were renunciants and would cast any gifts they received into the fire. There were originally seven main fires in the compound. One was used for cremating the yogis when they passed away.

We stopped to look at some dioramas showing the yogis in meditation and some manuscripts, hundreds of years old, attesting to the antiquity of the site. A number of them had been added since my last visit:

“One mile from Baku there is a place where fire burns eternally and without torches.”

[Ibn Aljas, Arab geographer, sixteenth century]

“There is nowhere [else] in the world where one can find white oil like here. There is a volcano, continuously erupting flame in this oil-rich place.”

[Masudy, Arab geographer, tenth century]

“In the suburbs of Baku, in some places the soil was dug out and food was instantly ready from the heat coming out of the ground.”

[Evleya Cheleby, Turkish traveler, sixteenth century]

After some time I turned to Uttama-sloka. “These dioramas and manuscripts are all very interesting,” I said, “but I’ve come



here for a different purpose. I'd like to spend some time alone."

As the group of devotees continued their tour, I walked over to the stone shrine where yogis had worshiped the sacred fire. I closed my eyes and chanted on my beads. Then I read from *Prema Bhakti Candrika*, by Narottam das Thakur.

My thoughts turned to Visakha. I folded my hands and prayed for her for a long time. "My dear Lord," I concluded, "please look after Your devotee, Visakha. Sometimes it's difficult to understand Your plan. We can only surrender to Your will, which ultimately brings us back to the refuge of Your lotus feet."

A while later Uttama-sloka came over. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "we have to go now."

"All right," I said. "Even a short visit here was enough to satisfy the heart."

As we walked towards the exit, Uttama-sloka turned to me. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "may I ask if you are thinking of mentioning Visakha in your diary?"

"Maybe," I said.

"I don't think you should," he said. "It's too tragic a story."

I stopped. "A devotee can find inspiration even in tragedy," I said. "It can help us become detached from this world and turn to the Lord for shelter."

"Yes," he said, "but your diary chapters are generally full of hope and inspiration. Her abduction won't fit in."

"I have a reason," I said. "My hope is that when others hear of her plight, they'll be inspired to pray for her."

"But she was abducted years ago," he said.

I looked back at the eternal flame. "It's never too late," I said. "Praying is a powerful way to solicit the mercy of the Lord. By praying, we can approach Him anytime, anywhere,

under any circumstances. Even here in this land of Islam, so far from India, the Lord has provided a place where we can purify ourselves and pray for the welfare of His devotees.”

Srila Prabhupada says:

If you are in danger, you ask your friends to help you. This is prayer. So our prayer is ... ‘My dear Lord Krsna, I am your eternal servant. Somehow or other, I am now fallen in this ocean. Please pick me up and fix me again at the dust of Your lotus feet.’ ... Prayer is needed because we are in danger ... [That] we are in this material condition of life means we are in danger. Therefore we should pray.

[Lecture, Durban City Hall, October 7, 1975]



# THE ENEMY NEVER SLEEPS

| JULY 1 - 4, 2009 |

After seven months of preaching and fundraising around the world, I came back to Poland for our twentieth annual summer festival tour. Twenty-three artistic performers from India and more than three hundred devotees from fourteen countries had already assembled at our base on the Baltic Sea coast. Everyone was busy organizing the twenty-eight tons of equipment and rehearsing a new five-hour stage show.

As I drove north to the coast with several other devotees, my heart was pounding in anticipation: if the previous two decades are any indication, our festivals this summer should bring close to 750 thousand people into contact with Krsna.

“No doubt, these are the modern-day pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu,” I thought. “They are part of His

prediction five hundred years ago that His name would be heard in every town and village.”

Just as prophetic are the words of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, an intimate associate of Lord Caitanya:

yad avadhi hari nama pradur asit prithivyam tad avadhi  
khalu loka vaisnavah sarvatas te tilaka vimala mala nama yuk-  
tah pavitrah hari hari kali madhye evam evam babahuva

From the moment that the holy names of Kṛṣṇa became manifest on the earth, Vaisnavas began appearing everywhere. Wearing tilaka and neck beads and equipped with the mahamantra, they were present in the very midst of the darkest of ages, purifying the atmosphere by chanting “Hari! Hari!” So indeed it came to pass.

[Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, *Susloka-Satakam*, text 62 ]

I felt unqualified but at the same time privileged to be part of Lord Caitanya’s movement. I smiled as I remembered Srila Prabhupada joking that just as Lord Rama conquered Ravana and his hordes of raksasas with monkeys and bears, so Srila Prabhupada was conquering the world with his young disciples.

As we were driving, one of my godbrothers phoned me to wish us well on the festival program and ask if the preaching was going smoothly.

“Preaching never goes smoothly,” I said, “at least not big-time preaching. It attracts the impious as well as the pious. Before Kṛṣṇa appeared in Vrindavan there were no demons there. So we have to expect opposition. Srila Prabhupada said, ‘If there is no opposition, it means there is no preaching.’ But in these situations we always see how the Lord intervenes to help His devotees.”

Just two weeks earlier we had run into problems getting visas for thirty devotees from nearby Belarus. Last year the European Union had placed restrictions on Belarus because of its allegedly corrupt policies. Included was a ban on visas for all Belarus citizens.

But Nandini dasi had encouraged our devotees to apply anyway. When they were refused she called the Polish Embassy in Minsk and pleaded with the official there.

“We’re a cultural event,” she said. “We have nothing to do with politics.”

She went on to explain the nature of our festival, giving many reasons the visas should be granted.

“It is European law,” the official said firmly. “There will be no exceptions.”

“Then we’ll just have to pray,” Nandini said.

Nandini called me and said she had done everything she could. Miraculously, three days later all the Belarus devotees were granted visas.

A similar thing happened when we tried to get visas for our Russian devotees, but that time it was a tiny little devotee who saved the day.

On May 29, Nandini went into labor, starting the birth of her first child. As she and her husband, Jayatam das, left the house for the hospital, she took her cell phone in case an important call would come. As they were driving to the hospital, the cell phone rang. It was the Polish Consulate-General in Moscow.

“Hello, ma’am,” the voice said. “I have your application for forty-seven visas on my desk. You’ve asked that I grant these visas by tomorrow.”

“Yes, please,” Nandini said as she groaned in labor.

“It’s simply not possible,” he said. “It will take six weeks or more to process these visas.”

“Sir,” Nandini said, “we have our first festival in four weeks. It’s our twentieth year. All engagements have been booked.”

The man paused. “I’ll think it over,” he said, “and I’ll call you back later today.”

“That won’t work,” Nandini said.

“What did you say?” said the man.

“It won’t work!” she shouted. “I’m giving birth to a baby!”

There was a moment of silence. “Oh, I’m so sorry to have called you now,” the man said. “Just do what you have to do. We’ll issue the visas this afternoon.”

The next day Jayatam called to tell me his son was born.

“What did you name him?” I asked.

“Alexander,” said Jayatam, “as in Alexander the Great.” I could hear the smile of a proud father in his voice.

“He’s Alexander the Little,” I said, “but he’s already done great service for Lord Caitanya.”

Four weeks after Alexander’s appearance, I arrived at our base to be greeted by a large number of devotees. Just as the weary traveler feels rejuvenated to be with his friends and family again, I felt refreshed in the company of so many loving devotees.

The next day after a short harinama, we held our first festival. “It’s unbelievable,” I said to Jayatam and Nandini. “It’s early in the season and there aren’t that many vacationers, yet our festival is crowded.”

“There aren’t so many people on holiday because of the recession,” said Jayatam. “People just don’t have money for vacations. Plus there was severe flooding in the south of the country in June, and many people have had to cancel their time off to deal with the damage.”

“But how do you explain why our festival is filled to capacity?” I said.

“It’s like this,” said Nandini. “All year people write to me about the festivals. One man said he plans his vacation around our event. He said he wouldn’t miss it for anything. I guess a lot of people feel that way.”

Our next festival was just as successful, with the Indian dance group Sankya especially popular. After I watched their dazzling performance, I turned to Nandini. “This is the best group we’ve ever had,” I said. “All fifteen of them are truly professional. How did you manage to get them?”

“Jayatam and I went to India to find some talent for this year’s festivals,” Nandini said. “In Mumbai we met the founder of Sankya, Vaibhav Arekar. He told us that for the past several years the group had been touring India, trying to revive people’s fading interest in the performing arts of Vedic culture. But sadly, fewer and fewer people were coming. He started thinking that people overseas might be more interested but had no way to pursue the idea.”

“Then, by Krsna’s arrangement, we met,” she continued. “I told him we could offer the airfares but nothing more. I encouraged him by saying that often five thousand people come to our events every day. He thought for a moment and agreed. They are happy here.”

Several days later we began advertising our festival in Kolobrzeg, one of the larger towns along the coast. As our large and colorful harinama party descended on the beach, a man stood up and started waving his arms. “It’s the guru!” he shouted. “The guru and his disciples have come back with the festival!”

Hundreds of people looked at me. I was embarrassed and felt like disappearing into the middle of the party, but I had a

second thought. “He’s being respectful,” I told myself. “He’s appreciative. For Srila Prabhupada I have to accept the respect.”

I waved, and many people waved back. “Don’t take any credit,” I told myself. “You’re just a little monkey in the army of the Lord.”

As we chanted and danced along the beach, handing out invitations, we stopped once in a while so people could come forward and take photos. On one occasion, a group of twenty schoolchildren began chanting and dancing with us.

A woman rushed forward and began talking loudly to a devotee over the sound of the kirtana. “I’m their teacher,” she said. “I’ve never seen them so happy. What is this amazing song you’re singing? Please write it down for me.”

The devotee wrote the mahamantra on a piece of paper, and I could see the teacher memorizing it as Tribuvaneshvara das gave a short talk inviting everyone to the festival. As we started to leave I received a phone call from Jayatam and sat on the beach for a few minutes to talk with him.

When I stood up I saw the teacher repeating the mahamantra to all the students as they sat on the beach. “Now everyone,” she said, “repeat after me: Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna...”

As I walked quickly to catch up with the kirtana party a woman approached me and started speaking in Polish.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “I don’t speak Polish, only English.”

“The information on your invitation is incorrect,” she said in perfect English.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“You say this is the twentieth anniversary of your festivals,” she said. “It’s not. You’ve only been doing them for nineteen years.”

“How do you know?” I said.

She smiled. “Because I’ve been coming every year,” she said.



I didn't know what to say.

"The first one was in 1990," she continued. "It was very small and was held in a hall in Gdansk. I was young and my mother took me there. Ever since then, I've been to your festival every summer."

"That's amazing," I said. "We'll make the correction."

I called Jayatam and asked about what the woman had said.

"It's the twentieth," he said. "There was a program in 1989. We consider it the humble beginning."

The next day, crowds poured into our festival on the beachfront of Kolobrzeg. "This is one of the best spots along the coast," I said to Jayatam.

"Yes," he replied, "but we fight for it every year. Nandini and I don't want to disturb you, so we don't tell you everything, but this is a conservative town, and we have a lot of opposition here. Not everyone appreciates us."

"Actually," said Nandini, "it's only because we have a few friends in high positions that we could get this spot. Behind the scenes there are a number of people trying their best to stop us."

"Just now I came from the city health department" she continued. "When the department officials visited our restaurant at the festival this morning, they said they would not give us permission to sell food. I pointed out that we had met all the criteria, but the woman in charge said there was no way they would agree. When I said that we had all our papers in order she reluctantly said I could bring them to her office."

"When I arrived a little late she began screaming at me. I just put up with it and tried to be nice. When she asked why I was late, I told her I was nursing a four-week-old baby. She was speechless. She looked at me compassionately and said, 'You're organizing such a big event while nursing a small baby?'"

“She paused for a moment and seemed to have a change of heart. ‘Please forgive me,’ she said. ‘You have our permission to go on with your restaurant.’ With that she handed back the papers.”

I laughed. “Alexander the Little at work again,” I said.

“That’s how you trained us, Guru Maharaja,” said Nandini. “You always say the personal touch is the most important.”

“It’s true,” I said, “and your story is proof. Abraham Lincoln said, ‘I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends.’”

As I walked around the festival site with Nandini, a little girl about seven years old came and stood in front of me, her hands behind her back. As her mother caught up, the little girl handed me a long-stemmed red rose and flashed a big smile. “Thank you,” she said in accented English.

“Thanks for what?” I asked her mother.

“My daughter and I came to your festival here last year,” the mother said. “You may not remember, but when you came off the stage at the end you gave her your large flower garland. She has never forgotten that act of kindness. She talked about you all year.

“Last week she had a dream about you and asked me to check if the festival was coming to town this summer. On our way here she asked me to stop and buy a red rose for you. For a single act of love, you remain an important part of her life.”

Nandini and I continued walking around the festival site, looking for improvements that could be made. As we pushed ourselves into each crowded tent, I made notes on my clipboard. “The success is overwhelming,” I said to Nandini.

“Yes,” she said, “but... how do you say in English... ‘One man’s food is another man’s poison’? Have you noticed there are people here who seem intent on just taking pictures? They don’t appear to be interested in any of the activities.”

“Now that you mention it,” I said, “I’ve noticed several men and women with unpleasant looks on their faces walking around taking photos.”

“We have to keep vigilant in our success,” she said.

“True,” I said. “There’s a French proverb: The enemy never sleeps.”

That evening I gave a short lecture so we could finish the festival with a long kirtana. People were mesmerized as all the devotees left their various festival duties and came onstage. My heart was completely satisfied as we drove to our base, a large school an hour away. I went to bed at 2:00 a.m.

The next day was Monday, a free day for the devotees, when they can sleep in and recover from their intense service.

At 8:00 a.m. I awoke with a start as a devotee burst into my room. “Gurudeva!” he said with alarm. “There are thirty policemen armed with guns and dogs surrounding the school! They want everyone in the gym! Now!”

I immediately phoned Jayatam. “What’s happening?” I said.

“Apparently someone told the police we’re dealing in narcotics,” he said. “They’ve come to search and check the identity of all the devotees. They’ve surrounded the school so no one can leave.”

I hung up the telephone and jumped out of my sleeping bag. “So the French proverb comes true,” I said as I ran into the shower.

I was getting dressed when there was a loud knock on the door. Before I could say anything, a frowning policeman barged in with a dog, Jayatam trailing just behind.

“Passport!” barked the policeman.

I quickly handed him my passport. He checked it carefully and handed it back.

“Where are the drugs?” he said.

“You won’t find drugs here or in any part of the school,” I said calmly.

“We’ll see,” he said as he commanded the dog to sniff through my belongings. The animal paused once or twice, probably confused by the exotic aromas from my deity equipment, but found nothing. The policeman seemed disappointed and stormed out of the room.

“Better stay here,” Jayatam said. “No need to come to the gym. They’re going to search all the rooms now and go through every devotee’s belongings. They came here first because somehow they knew you were the leader.”

I looked out the window and saw a number of policemen with guns guarding several entrances to the property. One stood directly outside my window. When our eyes met, he motioned to another policeman that I was there.

I walked to the other side of the room and phoned Nandini, who was staying off the property in a rented house to take care of Alexander.

I spoke softly. “The police have surrounded the building,” I said. “They’re all armed.”

“It’s serious,” she said. “Someone is trying hard to stop us at the very beginning of the festival season.”

The police continued their search and passport inspections, and several devotees were interrogated, but six hours later they left with no evidence. The person in charge of the team apologized to Jayatam.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “We had our orders and were doing our duty. It appears someone wanted to incriminate you. We appreciate your cooperation.”

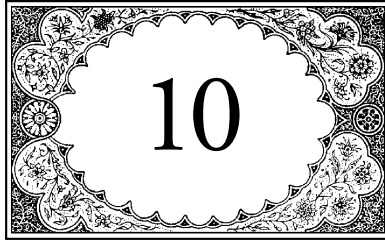
I called Nandini and Jayatam to my room. “It’s to be expected,” I said. “We just have to tolerate it. But as long as we

don't make any mistakes, our opposition can't stop us. Twenty years of festival programs have established us in this country. And people appreciate us for the most part. But let us be on the alert against those who don't, so our sacred service to the mission of Lord Caitanya is not disturbed and people can enjoy our festivals.”

Srila Prabhupada writes:

When one is engaged in devotional service, he is often surrounded by envious people, and often many enemies come to try to defeat him or stop him... The atheists are always prepared to harass a devotee; therefore Caitanya Mahaprabhu suggested that one be very tolerant of these people. Nonetheless, one has to continue chanting the Hare Krsna mantra and preaching the chanting of this mantra because such preaching and chanting constitute the perfection of life. One should chant and preach about the urgency of making this life perfect in all respects.

[*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.24.67, purport]



# FRIENDS AND ENEMIES IN HIGH PLACES

| JULY 7 - 13, 2009 |

On Monday the Polish police raided our school base looking for drugs. The next day, the devotees went for harinama on the beach. Most of the devotees went by bus, and I was in a van with a few others.

Amritananda das turned to me as we drove. “You know, Gurudeva,” he said, “it makes my blood boil just to think that some people are trying to stop our festivals. Can’t they see how much we’re contributing to the summer festivities? Can’t they see how happy we’re making thousands of people?”

“They see everything,” I said, “but their reaction is different from ours. The Padma-Purana says:

*dva bhuta sargau loke smin  
daiva asura eva ca  
visnu bhaktah smrto daiva  
asuras tad vipar yayah*

“There are two classes of men in this created world. One consists of the demoniac and the other the godly. The devotees of Lord Visnu are the godly, whereas those who are just the opposite are called demons.”

“Most people are nice,” I continued. “It’s the envious few who cause us trouble.”

Our kirtana party of sixty devotees descended onto the beach, creating an impressive sight with our golden fans and our colorful umbrellas and flags. People looked up and smiled, and a number of them ran forward to take pictures with us.

While we stopped to let people take their photos I overheard two families sitting in the sand arguing. “It’s a cult!” screamed a woman. “They’re dangerous! We should call the police!”

A man from the other family laughed. “They’ve been doing this for twenty years,” he said. “Do you think the police would allow a cult to come here every year? Be reasonable.”

As we went along the beach we had to stop every so often for the throngs who came forward to take photos. “Another aspect of the brhat mrdanga,” I said with a chuckle. “These photos will go much further and say much more than the beat of our drums.”

After forty-five minutes we had advanced only seventy meters. “Let’s keep moving!” I shouted to the devotees. “We have eight thousand invitations to give out today! We’ll have to hold back on the photos!”

But people followed us with their cameras, patiently waiting for the right moment. After some time, there was such a large group behind us that we had no choice but to stop. As people jostled for their turn to take photos I overheard another conversation.

“It must be pre-recorded music they’re playing from their speaker,” said a man to his wife. “It’s simply not possible for them to sing so nicely while walking through all this sand.”

The next day we put on the festival. As I was helping cook papadams in the restaurant tent, a woman waiting in line spoke to a friend. “I closed my cafe this afternoon to come to the festival,” she said.

“Really?” said her friend. “Aren’t you going to lose money?”

“There aren’t many people on the coast this summer,” the first woman said. “I had only a few customers. Most of the town was here, so I came too. I didn’t want to miss it.”

Just then a couple in their eighties entered the restaurant. When the woman saw me her eyes lit up. “There he is,” she said to her husband, and they came over to speak to me.

“We want to thank you so much,” she said. “Two years ago we became vegetarian after hearing your talk from the stage at the festival. Since then we’ve become so healthy.”

“That’s right,” said the man. “All our friends are sickly and dying, but we feel rejuvenated.”

“Is there anything else you feel we should do?” the woman asked.

I thought for a moment. “Yes, there is,” I said. “You should offer all your food to Krsna.”

“Sure,” the man said. “Just show us how to do it. We’re sure that whatever you tell us will work.”

“The process is here in this book,” I said, and I handed



them Adiraja's cookbook. Later in the evening I saw the couple sitting in the middle of the front row during my lecture.

As always, I based my thirty-minute talk on the *Bhagavad-gita*. After I finished I walked down the steps of the stage and saw a well-dressed elderly man waiting for me.

"Can we speak?" he said in English.

"Yes, of course," I said.

"In your lecture you said that your *Bhagavad-gita* is the first edition ever in the Polish language," he said. "That's not true. There are six other editions."

"I stand corrected," I said.

"Thank you," he said.

"How do you know about the *Gita*?" I asked.

"I've been teaching it for forty years," he said. "I'm a lecturer in Indian philosophy and culture in a number of universities. By the way, your talk was excellent. I like the way you present the ancient teachings of India in a contemporary way that people can understand."

"I appreciate that," I said. "It means a lot coming from someone of your caliber."

"Oh, I defend you people sometimes," he said. "Whenever someone criticizes you in the academic world, I speak on your behalf."

"So you know us," I said.

"I haven't been to any of your centers," he said. "I get my impressions from your spiritual master's books."

"Does that mean you have our *Gita*?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "It's one of the editions I teach from. I also teach from your guru's *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. One of my specialties is Jainism, so I lecture from the chapters on Lord Rsabhadeva. My focus, however, is Buddhism.

“When I went to India as a young man 1971, I became interested in the Mahabharata. I wanted to translate it into Polish, so I visited a university in Delhi, and I met a professor who agreed to help me. He was Buddhist, and with his encouragement I became a specialist in that field of religious studies.”

He paused. “But after seeing your festival and observing your devotees,” he continued, “my desire to understand bhakti has been rekindled. Please, I would like to learn from you, Swami.”

I nodded. “I feel flattered that a man like you wants to learn from me,” I said. “And I will be happy to share with you anything I have learned from my spiritual master.”

We exchanged cards and agreed to keep in touch. Just as he was about to leave he turned around and took a set of japa beads from his pocket.

“Swami,” he said, “I got these beads in the shop here. For my first lesson you can teach me how to chant on them.”

I spent several minutes showing him how to chant. Then we embraced, and he left.

On the way back to the base that night I spoke to Amritananda. “That was the best festival ever,” I said.

“Srla Gurudeva,” he said with a laugh, “you say that after every festival.”

I smiled back. “I suppose when you’re engaged in preaching, then Krsna consciousness just gets better every day,” I said.

The next day, I was relaxing with a few of the men as we laughed and talked about the success of the previous day. Then my cell phone rang. It was Nandini dasi.

“Srla Gurudeva,” she said, “we have a serious problem.”

I sat up. “What is it, Nandini?” I asked.

“I received a call from the mayor’s office in the town where we’re doing the festival tomorrow,” she said. “They say we are

missing an important document. If we don't get it by this afternoon the festival will be canceled."

"Is there a problem getting that document?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "The office that issues it closes in sixty minutes."

"Why did they notify us so late?" I said.

Nandini was silent for a moment. "I think we both know the answer," she said.

"What sort of document is it?" I said.

"Clearance from the sanitation department," she said.

"What?" I said. "We've never needed that for any event."

"I know," said Nandini. "What's more, when I called the department the woman told me it would take two weeks to get the authorization."

"I smell a rat," I said.

"Me too," said Nandini. "It seems our opposition is at work again."

I looked at my watch. "So what's our sixty-minute strategy?" I asked.

"I'm off to the sanitation department with Jayatam right now," she said.

"How long will it take you to get there?" I said.

"Fifty minutes," she said.

I retired to my room to chant japa. "Each of these festivals is like gold," I thought. "We can't afford to lose even one to our opposition. So many people's hearts are touched, just like the professor's."

Then I prayed. "Please, Lord Caitanya," I said, "protect Your very own movement so we can continue distributing Your mercy to one and all."

Ninety minutes later Nandini called. I grabbed my cell-phone. "Nandini," I said, almost shouting. "Did you get it?"

“Yes, Guru Maharaja,” she said. “Mission accomplished.” She sounded exhausted.

“Really?” I said. “That’s great. How did you do it?”

“When I arrived at the sanitation department the secretary was not helpful,” Nandini said. “The secretary told me, ‘The rules are the rules, and they must be followed. You need the department’s authorization two weeks in advance of any event.’

“So I said, ‘Then why wasn’t I informed? No one told me any clearance was needed when I made the application.’

She just looked at me.

“Then I said, ‘Let me see the head of the department.’

“And she said, ‘Sorry. He doesn’t see just anyone and everyone, madam. He’s in charge of sixty workers and staff. I deal with these matters.’

“I insist on seeing him,’ I said.

“And she said, ‘No. I told you, he doesn’t handle these affairs.’

“Then I folded my arms and looked her in the eye. And I said, ‘Then I’m not going to move until you ask him if he’ll see me.’

“She snorted indignantly, but she picked up the phone and made the call. ‘Excuse me, sir,’ she said, as coldly as she could, ‘there’s a lady here from the Festival of India who just insists on seeing you. I told her I would inform you, and now I’m going to send her away.’

“The department head said something to her, and then she swallowed and said, ‘What’s that? You say you will see her? Yes. I’ll send her in right away.’

“She directed me to the man’s office. I knocked on the door, and he opened it with a smile.

“He said, ‘Please come in,’ and I went in.

“What can I do for you?” he said.

“I said, ‘I need your help, sir. Tomorrow we are holding the Festival of India in your town. An hour ago, the town hall told me that we need clearance from your department; otherwise, the event will be canceled.’

“And he said, ‘That’s unusual. You should have been told when you made the original application. Why was that withheld?’

“I paused. Then I said, ‘I suppose everyone has friends and enemies.’

“He said, ‘I see,’ and he nodded in acknowledgement.

“Then he said, ‘But don’t you worry. I’m going to bend the rules a little and give you the document right away even if a few eyebrows will be raised, including those of my secretary.’ And he started filling out the form.

“I thought he was really nice, and I said so. I said, ‘It’s so kind of you. You don’t even know our event, but you’re going to such lengths to help us.’

“He looked up and said, ‘Huh? I don’t know your event?’

“He put his pen down and sat back in his chair. ‘Oh, I have been to your festival more than once,’ he said. ‘The first time, I sat all afternoon in the questions-and-answers tent. The second year I enjoyed the cooking classes given by Kurma from Australia. And the last time I came I very much appreciated the talk by the Indian Ambassador.’”

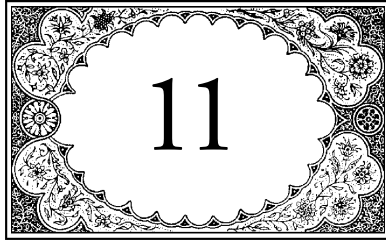
“Srla Gurudeva,” Nandini continued, “I was astounded. Then as he picked up his pen again he said, ‘Thank God that just as you have enemies in high places, you also have friends there.’”

Srla Prabhupada writes:

We have no business creating enemies, but the process

is such that non-devotees will always be inimical toward us. Nevertheless, as stated in the sastras, a devotee should be both tolerant and merciful. Devotees engaged in preaching should be prepared to be accused by ignorant persons, and yet they must be very merciful to the fallen conditioned souls. If one can execute his duty in the disciplic succession of Narada Muni, his service will surely be recognized... Let us continue preaching the message of Lord Krsna and not be afraid of enemies. Our only duty is to satisfy the Lord by this preaching, which will be accepted as service by Lord Caitanya and Lord Krsna. We must sincerely serve the Lord and not be deterred by so-called enemies.

[*Srimad Bhagavatam* 6.5.39, purport]



# SUMMER HAS NEVER BEEN THE SAME

| JULY 14 - 20, 2009 |

“Losing the battle doesn’t mean losing the war,” I said to Nandini dasi. One of our festivals had been canceled despite her determined efforts, and she was sitting there fuming.

I tried to smile. “It’s OK, Nandini,” I said. “You can’t win them all. We just have to find another town.”

“Guru Maharaja,” she said, “the festival was supposed to be tomorrow.”

“I know,” I said, “so let’s put our heads together and come up with a plan. Jayatam, do you have any idea where we could do the festival?”

Jayatam dasa looked hopeless. “Even if we miraculously found a town that would agree on one day’s notice,” he said, “we’d need permission from the health department, the fire

department, the sanitation department, the police department, and God knows what else.”

I thought for a moment. “If we go straight to the top, it’s possible,” I said.

“What do you mean?” Nandini said.

“Straight to the mayor,” I said. “We can choose a town and go directly to the mayor and ask his permission.”

“But the new European Union laws are so strict,” she said. “I doubt that even a mayor could get around them.”

“He doesn’t have to,” I said. “He can just make a few phone calls to the right people and get the job done.”

Jayatam and Nandini were silent.

“We have to try,” I said.

Jayatam looked at his watch. “It’s 3:30 pm,” he said. “All town administrative offices close in ninety minutes.”

I smiled. “Nandini got a result in ten minutes in the last town,” I said. “This may sound corny, but the English poet Tennyson wrote, ‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.’”

“I don’t understand the English,” said Jayatam.

“It means we have nothing to lose by trying,” I said. “Come on now, think of a town.”

Nandini thought for a moment. “Well,” she said, “we’re already doing all the towns in this region twice this summer. But there is one town nearby that we haven’t done in thirteen years. We used to do it every year, but the town officials became unfavorable, especially the director of the sports hall. That’s where we held our events, just outside of town in the parking lot.”

“I remember,” I said. “One year he simply refused us. I also recall how before that the officials wouldn’t let us do harinama on the beaches.”



“I think there’s a new mayor now,” Nandini said.

“It sounds like a pretty tough option,” said Jayatam.

“It’s our only hope,” I said. “Nandini, get in the car and go straight there. Don’t even call the town hall. We have to take a chance that the mayor’s still in his office.”

“And that he’s favorable,” added Jayatam smiling, “and ready to make a few calls himself.”

In a matter of minutes Nandini was out the door, leaving Jayatam holding their sleeping five-week-old baby, Alexander, in his arms.

“Hey!” yelled Jayatam as Nandini got in the car. “What if he wakes up hungry?”

“I just fed him!” she yelled as she pulled away. “He should be OK! But you’ll have to change his diapers!”

Back in my room I found myself praying to Lord Caitanya again for the success of yet another festival. “I’m sorry to keep appealing to You for the same thing,” I prayed, “but You are the master and we are the servants. It is not up to us to determine what will fail and what will succeed. These festivals are giving many people a chance to know and serve You. Please intervene. Please make the necessary arrangements and let us hold our event for Your pleasure again.”

Two hours later my cell phone rang. I knew it was Nandini. Before I could say anything, she spoke. “You’ve got your festival, Guru Maharaja,” she said.

I knew it was her determination more than my feeble prayers that clinched the event.

“So how did you do it this time?” I asked, reflecting on her uncanny ability to sway authorities.

“There was lots of traffic on the way,” she began,” so I got there only five minutes before the offices closed. I went straight to the receptionist, and I said, ‘I want to see the mayor.’

“She laughed, and she said, ‘Just like that? You want to see the mayor?’

“I said, ‘Yes. I have something very important to discuss with him.’

“And she said, ‘It will have to wait. You can fill out this form, and if your proposal is interesting enough we’ll contact you for an appointment some time next week.’

“And I said, ‘No. I insist on seeing the mayor immediately.’

“Then she said, ‘Oh. Well he’s gone home. Our offices close in three minutes. Come back tomorrow and fill out the form.’

“I glanced at all the plaques on the nearby doors to see if one displayed the title of mayor. None of them did. I decided to take a chance that there would be other offices upstairs, so I rushed to the stairway nearby.

“Then she screamed, ‘Wait! Where are you going?’

“I didn’t answer or look back, and I started running up the stairs. It was a long, winding staircase, and the next floor seemed far away. Suddenly I saw a man coming slowly down the stairs with a briefcase in his hand. I guess I was inspired by the Supersoul because I went directly in front of him and stopped him. When he saw me he got such a surprise.

“I stood right in front of him, and I said, ‘Excuse me, sir. Are you the mayor?’

“He seemed stunned for a moment, and then he said, ‘Well, yes I am, and I’m on my way home, young lady. If you want to meet me you can make an appointment downstairs.’

“He tried to go around me, but I blocked his way. I said, ‘I have to talk to you, sir. It’s important. Please. I’m from Viva Kultura. We hold a big cultural event—the Festival of India—along the coast every summer. It’s greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, one of our festivals was canceled, and we’re looking for another town.’

“And he said, ‘Just go through the normal procedures. We’ll consider your application.’

“I looked him straight in the eye, and I said, ‘No. We want to do the festival tomorrow.’

“Then the most amazing thing happened, Guru Maharaja. Suddenly he seemed to have a change of heart, and he said, ‘Tell me more about your event.’

“We stood there on the stairwell, and I described our festival. The more he listened, the more he seemed interested. After a few minutes he put up his hand and smiled. He said, ‘All right, you have my permission to put on your event in my town. I would suggest you contact the manager of the big parking lot off the main boardwalk and see if you can rent it for a few days. You can mention my name.’

“I took a deep breath, and then I said, ‘Mr. Mayor, we’ll need permission from the various departments like health, police, and sanitation.’

“He said, ‘Don’t worry about that. I’ll make a few calls on the way home.’

“I said, ‘You’re so kind.’

“He chuckled. Then he said, ‘And you’re a very brave young woman. Just make sure your people don’t burn down my town.’”

The day after Nandini’s success, I gathered all the harinama devotees and piled them in the bus. “We’re going to take the town by storm,” I said. “We’ll let everyone know about the festival today.”

“Guru Maharaja,” said a devotee, “Jayatam was telling us how Nandini got permission from the mayor, but we also know that many years ago we were not allowed to do harinama on the beach here. What if they stop us again?”

“We’ll take our chances,” I said.

It took the bus and the vans almost two hours to get to our destination. When we arrived, the road into town was congested with vacationers. The bus driver looked for a parking place for an hour and finally pulled into a large parking lot just outside of town. I'd been napping in one of the vans on the way, and when I awoke I saw a number of devotees going into a building nearby to use the rest rooms.

When I looked closer I got a shock. It was the sports hall where we did our festivals years ago, where the director was our enemy. I knew if he was forewarned of our event he would cause serious damage.

"No! No!" I shouted to the devotees. "Don't go in there!"

But it was too late. No one heard me, and several devotees had already gone into the hall.

I opened the door of the van, jumped out, and sprinted towards the building. Inside I saw the devotees waiting peacefully in line by the rest rooms. Suddenly an older woman came up to me and shook my hand.

"Welcome back," she said.

"Thank you," I said, looking around uneasily for the director. "It certainly is good to be here."

"You may not remember me," she said. "I'm the manager of this complex. You gave me your flower garland at the end of the last festival you did here in 1996, just as you left the stage. I still have it hanging in my kitchen."

"Is that so?" I said, my eyes darting around expecting the director to appear at any moment.

"And I also remember your talk," she said. "I used to tell my friends that if there were more people like you in this world, we'd have a lot fewer problems."

I felt a little embarrassed, and I forgot about the director. "Well that's very kind of you, ma'am," I said.

“The people here often talk about your festival,” she continued, “especially the children. They’re all grown up now, but they do remember. Sometimes they come and ask if I know when you’re coming again. I never know what to say.”

That was my cue. “Did you know about the director of this complex?” I said. “He denied us permission when we asked to use the parking lot, and he campaigned against us.”

“Oh, that old fuddy-duddy,” she said. “He died six months after that.”

“He did?” I said.

“And the new director is quite a different fellow,” she said. “I’m sure he’d let you use the parking lot.”

“It’s OK this time,” I said. “We’ve rented one further down the street.”

“Well, you know you’re always welcome here,” she said.

I gathered all the devotees and gave a little pep talk before we went out on harinama. “I suppose this is going to be something like a homecoming parade,” I said. “Apparently many people have been waiting for our return. Let’s not disappoint them. I want all of you to chant and dance with great joy and to savor every moment of our chanting of the holy names.”

“Maharaja,” said a devotee, “will they stop us from chanting on the beach?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “We’ve come this far. And it’s all been the arrangement of the Lord. Everything’s happening by His internal potency.”

As we chanted along the street, the invitations seemed to fly out of the distributors’ hands. Not one was left on the ground. People waved and one group cheered “Bravo!” as we passed by. We went through the town quickly.

Suddenly we were on the beach. It was packed with sunbathers. I urged the devotees to push on, and immediately we

were surrounded by people wanting to take pictures. Within minutes, groups of children were chanting with us, and an hour later we were lost in abandon as we chanted and danced deep into the crowds.

As we rounded the first bend in the beach a man came up to me with his two young daughters. “Can I speak to you for a moment?” he said.

“Sure,” I said, stopping as the harinama went ahead. “What is it?”

“I just want to say thank you for coming back to our town,” he said. “The summer has never been the same without your festival. I used to come every year when I was a boy. Now I’m married and I have my own family, and my children will have a chance to know the same happiness I did as a child. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Well, right there on the beach, surrounded by the holiday-makers, I got all choked up and couldn’t reply. I just nodded my head, tried to smile, and continued walking.

As I caught up with the harinama party I felt a sense of deep happiness and reward. I knew that by serving Lord Caitanya we were experiencing the greatest joy and somehow that joy was overflowing into the hearts of many conditioned souls.

It’s the joy my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, lived for, and it’s the joy I live for as well.

Srila Prabhodananda Saraswati writes:

“In every home there is a tumult of hari-sankirtana. On every body are tears, hairs standing erect, and other symptoms of ecstasy. In every heart is the most exalted and sweet spiritual path that leads far from the path of the four Vedas. All this has appeared now that Lord Gaura has descended to this world.”

[*Caitanya-candramrta*, chapter 10, verse 114]



# THIS SACRED TASK

| AUGUST 14, 2009 |

Dearest Srila Prabhupada,

Please accept my most humble obeisances in the dust of your lotus feet. All glories to you!

On this auspicious day, as I celebrate your appearance in this world, I stop for a few moments and reflect on your mercy upon me. I shudder to think where I would be now, as I enter the last phase of my life, had you not rescued me from the terrible ocean of material existence.

The men and women of my generation toiled for years to enjoy the temporary pleasures of this world and are now retiring, hoping to live a life of quietude and contemplation. But the unfulfilled desires in their hearts will haunt them till the day they die.

Like the others, I deserved nothing better, but you intervened and changed my destiny. And when I finally came to you, you petitioned the Supreme Lord on my behalf. "Here is a nice young boy trying his best to serve You," you prayed. "Please accept him."

And thus the Lord accepted this fallen soul. Defying all logic and reason, He engaged me, along with many others, in His modern-day pastimes of distributing the yuga-dharma, the chanting of the holy names, to every town and village in the world.

Though I am lowborn, deceitful, and without any good qualities, I have never forgotten your kindness upon me. Not a single day passes, my beloved master, when I do not reflect on your causeless mercy. Thus, I re-commit myself to your service again and again.

Srila Prabhupada, I know how seriously you take your spiritual master's order to spread Krsna consciousness. Though you are an intimate and beloved servant of the Lord in His eternal pastimes in the spiritual sky, and though you swim in the nectarean sea of devotion, you gave your full attention to the deliverance of the fallen souls of Kali-yuga.

I can only conclude, then, that your service on earth and your service in Goloka Vrindavan are equally appreciated by the Lord. Your pastime of circling the globe fourteen times, tirelessly preaching the message of Lord Caitanya, is the same as "running and frolicking with the Lord throughout the many forests of Vrindavan," as you wrote in your poem "A Prayer to the Lotus Feet of Krsna."

And I know that those who carry on your preaching here will one day join you in the spiritual world. In fact, this is the best way to enter that transcendental abode. You once wrote:

*bhajana parayana jiva nrtya gita kare  
guru pada anusari jagat nistare*

"The souls truly attached to worshiping the Lord always sing and dance in joyful sankirtana. Following in the footsteps of their spiritual master, they deliver the whole world."

[Viraha-astaka, third octet, verse 3]



## THIS SACRED TASK

There was a time when you saw the preaching of the Vaisnavas diminish greatly. You wrote about it, and it is obvious how much pain you felt:

*mayavadi bha're gela jagat samsare  
vaisnava chadila pracara nirjanera ghare*

“The whole world has become filled with impersonalists, and the Vaisnavas have given up the work of preaching that was entrusted to them and gone off to perform solitary worship.”

[Viraha-astaka, sixth octet, verse 4]

O Srila Prabhupada! May you never have to lament like that again. By your strong desire and your organizational expertise, your ISKCON movement continues to expand.

Please take a moment and look at our humble efforts here in Poland. During your time on earth you took interest in this country, even though it was under a communist regime. You wrote to your disciple Gurudas:

I am very happy to hear that you are going to Poland. Bharadraja also speaks Polish. He may go there sometimes if it can be arranged. The preaching in Poland is the first consideration. Vrindavan is being managed somehow by others ... If you can preach vigorously in Poland it will be a great asset. You may come to Vrindavan if you like, but preaching in Poland is my greater interest.

[Letter, November 18, 1976]

My dear spiritual master, please be relieved of all anxiety. Let me tell you the happy news that our festival program is enjoying its twentieth year along the Baltic Sea coast. Each summer more than 750 thousand people come in contact with Krsna consciousness in this massive event. Hundreds of people buy your books, thousands hear and even chant the

maha-mantra, and everyone enjoys the lectures, bhajans, and shows from our stage.

And for your pleasure, this year at the Woodstock Festival in Kostrzyn we distributed 130 thousand plates of prasada. Each summer all these people go away with a good impression of this movement, which you struggled so hard to begin.

Even before you came to the West, you envisioned such miracles. You had imbibed the mood of your spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, who was always thinking of new ways to engage people in Krsna's service. In a Vyasa-puja offering to him you wrote:

*landanete "chatravasa" karibe cao  
paripati yate haya se katha bujhao*

"In London you want to make a hostel for travelers. You explain that it must be organized in a first-class manner."

*mleccha dese "chatravasa" hari-katha-tare  
e saba marmara katha ke bujhite pare*

"In the land of meat-eating barbarians, a student hostel for preaching hari-katha! Who can possibly comprehend the significance of these things?"

[Vaisistastaka, Second Distinction, verses 8-9]

Srila Prabhupada, it is your causeless mercy that you engaged us, hapless as we were, in this sacred task of helping you and the previous acaryas light the fire of sankirtana all over the world. On my first day of sankirtana, back in February 1970, I turned to a dear friend. "I could do this my entire life," I told him.

Now, my final days loom on the horizon, no longer a distant vision. Please let me tell you that if it is your desire, I will happily engage in this preaching work for the whole of eternity and beyond.

## THIS SACRED TASK

Srila Prabhupada, I love this service you have given me, to “preach boldly and have faith in the holy names.” I worship this instruction with all my heart and soul. It is the be all and end all of my existence. I derive unlimited satisfaction and joy sharing my good fortune with others through sankirtana. I can honestly say that nothing in the three worlds appears as attractive to me.

I do not claim to be free from material desires, nor am I saying I am a pure devotee. But let no one mistake it: Service to your lotus feet is infinitely more satisfying than all the pleasures this world has to offer.

My dear spiritual master, I know that one day the curtain will close and my part in this festival program will come to an end. My hope and prayer is that my disciples will continue to push it on, having imbibed the purpose and spirit of this service from their own spiritual master.

But please know that though this mortal body may perish, my desire to serve you will never falter. Please always include me in your preaching entourage wherever you go within the three worlds. Let death be at most a brief respite from the intensity of a lifetime spent serving you. And may my next birth be a continuation of such service, but with even more enthusiasm, determination, and success.

I pray that after many such births my heart will be free from all the things that keep me from becoming your confidential servant. Perhaps then you will call me to your side to join you and your associates in the spiritual sky, where every step is a dance, every word is a song, and every day is a festival. I look forward to that moment, Srila Prabhupada.

In the meantime, I am eager for your next instruction, and I wish to take shelter of the words you wrote when you revealed your heart to your own spiritual master on such an auspicious day as today:

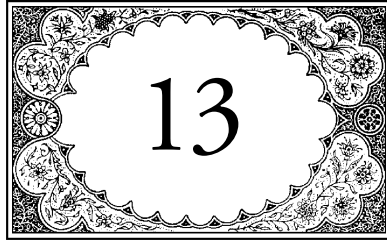
DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

*srila prabhupada! tumi aja kara daya  
e-bara karuna kara haiya amaya*

“O Srila Prabhupada! Please be merciful upon us today.  
Have compassion now and let us feel your affection for us.”

[Vaisistyaṣṭaka, eighth distinction, verse 9]

Your faithful son and loyal disciple,  
Indradyumna Swami.



# HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO HAVE SEEN IT!

| AUGUST 2009 |

“Over my dead body!” screamed the woman over the telephone.

As I entered the office I could hear every word she was saying to Nandini dasi: “Never! I’ll never rent my school to you people! Not in a million years!” With that, she hung up.

“Gosh,” I said. “Who was that?”

“The directress of a school near the Woodstock site,” said Nandini. “She’s refusing to rent it to us. It’s a problem because there will be 400 hundred devotees helping us.”

“Last year we rented three schools to house the devotees,” said Jayatam dasa. “But two of the schools are undergoing renovations. We have only one so far this year.”

“Every year I approach the same woman to rent her school,”

said Nandini, “and every year she adamantly refuses. She thinks we’re a dangerous cult.”

“What to do?” I said.

“I’ll try one last thing,” said Nandini. “I’m going to ask the mayor of that town to speak to her. He’s our friend. Maybe he can influence her.”

The next afternoon on sankirtana I got a call from Nandini. “We got the school!” she shouted.

“The directress agreed?” I said.

“Not exactly,” said Nandini. “The mayor forced her to rent it to us. He told her she could lose her job if she didn’t. It wasn’t pleasant, but it worked.”

Several days later our festival group of 250 devotees left the Baltic Sea coast and headed southwest toward the site of the Woodstock festival. Within days, 150 more devotees joined us from Ukraine, Russia, and other European countries.

“It’s going to be a very special Woodstock this year,” said Jayatam as we began a meeting to organize manpower. “Michael Lang will be one of the main guests. He’s the one who organized the Woodstock event in America forty years ago.”

“That’s nice,” I said.

“It will be the fifteenth year of Polish Woodstock,” Jayatam continued. “Jurek Owsiak, the organizer, is doing massive advertising. They are expecting more kids than ever.”

“It’s been twenty years since the fall of communism,” said Nandini, “so Jurek has also invited Lech Walesa, who was instrumental in bringing democracy to Poland and later became president of the country.”

“Quite a lineup,” I said.

Having been part of Woodstock from the beginning our set-up crew was experienced and finished putting up our site,

Krsna's Village of Peace, several days before the event. Our large seventy-meter-long tent, along with twenty smaller ones, stood tall and impressive on our one-acre site.

But as we drove by one morning a devotee shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing new," he said. "It looks the same as always."

"Don't dare take it for granted," I said. "Each year we have to thank Krsna for the opportunity to touch the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people. Practically everyone at the festival will come through our village. Where else do devotees have a chance to preach on such a scale?"

On the first day Jurek invited us onto the main stage for the official opening, along with our colorful group of fifteen dancers from India. When we arrived, 250 thousand young people had assembled in front of the stage. We positioned ourselves as close to the front as possible. As several dignitaries walked by us, my godbrother Patita Pavana das noticed Lech Walesa and shook his hand.

"I'm from America," Patita Pavana said. "In San Francisco they've named a street after you."

Walesa seemed pleased. As he continued forward, the line momentarily slowed down and he stopped in front of me. I had heard that he is a staunch Catholic and not favorable to our movement, so I took the opportunity to try to befriend him.

"Mr. Walesa," I said, "it was a brave thing you did, standing up to the communists. Your courage helped bring about democracy and freedom of religion in this county. On behalf of our movement I would like to personally thank you."

He was a little surprised and somewhat distracted, but after a moment he relaxed and smiled. "You're welcome," he said.

A few minutes later he was speaking to the large crowd of kids, welcoming them to Woodstock. Afterwards they gave

him a long, enthusiastic round of applause. Then another dignitary spoke, and the kids also applauded him loudly. Finally, Jurek opened the event and a rock band began playing. As the dignitaries filed out, I put out my hand to the man who spoke after Lech Walesa.

“Hare Krsna,” I said. “Thank you for your nice talk.”

To my surprise, the man pulled me close and kissed me on the cheek. “I know who you are,” he said, “and I’m aware of the work you’re doing. I want you to know I love you for it and I’m grateful.” With that he was on his way.

There was a lot of commotion as people were leaving the stage. I grabbed a stage technician and pointed to the man who had kissed me. “Who is that?” I said.

“One of the best-known film producers in Poland,” he replied. But as he said the name his voice was drowned out by the band.

“Oh well,” I thought, “the film producer appreciates us. Perhaps Krsna will bring us together again.”

Each day we opened our village at 10:00 am. Within minutes huge lines formed to get prasada in front of the Food for Peace tent. One day I was helping with the distribution when a Russian devotee came over to me.

“Maharaja,” he said through a translator, “there’s a young man in line who doesn’t have any money. He keeps showing me this old piece of laminated paper. He insists he can eat as much as he wants.”

I took the paper and was surprised to see it was in my handwriting. It was dated August 18, 2004. It read:

“Dear Prabhus,

“This boy is my friend. He swept the road in front of Lord Jagannatha’s chariot for hours today during the Ratha-yatra. He loves to sing Hare Krsna and dance in ecstasy. He has no



money, so please allow him to eat as much prasada as he wants throughout the festival for free.

“Indradyumna Swami.”

“I wrote it five years ago.” I said.

“I told him that,” the Russian devotee said, “but he says you told him the Ratha-yatra parade is eternal and therefore the paper is good forever.”

I laughed. “OK then,” I said, “let him eat with us forevermore.”

As every year, we held Ratha-yatra several hours each day on a road that cut through the center of the large field. At one point the road was so crowded it took an hour to go just thirty meters. The devotees didn’t mind. We simply chanted louder and danced more enthusiastically. And the kids joined in.

One morning we heard that Jurek was making announcements on radio and television and in the newspapers asking that no more people come to Woodstock. “There are over 450 thousand people here now,” he was saying. “We don’t have the infrastructure to accept more. Stay home and hear about it later.”

“That must be why so many kids are coming for prasada,” I said to Jayatam. It’s the largest crowd ever at Woodstock. I’ve never seen such huge lines. The cooks estimate we’ll distribute well over 130 thousand plates.”

“Actually, there’s another reason so many kids are coming,” said Jayatam with a chuckle. “They’re boycotting all the other food stands”

“Really?” I said. “Why?”

“When the owners of the stands realized how many more people had come this year, they raised the prices,” said Jayatam. “The kids don’t like it, so they’re boycotting them. The word is out that Krsna’s Village of Peace is the best place to eat and

it's not expensive. So the kids are either eating here or walking three kilometers into town to buy groceries. “

As always, we provided entertainment. In our small tents there were yoga classes, gopi dots, books, astrology, shops, and questions-and-answers. In the evening, various bands played on the stage in our main tent. Six thousand kids crammed into the tent to hear Madhumangala das and his punk band, Gaga, from the early '90s. He got them all chanting Hare Krsna and dancing.

Each night we scheduled BB Govinda Maharaja and his Silk Road Bhajan Band in the Mantra Rock tent. His kirtans are legendary at Woodstock, so each evening the tent was crowded with devotees and non-devotees alike. For me, one of the sweetest parts of the evenings was watching people walk by and be drawn inside by Maharaja's melodious singing.

On the first evening I noticed three middle-aged women standing at the entrance to the tent, scoffing and ridiculing the kirtan. Maharaja was leading an explosive kirtana as three hundred people chanted and danced around the tent.

The next night the women came as Maharaja had everyone swaying to a light melody. Mesmerized by the beauty of it all, they were drawn into the tent. They stood and watched for hours.

On the third night, they came early and stood in the middle of the crowd as the singing started. They looked up on the wall of the tent, where we had a banner displaying the mahamantra, and my eyes opened wide when I saw them start chanting along with everyone else. Later in the evening I saw them dancing wildly with the crowd.

On the fourth and final night the women were the loudest chanters and the wildest dancers of all. Because of their age, they caught the attention of onlookers who passed by the tent. The kirtan went on until midnight. I couldn't keep my eyes off

them as they danced with abandon, their arms raised high in the air, chanting Hare Krsna at the top of their lungs.

As the kirtana was coming to an end, Nandini and Jayatam came in. They had both worked hard to organize the festival, and I wanted them to see how happy the devotees and the kids were in Maharaja's kirtana. I motioned for them to come up on the stage.

"Isn't this wonderful, Nandini?" I said. "This is the essence, the very heart of our festival."

"So true," she said.

I pointed to the three middle-aged women singing and dancing up front. "Just look at those women," I said. "They've been with us every night. They love kirtana."

"I know," Nandini said.

"Oh?" I said. "How do you know?"

Nandini smiled. "You see the one in the middle?" she said. "That's the directress of the big school we're staying in, the one who refused to rent to us for so many years. The other two are her secretaries."

I was speechless for a few moments. "How is it possible?" I finally said. "She was so inimical towards us."

"She came to speak to me this morning," Nandini said, still smiling. "She told me she came to our village the first day to find reasons why she shouldn't have to rent the school to us next year. She was noting what she considered so many faults, but she said that something happened when she was standing outside the Mantra Rock tent. Listening to Govinda Maharaja's kirtana, she had a change of heart. At first she didn't want to admit it, but something drew her back again the next night. She said the singing was the most beautiful thing she'd ever heard and she was transfixed.

"The next night she wanted to experience it for herself, so

she and her secretaries stood right in the middle of the tent. When the kirtana started they saw the mantra on the wall and started chanting. Suddenly, one of our girls pulled them into the kirtana. They've been completely transformed. She said we could have her school next year and even begged me to take it."

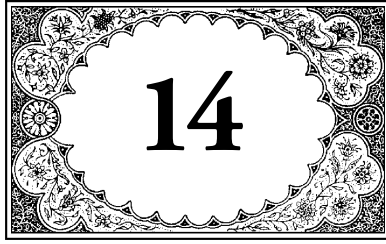
As BB Govinda Maharaja slowly brought the kirtan to an end, I saw the directress and her two secretaries standing with their eyes closed, swaying slowly back and forth. When the kirtana finished none of them moved. They just stood savoring the sweetness of chanting the holy names.

"Woodstock really was special this year," I said to Nandini, "but nothing came close to this miraculous pastime of the holy names. How fortunate we are to have seen it!"

*tunde tandavini ratim vitanute tundavali labdhaye  
karna kroda kadambini ghatayate karnarbudebhayah sprham  
cetah prangana sangini vijayate sarvendriyanam krtim  
no jane janita kiyabdhir amrtaih krsneti varna dvayi*

I do not know how much nectar the two syllables 'Krsna' have produced. When the holy name of Krsna is chanted, it appears to dance within the mouth. We then desire many, many mouths. When that name enters the holes of the ears, we desire many millions of ears. And when the holy name dances in the courtyard of the heart, it conquers the activities of the mind, and therefore all the senses become inert.

[*Vidagdha-Madhava* 1.12]



# WILL THOSE SWEET DAYS EVER RETURN?

| AUGUST 7 - 23, 2009 |

After the Woodstock festival we went back to our programs on the Baltic Sea coast. We were exhausted but determined to make it through the last seventeen days of our tour. There might be some austerities, but the satisfaction of sharing Krsna consciousness with thousands of people would far outweigh any discomfort.

As I was waking up the morning after our return, Jayatam das called me on my cell-phone.

“Did I wake you?” he said.

“It’s OK,” I said struggling to bring myself to full consciousness.

“Late last night I got a call from the National Police,” Jayatam said.

I immediately sat up and came to my senses. It was the National Police who raided our school base the previous month looking for narcotics.

“What is it now?” I said.

Jayatam laughed. “Don’t worry, Srila Gurudeva,” he said. “They want our help. They arrested a man from Nepal who entered the country illegally to sell diamonds. He speaks Hindi, and they were asking if they could use one of our devotees from India to translate for him. If it comes to a court case they’ll pay us for the translator’s work in court.”

“That’s terrific,” I said.

“Of course, I agreed,” said Jayatam, “and they’re very grateful for our help.”

“Any time,” I said with a chuckle.

The weather was perfect, and the last few festivals went well. But throughout them all, I was thinking of our finale in Kolobrzeg. Somehow Nandini dasi had gotten the city authorities to agree to a second festival on the prestigious boardwalk by the beach. The three-day event in late August would happen on the final weekend of the summer, just before the vacationers headed home.

When we started harinama on the beach at Kolobrzeg, everyone waved and some people cheered. I turned to Gaura Hari das. “It’s almost too good to be true,” I said. “This is a conservative town with many older people. We always run into some sort of opposition when putting on festivals here.”

Just then one of our women came running over to me. “Maharaja,” she said, “three women are following our harinama party telling people to throw away our invitations. They’re saying we’re a dangerous cult.”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “People won’t take them seriously.”

“But they are,” the devotee said. “Look.”

Glancing to the right I saw the well-dressed women passionately pleading with people to destroy the invitations, and I was shocked to see some people rip them up and throw them to the wind.

Another devotee ran up to me. “Guru Maharaja,” she said, “someone just spat in Bhagavati dasi’s face. What should we do?”

I tried to control my anger. “Tolerate it,” I replied. “It won’t make sense to confront them here on the beach in public. They’ll give up soon. It’s not easy to walk through this crowd on the hot sand. I really don’t think most people will believe them.”

Sure enough, after a few minutes I saw several groups of people arguing with the women. Challenged by the crowd, they gave up and left the beach.

“That’s the best we could hope for,” I said to Gaura Hari. “People are standing up and defending us. How times have changed!”

I was tired, so I sat on the sand and let the harinama party continue. While there I overheard an older man speak to his wife. “Look at those silly people,” he said. “They just sing and dance all day, every day.”

The wife looked up from her newspaper. “If only we could have been so fortunate,” she said.

The man looked down and became silent.

Although I rested twenty minutes, it didn’t take me long to catch up with the harinama party. So many people wanted to take photos with them they’d gone only about fifty meters.

When we came off the beach onto the boardwalk, a young man went up to one of the male devotees. “Can I borrow

your clothes?” he said. “I’ve been watching how people like to take photos with all of you. I’d like to wear your clothes and charge people to pose with me. It would help pay for my college tuition.”

After almost a week of chanting and advertising on the beach, the festival day arrived. Because the crew was tired it took them a long time to set up. In fact the event started late. Ordinarily I would be disturbed, but considering how they had set up and broken down almost fifty festivals in a row, I didn’t say anything. Instead I praised them. They were the backbone of our festival, and I let them know it.

As people began arriving I saw a little girl standing alone next to the stage crying. I went up to her, and her mother appeared from nearby. “Is there a problem?” I asked.

“Yes,” the mother said. “My daughter, Agnieszka, is crying because she doesn’t think she’ll win a sari in the dancing contest. We’ve been coming to your festival for four years, and she’s never won.”

“It’s no problem,” I said. “This is our last festival of the year, and we have a few saris left. Come with me, and she can pick one.”

I grabbed Agnieszka’s hand, and with her mother behind us we walked quickly to the fashion tent, where Agnieszka picked out a beautiful and opulent sari. “She has good taste,” her mother said with a smile.

After one of our devotees dressed her in the sari, I had another idea. “I think you need some bangles to match,” I said. So we walked to the jewelry booth, where she picked several bangles, a necklace, and a ring. I also gave her a Krsna doll, a small marble elephant, a cool hat, and a little bag to hold everything.



“Thank you, sir,” she said as we left the tent. “But won’t you get in trouble?”

I smiled. “No,” I said. “I’m the organizer.”

Agnieszka’s mother said she wanted to buy a handbag, so I offered to take her daughter to the face-painting booth. Forty-five minutes later Agnieszka was looking spectacular, her face decorated with gopi-dots and her hands with henna designs.

When her mother returned it was with her husband and another couple. By her husband’s appearance I could immediately understand he was an important person, well dressed and wearing an expensive watch. With a disdainful look on his face, he pulled out his wallet. “How much is this going to cost me?” he asked.

“Nothing, sir,” I said. “It’s our gift to your daughter.”

“Nothing’s free,” he said. “What’s the deal?”

“Honestly,” I said. “We’d just like to see her happy.”

“Well then...,” he started to say something and then stopped. He looked at his daughter dressed so nicely, and he cleared his throat. “I will not forget this, sir,” he said.

Then he motioned to Agnieszka. “Come, let’s go” he said. “It’s time for the puppet show.”

As they walked away I turned to the other couple. “Excuse me,” I said. “Can you tell me who that man is?”

The woman smiled. “You wouldn’t believe us if we told you,” she said.

They hurried to catch up with their friends. “The Lord works in mysterious ways,” I thought. “Whoever that gentleman was, someday, somewhere he’ll repay the favor. He’ll help devotees during a time of opposition, assist us in an important project, or maybe rule in our favor in a court of law. Who knows?”

As I walked around the festival site, I passed by the book

tent when a man came running out. “Swami,” he said, “would you please sign my *Bhagavad-gita*.”

I wrote a small note inside the cover. “Have you seen the *Gita* before?” I said.

“Oh yes,” he replied. “I bought your *Gita* in 1992 in the south of Poland. I had always been interested in philosophy, but after reading the *Gita* translated by your spiritual master, I realized there is no philosophy in the world that can compare.”

“Thank you,” I said. “Have you ever visited our temples?”

“No,” he replied.

“Do you communicate with devotees?” I said.

“No, I don’t,” he said. “This is only the second time I’ve met you people. The first was when I bought the book. This one’s for a friend.”

“You haven’t seen us since 1992?” I said.

“That’s correct,” he said. “I was really happy when I got an invitation to the festival on the beach today.”

“What do you do for a living?” I asked.

“I’m an artist by profession,” he said. “And I teach the *Gita* twice a week in my home in Germany. I’ve been doing this since 1993. In my classes I always establish that Krsna is supreme and that all other spiritual paths like yoga, jnana, and brahman realization are inferior to bhakti.”

“I’m amazed,” I said.

“But you know,” he said “the only reason no one has ever defeated me in a philosophical debate is because I know Prabhupada’s *Gita* by heart. It’s the perfect philosophy.”

Just as we finished our conversation an elderly man came up to me. “I’ve been living across the street for ten years,” he said. “Every summer you people set up your event here, and I’ve been hearing the same song, Hare Krsna, for a decade. I think

it's had an effect on me, so I wanted to ask what it means and what this festival is about. Can you take me around?"

"With pleasure," I said,

After showing him a few of the tents and exhibits, I took him to the main stage. Tribhuanesvara das, our master of ceremonies, had invited all the children in the audience onto the stage and was teaching them songs about Krsna. It's one of the most popular programs at the festival. I counted fifty-four children on the stage. One touching part is when he asks children questions related to the festival.

As my guest and I watched, Tribhuanesvara turned to a nine-year-old boy. "What did you like most about the festival?" he asked.

"The puppet show," the boy said.

Then he turned to the boy's little sister. "What about you?" he asked. "What did you like best?"

"The dancing," she said.

Then he turned to a four-year-old girl. "And what about you?" he said. "What did you like?"

"I don't know," she said, "but my grandma wants her money back." The audience exploded in laughter.

A storm seemed to be coming on the horizon, so Tribhuanesvara turned to a six-year-old boy. "Do you think it's going to rain on the festival?" he asked.

"No," said the boy. "Don't worry. Those are night clouds."

At the end, he told the children there would be a final song about Krsna. Then he turned to a five-year-old girl. "Do you know what 'final' means?" he asked.

"Yes," said the girl. "Final' means you have to leave the zoo before dark. Otherwise, the animals will come out of their cages and eat you." Again the audience burst into laughter.

Although the children's program is simple and obviously unrehearsed, it's crucial to the success of the festival. If the kids love the program, so do their parents. It complies with Srila Prabhupada's request to "think of novel ways to spread this Krsna consciousness movement."

As the evening drew to a close I noticed many devotees trying to hide their tears. Men, women, children - everyone was having the same realization: what we loved most was coming to an end.

After living in the joy of sharing Krsna consciousness for so many months, devotees found it difficult to hold their emotions. At one point I, too, started to get teary-eyed, and I went to stand in the shadow of the stage so no one would notice me.

All three hundred of us had served in various ways to bring Krsna consciousness to hundreds of thousands of people, who themselves had appreciated Krsna consciousness in a variety of ways: the adults through cultural performances; the young people through the *Bhagavad-gita* play, the martial arts, and the yoga classes; the children by dressing-up, wearing gopidots, and watching the puppet shows. And everyone, without exception, loved the prasada.

Finally it came time for my lecture. Afraid I might get too emotional in public, I kept it short and called all the devotees onstage for the final kirtana. Immediately all the children ran in front of the stage to dance, the girls hoping to win a sari. When I saw little Agnieszka in her sari, bright-faced and smiling from ear to ear, I waved, and she waved back. Not far behind was her father sitting in the front row. When our eyes met, he nodded and smiled.

"Although we had never met before this afternoon," I thought, "we now have a bond of affection that no doubt will

manifest in a most wonderful way one day. What is this miracle of Krsna consciousness?”

As I started the kirtana I could see six hundred people still sitting in the audience. I could hardly control myself, so I closed my eyes for the first ten minutes. When I opened them I was surprised to see that many of the parents had left the benches and joined the kirtana. It had never happened before. Then as I looked at the crowd I suddenly realized this was the spot where sixteen years ago we held our first outdoor event.

In the summer of 1993 we did a harinama on the beach in Kolobrzeg to advertise a hall program. As we were coming off the beach we stopped on the boardwalk, the place where we were now chanting, and a crowd of four hundred people gathered. Spontaneously we did the Ramayana play, a bharatanatyam dance, and a lecture, and we passed out sweets. The crowd wanted more, so we had kirtana until dark. When we got back to our base we decided to start doing outdoor events. At the next festival in the park of a nearby town we drew a crowd of three thousand.

As I stared at the spot where our festival was born, I was amazed to think how much the festival had changed, how everything had expanded beyond what I could have imagined. One thing, however, remained the same, and that was the people. From the very beginning they had shown a keen interest, and they'd been coming in droves for twenty years. Without them, our festivals would have no meaning. As I sang the final refrain of the mahamantra, I paid obeisances in my mind to my spiritual master, the previous acaryas, the holy names, and the devotees on the tour. And to each and every soul who had come to our events.

When the kirtana ended, no one moved and no one said

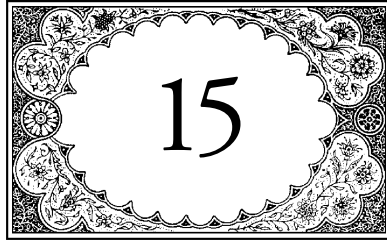
a thing. Our festivals - our life and soul - had ended. All of us shared the same painful thought: we would have to wait a whole year before we would again see the Baltic coast reverberating with the sweet chanting of the holy names.

As we walked back in silence to our buses I had a realization: "This must be what it was like in the world after Lord Caitanya left and the chanting of the holy names subsided. We are blessed to experience these emotions. As immature as we are in devotion, these sentiments are leading us in the right direction."

*abhivyakto yatra druta kanakagauro harirabhun  
mahimna tasyaiva pranayarasamagnam jagadabhut  
abhuduccairuccaistumulahari sankirtana vidhih  
sa kalah kim bhuyo'pyahaha parivartteta madhurah*

When Sri Gaura Hari was visible in this world, resplendent with the luster of molten gold, the entire universe was immersed in the mellows of loving affection for Sri Krsna by His divine inspiration. Then the order of the day was the sublime process of tumultuous chanting of the holy names of the Lord. Alas! Will those sweet days ever return?

[Prabhodhananda Sarasvati, *Sri Caitanya Candramrita*, text 139]



# THE YOGI

| AUGUST 24 – SEPTEMBER 1, 2009 |

The day after our last festival in Poland, I boarded a flight for India and landed the next morning in Delhi. I was going down a flight of stairs leading to Immigration and Customs when my knees buckled and I began to fall. A large man grabbed me from behind in the nick of time.

“You OK, buddy?” he said as he helped me down the last few steps.

“Thanks,” I said. “I’m fine. It’s probably from the long flight.”

It wasn’t true. I knew that two and a half months on the Polish festival tour had taken their toll. On the last day of harinama I stopped the chanting party early and told everyone to go back to the festival site. For the first time in thirty-eight years, I couldn’t go another step. It was then that I decided not to go to Russia, as I had planned, but to go to Vrindavan and recuperate as well as read and chant.

I continued walking toward Immigration and Customs. “It’s just a fact of life,” I thought shrugging off my mishap. “I’m getting older.”

Srila Prabhupada spoke about getting older while walking with his disciples on the beach at Jagannatha Puri.

“I was jumping here,” he laughed. “In 1920 or ’21 I came here... I came after appearing for my B.A. examination. And because I was jubilant, I was jumping. When the waves came I was jumping. Now it is fifty-seven years after... Now I am walking with stick... the body has changed.”

[*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrita*, Volume 6, Chapter 7]

I was met at the airport by my disciple Narottama Das Thakura das. “It’s still early,” I told him, “but I don’t feel like sitting in a car for another four hours on the way to Vrindavan. I’d rather walk and chant my rounds in a park in Delhi. Besides, I need to pick up some supplies before we continue.”

An hour later we were strolling through a scenic park. It had been raining for a week, so everything was fresh and green. Exotic birds flew here and there, and the ponds were full of yellow and pink lotuses. Some people were walking, others were jogging, and several were doing various kinds of group exercises.

“This would be called a botanic garden in the West,” I said to Narottama, “and it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to maintain each year. But here it’s simply part of the natural beauty of India.”

After walking for a while we came to a small grove of trees. I looked at it and then quickly looked again. “Narottama,” I said, “is that someone meditating in that little grove?”



Narottama squinted. “Looks like it, Srila Gurudeva,” he said.

“It’s a classic picture,” I said, reaching for my camera, “the old trees, the lake with the lotuses...”

As I focused my lens and composed the shot I could see that the person doing yoga was not a casual practitioner but someone serious. The pose he was doing was extremely difficult, and his demeanor made him look like a sage of antiquity. He was thin, with long white wavy hair, and his piercing green eyes seemed to be focused within, not outwardly.

Fixed in his position, he didn’t move an inch, and he seemed oblivious to everything around him. Slowly he changed asanas, going through what appeared to be a long and practiced routine. After taking several photos, I waited until it seemed he had finished his exercises and walked over to the grove.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said as he slowly opened his eyes. “Do you practice yoga here every day?”

“Yes,” he replied, “for eight to ten hours a day.”

“How long have you been practicing here?” I asked.

He thought for a moment. “For forty years,” he said.

“That’s amazing,” I said. “Forty years for ten hours a day. And do you work?”

“This is my work,” he said, “getting free from samsara, the cycle of birth and death.”

“I understand,” I said, “but generally yogis live in the Himalayas, not big cities like Delhi.”

“It makes no difference if you go within,” he said.

“Have you been to the Himalayas, to Hrsikesh or Haridwar?” I said.

“No,” he replied. “I’ve never been outside of Delhi.”

“That’s interesting,” I said, glancing at Narottama, who

stood next to me with his mouth open. “And how did you start practicing yoga?”

“I met my guru when I was nine, at this exact spot,” he said. “He had come out of the Himalayas and was on his way to the Kumbha-mela in Prayag.

“I was playing here with my friends when I saw him meditating. My friends made fun of him, but I was curious. After they left I sat with him and discussed spiritual topics. I had always been interested in such things, even as a small child.

“He kindly stayed here for several weeks and taught me much of what he knew. I mastered many yogic asanas very quickly. It came naturally to me. He told me if I was serious and continued practicing, one day I would see the Paramatma, the Lord within my heart. Since then, I have come every day to this park and meditated.”

“Did you finish your education?” I said.

He laughed. “No,” he said. “I never went back to school. I live in a small room nearby. Sometimes I walk to other parts of Delhi to teach yoga.”

“Have you seen the Paramatma?” I said.

“Not yet,” he replied, closing his eyes to begin meditating again.

“Excuse me,” I said. “I am interested ...”

He opened his eyes again.

“What scriptures do you study?” I said.

“*The Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali,” he said. He relaxed for a moment.

“And you?” he said. “What scriptures do you study?”

“*The Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*,” I said.

“Can you quote them?” he said.

“Yes, of course,” I said. I thought for a moment to choose a verse relevant to our meeting. Then I quoted this verse:

*vadanti tat tattva vidas  
tattvam yaj jnanam advayam  
brahmeti paramatmeti  
bhagavan iti sabyate*

“Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance Brahman, Paramatma or Bhagavan.”

[*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.2.11]

“I read that recently,” he said.

“In Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*?” I said.

“No,” he replied, “in the *Bhagavatam*.” He picked up a book that was lying nearby. “It was given to me by another sadhu several months ago. I’m enjoying it. In fact, I had a dream of Lord Krsna last night.”

He laughed. “And now Lord Krsna’s devotees have come,” he said

“Baba,” I said. “What is your name?”

“Om Prakash,” he replied.

Just then I got an inspiration. “Om Prakash,” I said, “why don’t you come with us to Vrindavan? We’re leaving in a few hours. Vrindavan is one of the holiest places in India, and it’s only ninety miles from here, on the way to Agra. I can’t imagine you haven’t been there in all these years.”

“Here or there, it makes no difference,” he said, preparing to return to his yoga.

“True,” I said. “One can be spiritually enlivened anywhere if one knows the process, but at the same time, places where the Supreme Lord appeared and performed His pastimes are spiritually surcharged, especially Vrindavan. One can easily obtain pure love of God there.”

Om Prakash's thick gray eyebrows went up.

"I'll take care of you while you're there," I said. "I would consider it service to a sadhu."

He stood up. "All right," he said. "I am going there now. Which direction is it?"

"This very second?" I said. "If you can't wait for us, here's three hundred rupees. There's a bus stop just down the road."

He took the money in his chaddar. "I guess he doesn't want to touch it with his hand," I thought.

"We have some errands to do in Delhi before we go," I said. "We'll meet you there this afternoon. This is Narottama's cell phone number. You can call us from a public phone when you arrive."

I wrote the number on a piece of note paper and handed it to him. He bent down, picked up his few belongings, wrapped them carefully in a cloth, and started walking out of the park.

"That's India," I said to Narottama as we watched him leave. "Only here can you meet people like him, who on a moment's notice can just pick up and go without any prior arrangement. It's incredible."

When the stores in Delhi opened at 10:00 am, we began our shopping. An hour later Narottama's cell-phone rang. It was Om Prakash. "He's already in Vrindavan," said Narottama. "He went straight there."

I smiled. "He's a focused person," I said.

"He's using the public phone opposite the ISKCON temple," Narottama said. "He wants to know what he should do next."

"Direct him to the Krsna-Balarama tree on the parikrama marga and have him wait there until we arrive," I said.

We met Om Prakash in Vrindavan that afternoon. As I

expected, he was absorbed in meditation. “Arrange a room for him in the place where you’re staying,” I said to Narottama, “and some prasada.”

I called Narottama the next morning. “How’s it going?” I asked.

“We’ve been up since before dawn,” Narottama said, “and we’ve already visited the seven main temples in Vrindavan.”

“Great,” I said. “How does Om Prakash like Vraja?”

“He’s in awe. Now we’re off to bathe in the Yamuna,” Narottama said.

That afternoon during lunch, Om Prakash was studying me carefully. “You’re not in good shape,” he said. “You look exhausted. You’re bent over, and you have circles under your eyes. Why?”

I thought for a moment. “You’ve been sitting in one place doing yoga for forty years,” I said. “I’ve been traveling and preaching the *Gita* in the West for the same amount of time.”

“Then I will teach you yoga,” he said. “It will improve your condition dramatically.”

I had never desired to practice yoga, but when Om Prakash offered to teach me I accepted. That evening on the veranda, he gave me my first lesson. It soon became apparent that he was as enthusiastic to share the process of astanga-yoga with me as I was bhakti-yoga with him. One by one, he took me through the classic yoga asanas. But I could not keep up with him, and I fell back against a wall. He seemed disturbed.

“Be patient,” I told him. “You started at nine years of age. I’m starting at sixty.”

Later, as we were resting after taking prasadam, I spoke to him. “Om Prakash,” I said, “you’re accomplished in astanga-yoga, but in the *Gita*, Krsna says:

*“yoginam api sarvesam  
mad gatenantar atmana  
sraddhavan bhajate yo mam  
sa me yuktatamo matah*

And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me - he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion.

[*Bhagavad-gita* 6.47]

“Through jnana-yoga and astanga-yoga one can obtain divine knowledge and mystic powers,” I said. “But that’s not enough to satisfy the heart. The soul yearns for love, or bhakti, and Krsna is the supreme lover. That’s why pilgrims come here to Vrindavan, to find Krsna.”

Om Prakash sat up straight in a yogic posture, his eyes closed.

“Om Prakash,” I said, “did you understand?”

He opened his eyes and looked around at the beautiful Vrindavan scenery. Temple bells were ringing in the background, peacocks were calling, and some sadhus were having a bhajana nearby.

“Be patient,” he said with a smile. “You started on the path of bhakti when you were young. I’m starting at fifty.”

The next day, Narottama continued taking Om Prakash around Vrindavan to the holy tirthas. They visited many temples, as well as Rasastali, the place of the Rasa Dance, and Vamsivat, where Krsna called the gopis to the forest with His flute. When they returned in the evening I could sense that Om Prakash was deeply touched by his pilgrimage.

But the following morning during breakfast he was silent. Afterwards I asked him to come to my room. As we sat, I took his hand. “Om Prakash,” I said, “you’re reaching old age. You have no family and no possessions. You’re renounced, austere, and accomplished on the path of yoga. I’d like to help you find a room here in Vrindavan where you can live and become Krsna conscious. You can associate with Krsna’s devotees and chant the holy names. It’s a natural step for you. I’ll help maintain you.”

To my surprise Om Prakash started chanting Hare Krsna for a few minutes. Then he stopped. “It will take me some time,” he said.

Then as quickly as he had come, he started leaving. He picked up his few possessions and headed toward the door with the same detachment he showed when leaving the park in Delhi.

“Om Prakash!” I called out. “Where are you going?”

“Back to the park,” he replied without turning his head. Then he paused and looked over his shoulder. “But I’ll be back some day,” he said. “Your Vrindavan is a special place. I’ve never known anything like it.”

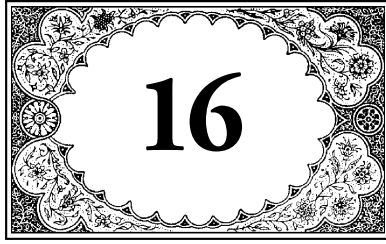
*jnatam kanabhujam matam paricitaivanviksiki siksita  
mimamsa viditaiva sankhya saranir yoge vitirna matih  
vedantah parisilitah sa rabhasam kintu sphuran madhuri  
dhara kacana nandusunu murali mac cittam akarsati*

I have carefully understood Kanada’s paramanuvada philosophy. I have studied Gautama’s nyaya philosophy. I know Jaimini’s karma-mimamsa philosophy. I have already traveled on the path of pseudo-Kapila’s sankhya philosophy. I have applied my mind to

Patanjali's yoga philosophy. I have ardently studied Vyasa's Vedanta philosophy. None of these attracts me. It is the flood of sweetness from Lord Nandasunu's flute that attracts my heart.

[Sri Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, quoted in *Padyavali*,  
by Srila Rupa Goswami, verse 100]





# FEELINGS OF SEPARATION

| SEPTEMBER 12, 2009 |

My dear godbrother Sridhar Maharaja,

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

Today is the celebration of your appearance in this world, and those of us who remember your kindness gather to glorify you and show how much we appreciate what you have done for us.

Each of us in his own way benefited from your saintly association when you were among us: your disciples from your fatherly guidance on the spiritual path, your friends and well-wishers from your brotherly love and affection, and the fallen jivas from your learned talks on the Absolute Truth.

I had the privilege to call you my friend. At least, you thought of me that way. The truth is that you were light-years ahead of me in Krsna consciousness, but you treated me as an equal and tried to raise me to your level. Such is the nature

of saintly persons: they are non-envious and always concerned with the spiritual welfare of others.

We were friends in the ultimate sense because we liked the same things. From the minute we met we were attracted to each other because we both relished speaking on the *Bhagavatam* and chanting and dancing in kirtana. We also liked the adventure of traveling and spreading Krsna consciousness.

As young men we had a zest for taking prasada together. I was always amazed at your voracious appetite. But as I watched you relish prasada with gusto, I knew it was not just a question of taste but rather that you realized the prasada was the mercy of the Lord. And as preachers we always needed mercy to defeat our challengers.

And perhaps the quality I most appreciate in you is that you were a fearless preacher. You had mastered the philosophy and did not tolerate any conclusion to the contrary. You would preach strongly and forcefully, not giving in to your opponents in any way. If they accepted defeat, you smiled and offered to help them on the blissful path of service to the Lord's lotus feet.

But woe to them who chose to argue with you! Your keen intelligence and witty remarks would soon reveal their foolishness and leave them no recourse but to withdraw.

A preacher willingly accepts difficult situations in service to guru and Gauranga. He endures the rigors of traveling far and wide to preach the glories of the Lord. Sometimes he sleeps in a palace, sometimes on the side of the road. At times he tolerates the heat, and at other times the cold.

Still, he remains satisfied from sharing the good fortune of Krsna consciousness, and you were not only satisfied but jolly through it all. In happiness and distress, honor and dishonor, even in the face of death itself, you were always the Jolly Swami. Today we honor and worship you for that endearing quality.

Your merry nature and constant humor enabled us to tolerate the ups and downs of this world. You taught us to

take material life lightly, that this world is a subject for jokes, not something to be taken seriously. We thank you for that.

On the other hand, we thank you for helping us become serious in Krsna consciousness. Your example as a sadhaka, a practitioner of Krsna consciousness, was exemplary. You always chanted your rounds and your Gayatri mantra. You faithfully attended morning programs, associated with your godbrothers and godsisters, and enthusiastically worshiped the deity. Just remembering you in this way gives us strength, even in your absence.

We miss you dearly, Maharaja. The adage that time heals all wounds does not apply in the realm of devotional service. In fact, the contrary is true: as time goes on we miss you more and more. This is painful for those of us who love you. It is difficult to live without you and other godbrothers and godsisters who have left this world.

Devotional service is relishable in the association of other devotees. As we grow older and devotees begin to depart, even devotional life seems devoid of happiness. The only remedy is to join all of you and Srila Prabhupada again, wherever your pastimes may be happening.

In the meantime we will continue our services here in a mood of separation. I believe it is these feelings of separation that will bring us together again, because in the end one goes to where the heart takes one. Because you endeared yourself to me with your brotherly love, you are forever in my heart. Thus I am confident that one day I will again enjoy a good laugh with you in Krsna consciousness, and perhaps a good fight too, as we defeat our opponents somewhere in some universe in service to Lord Caitanya.

Happy trails, my friend, until we meet again.

Your servant,  
Indradyumna Swami.

# 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 website [www.travelingmonk.com](http://www.travelingmonk.com). His lectures are available at [www.narottam.com](http://www.narottam.com), and you can write to him at [Indradyumna.swami@pamho.net](mailto:Indradyumna.swami@pamho.net).