

Lo and Behold
Volume 13, Chapter 1
August 1, 2012

After almost a year of traveling to temples throughout the world, I came back to Poland in late June for our annual Festival of India tour along the Baltic Seacoast. The 300 tour devotees had already arrived at our base and had been preparing for the two-month adventure.

I was jet-lagged and exhausted after my flight from Los Angeles. Warsaw's airport terminal was crowded with people returning from vacation, and as I queued at immigration I thought about the quarter-century I had been preaching in Poland.

"It's Kali-yuga," I thought, seeing the spirit of enjoyment that prevailed amongst the holiday-makers as they waited for their luggage at the carousel. "The results of preaching are not always obvious. One has to be patient."

"You're late," said a businessman next to me picking up a bag from the carousel.

"No," I said, "my flight was on time."

"I mean you're late for the festival," he said. "The Festival of India. Don't you guys usually start in the third week of June? It's almost July."

I broke into a smile. "Yes, you're right," I said. "This year we've had to start a little later because the school year was extended by a couple of weeks. Our first program is tomorrow."

"Oh, I see," he said. "I'll see you in July in Rewal. My wife and I always plan our vacation around your festival. We visit the festival website quite often. Keep up the good work!"

"Well, that five minutes of patience sure paid off," I thought, watching him head for the exit.

The next morning I took a flight up north to our base. Amrtananda dasa picked me up at the airport.

"We're going straight to the first festival from here," he said. "Will you be up to giving the lecture?"

"I will," I said. "I look forward to it all year."

We drove for two hours and as we pulled up at the festival site, I heard the clear, sweet notes of kirtan ring out. The spires of our twenty-five colorful tents depicting various aspects of Vedic culture were clearly visible even from a distance and I walked towards the site in anticipation of seeing the tents filled with happy, curious people. I could feel the excitement in the air. Our show was a grand event with a huge stage, flashing lights and a powerful sound system. Standing at the festival entrance I saw hundreds of beautifully dressed devotees serving prasadam, painting gopi dots on children's faces and helping festival-goers put on saris for the evening. A woman walked past me and gasped, "Oh my God!" as she got her first glimpse of the spectacle before her.

"Quick, Srila Gurudeva," the stage manager said, running up to me. "You're on in less than a minute." I put my reverie to one side and followed him across the festival site and up the stairs to the stage.

There was a devotee waiting in the wings with a Bhagavad-gita. "It's the same one you used last summer during your lectures," he said smiling.

I clasped the book tightly. "Like meeting an old friend," I said.

I walked onto the stage and looked out at the benches which were filled with hundreds of guests all looking expectantly at me.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I began. "For the next twenty minutes I'd like to share with you another very beautiful aspect of India's ancient culture: her spiritual wisdom."

Before ending, I invited the people to purchase a Bhagavad-gita at the book tent. "I'll be walking around the festival site for the next few hours," I added, "and I'll be happy to sign any copies you buy."

The audience applauded. When I descended the stairs I was met at the bottom by a man who had already bought a copy of the Bhagavad-gita. His frown contrasted with the sea of smiles I had seen in front of me a minute before.

"Please," he said, "could you sign this right now, right away?"

"Sure," I said, taking the book from his hand. "So, you appreciated the philosophy?"

"Not at all," he said. "I have no interest whatsoever."

I stopped writing. "Then why are you buying the book?"

"My wife is fascinated with your festival and particularly with your talk," he said. "But I'm bored stiff. I want to go home. We made a deal that if I buy her the book then we can leave immediately."

I couldn't help but smile as I signed my name.

Then another man came up to me. "You said you'd sign the books, right?" he said.

"I did," I replied.

"Then please sign here," he said, pointing to a blank space inside the book's front cover.

"Are you buying this book to go deeper into spiritual life?" I asked.

"Oh no," he said. "I'm an atheist. In fact, I regularly debate against the concept of God."

"Then why in the world are you buying this book?" I asked.

"I can't defeat the arguments you presented in your talk for the existence of God," he said, "so I want to study this book and understand them better."

"Great," I said and handed him my card. "Here's my email address. Maybe we can debate online."

He smiled. "That's a great idea," he said.

The next morning I congratulated the devotees on the success of the first festival. "But let's not rest on our laurels," I said, quoting the ancient Greek saying. "We have forty-seven more to go!"

A large group of us left after a hearty breakfast to perform harinama on the beach near the town where we would hold the second festival. The invitations went out quickly.

"Can you give me six?" asked a woman.

"No need for six," I said. "They're not tickets. They're invitations. The program is free."

A woman sitting on the sand nearby spoke up. "But don't think it's something cheap because it's free," she said. "I've attended seven of their festivals. Everything is very nice and professional. I have only one complaint."

"Uh oh," I thought. "Here it comes. She's going to talk the other woman out of going."

I forced myself to smile. "Really?" I said. "What is it?"

"Why does the festival have to start in the evening?" she said. "Why not early morning? What better things do we have to do? Tell me."

"It's a good idea. We'll consider that," I said. The harinama party was disappearing into the distance. "I have to catch up with my friends now, but please do come tomorrow."

"Definitely," said the woman. "I'm always an hour early."

True to her word, the next afternoon the woman was sitting alone in the front row of the benches an hour before the show began. Soon, though, the grounds began filling up, and fifteen minutes before show time there wasn't an empty seat. The stage program began, and I noticed a disheveled man holding a bouquet of flowers looking for a seat. Eventually he sat down on the ground in front of the stage. The people sitting near him moved away. I thought about asking our security team to escort him out; he looked harmless, though, so I decided to let him stay. But during my lecture, he started yelling something. When I didn't take any notice, he yelled again, and then again until the security team pulled him to one side.

After my talk I left the stage and started down the stairs where a woman and her pre-teen daughter were waiting for me. "Do you remember me?" the girl said.

"I'm sorry, I don't," I replied. "I meet so many people every day."

"Well, I remember you," she said. "I've been coming to the festival each summer since I was four years old. I'm ten now. Last year you gave me a sari and some bangles. After the festival you sat with me and my friends and explained that God is a young boy who plays a flute and herds cows. Every night before going to bed I pray to Him to let me join Him and His friends herding the cows."

"You do?" I said.

"Yes, she does," said her mother.

"My mother bought the Bhagavad-gita for me today," she continued. Her eyes shone with excitement. "Can you please sign it?"

"Of course," I said, "but will you be able to understand it?"

"Not now," she said, "but Mom will put it away for me until I am older."

Later that evening when I was walking around the festival site the unkempt man came out of the prasadam tent and handed me the bouquet. "These are for you," he said.

It was obvious he had not bathed in weeks and the smell of liquor wafted around him. I saw that his hands were encrusted with dirt and covered with sores.

"That's very kind of you, but I must move on," I said as I continued on my way.

"Wait!" he called out.

I turned back.

"Please," he said. "It was my best friend's dying wish that I give the flowers to you. That's what I was trying to say during your talk. We lived over there." He pointed to a small bridge over a nearby river. "We lived underneath the bridge. My friend looked forward to your festival each year. You may not remember us, but you gave us free food each time we came. You'd take us behind the tent over there and bring us big plates of food. But what my friend liked most was your lecture. Two years ago he asked you for a book and you gave him the big one for free."

"Was it the Bhagavad-gita?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "But he never let me read it. He said I wouldn't understand it. A couple of months ago his liver gave out; too much liquor. But he was peaceful when he died. A few minutes before he passed away he gave me the few zlotys he had and told me to buy flowers for you when the festival came to town this summer."

I took the flowers and held them close to my chest. "Thank you," I said.

"I listened to your talk tonight," he said. "I was surprised that I actually understood quite a lot of it. I have my friend's book and I'm going to start reading it."

"I wish you all the best," I called out as I watched him walk back to his home under the bridge.

The Ramayana theater, one the most popular items of our show, was just beginning when I noticed a dark rain cloud in the distance in an otherwise clear blue sky. The cloud reached us within minutes and showered rain on the festival site. At first the audience seemed unsure what to do, but as the rain got stronger everyone jumped up and began running for the shelter of the tents.

"It will only last a minute," Rajesvari-seva dasi, our Master of Ceremonies, called out over the loudspeakers. "In Vedic culture it's considered very auspicious when it rains and shines at the same time! It's called a divya-snana, a divine shower."

To my amazement most of the audience members returned to their seats and sat in the rain, obviously convinced that it was something special. The shower passed and the play continued.

On my way backstage to check on the next performance, an elderly man approached me and asked if I was still signing books.

"Do it quickly," he said. "I don't want my wife to see. She doesn't want me to read this book because she's afraid I'll leave home and join you in your travels around the world. She doesn't like it when I listen to your classes on the internet."

I chuckled. "I see," I said quickly signing the book and handing it back to him. He put it in his bag, looked around to make sure his wife wasn't nearby, and sauntered away nonchalantly.

As I passed by the rows of benches in front of the stage I overheard a woman calming her frightened child. "Don't be upset, darling," she said. "It's just Krsna killing the Putana witch. You know, we've read that story in the Krsna book we bought at the festival last year."

I shook my head. "Couldn't ask for a more obvious sign that we've been at it for over twenty years," I thought.

Moments later a woman approached me with a Bhagavad-gita in her hand. "I saw you signing books," she said, "but I didn't want to bother you with mine."

"No," I said. "It's not a bother. I'd be happy to sign it."

"In your lecture," she said, "you spoke about the duality of material existence, how there is a combination of happiness and distress in everyone's life. But I would have to disagree."

"And what is your disagreement?" I asked.

"There is no duality in my life," she said. "I only know suffering. And I've become desperate to the point where I'm thinking about taking my life. But your talk today gave me hope that there is a positive alternative, as you called it. I will spend the next few weeks seriously studying this book."

"My spiritual teacher would be very happy to hear that," I said.

Then I went with a few devotees to distribute some leftover invitations on a nearby street. Near the entrance to the festival grounds there was a gypsy girl of about ten years old playing an accordion. There was a hat at her feet that had five or ten zlotys in it. She was looking longingly at our festival.

When she reached the end of the song, I asked her whether she would like to go to the festival.

"Yes, so much," she said. "But I have to ...". Her voice trailed off.

"What time do you finish working?" I said. "Do you work through the evening?"

She nodded.

"Are your parents nearby?" I asked.

"My father is there," she said pointing towards a side street where a man played another accordion with a hat at his feet.

I crossed the street and started talking to him. "How much does your daughter earn per evening with her street performance?" I asked after a while.

I saw him hesitate. "About fifty zlotys a day," he said.

"If I give you the fifty zlotys will you allow her to come to our festival for the rest of the evening? You can see how much fun the children are having. I'll introduce you to one of the ladies who will look after her. We'll bring her back here when the festival is over."

He looked surprised. "But she has a sister, and if she goes her sister will want to go as well."

"No problem," I said with a smile. "They can both come. I'll give you 100 zlotys."

"OK," he said. "I thank you."

I introduced the girls and their father to one of the devotees. She took the girls by the hand and walked with them towards the festival site.

As we continued to walk, a devotee turned to me. "Is it right to give those people money?" he said. "You don't know what they'll do with it. They may use it for sinful activities."

"Possibly," I said. "But the benefit those young girls will get by chanting, dancing and taking prasadam is incalculable."

The devotee was insistent. "But you'll get the bad karma if they use the money the wrong way."

I stopped and turned to face him. "That's not a problem. I'll take the karma and you take the blessing that comes from engaging them in Lord Caitanya's service. Do we have a deal?"

He was silent.

I was approached by yet another woman with a Bhagavad-gita as soon as we entered the festival grounds.

"I didn't catch much of what you said in your talk," she said, "but it was enough to realize your philosophy and way of life are special. I'm curious, so I bought the book. I'm just doubtful that I will be able to understand it."

"Why not?" I said.

"Because I'm a waitress in a bar," she said. "I'm engaged in many bad things."

"It doesn't matter. I'm confident you will still be able to understand this philosophy," I said.

"If you say so," she said, taking the book from my hand. "I'm off to work now. I'll begin reading it tomorrow."

"Maharaja, do you really think a woman like that can understand the Gita?" one of the devotees asked me. "I mean she lives a pretty low life."

"It's possible," I replied. "Not long ago both of us lived sinful lives like her, but now we understand the Gita. Isn't that right?"

He nodded.

It was time for the final kirtan, the highlight of every festival. Devotees chant and dance together in great happiness and engage festival-goers in the yuga-dharma of chanting the holy names. The cultural entertainment that comes before the kirtan—the theater, the puppet shows, the bharata-natyam dancing, the martial arts display—is just to give people faith to chant Hare Krsna with us. And many do. That night was no exception: the kirtan went on for forty-five minutes and more than seventy-five children and some of their parents danced with us. Just before the kirtan ended I happened to glance towards the shadows in the back. The homeless man was there, dancing in jubilation.

When the kirtan finished and the applause died down I left the stage to say goodbye to the people as they left the grounds. I was met at the bottom of the stairs by one final man holding out a Bhagavad-gita for me to sign.

"I can't believe I'm standing here," he said, handing the Bhagavad-gita to me.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I've seen you people at Woodstock for many years," he said, "but unlike my friends, I never once visited your village there, not even to eat. I had zero interest in anything you were doing. I thought you were all crazy. "Then two days ago I got a ticket for speeding near here. I felt the officer was wrong so I decided to contest the ticket. I was given an appointment for this afternoon at the police station, directly across the street from your festival.

"Lo and behold, when I'm driving up I see you people here. 'No way am I going to that event,' I said to myself.

"When I entered the police station, there was a long line of people and an officer told me to sit down and wait. I was right next to the window and could hear your event loud and clear. Just as I settled in my seat, you started your lecture from the stage. It seemed as if you were only ten feet away. I had no choice but to listen as you gradually developed your talk, touching on many aspects of your philosophy.

“The line of people in front of me hardly budged and I had to sit there and listen to your whole speech. And you know what? The more you spoke, the more interested I became. In fact, I was very impressed. By the end you had me completely convinced.

“When the police officer finally called me, I filed my complaint and then walked straight over here to your book tent. I immediately bought a hardcover Bhagavad-gita. I plan to start reading it on the beach tomorrow.”

“Now that’s a great story,” I said. I handed him the book and my card. “Let’s keep in touch.”

In front of the stage I saw small groups of devotees and guests speaking together. It seemed no one wanted to leave, including the father of the gypsy girls who walked up to me with his daughters in tow.

“Don’t they look beautiful?” he said. The girls grinned, radiant in their saris, bangles and gopi dots. “They had such a good time. I’m so grateful to you.”

“It’s my duty,” I said.

“It’s more than that. It is kindness,” he said. “I wish I could give you something in return, but we are so poor.”

“The gratitude we receive from people like you makes everything we do worthwhile,” I said. “We’ve received so much appreciation lately that I’m convinced one day the whole world will dance alongside us in ecstasy. And why not? It’s foretold in scripture.”

“Victory! Victory! Victory! I behold something wonderful: all the inauspiciousness of the living entities is destroyed, no one is going to hell, Yamaraja has no more work to do and the effects of Kali-yuga have ceased to exist. This is because all over the world an increasing number of Lord Visnu’s devotees are singing His names while dancing and playing musical instruments.”

[Nammalvar, (3102 BC) Divya-prabandha, Tiruvaymoli 5.2.1]



► "There's something special about going to a place for the first time," I said to Rasikendra dasa as I threw my bags into the back of his van. "I'm looking forward to visiting the devotees in Macedonia."

"Fine," he said, "but hurry. Traffic's heavy on the way to the airport."

Sure enough, ten minutes later we were stuck in early morning commuter traffic. Suddenly, I realized I'd left my passport in the apartment. We raced back, found the passport, and got stuck in the same traffic jam again.

"Not sure we'll make it now," Rasikendra said as we inched forward.

I squirmed nervously in my seat. "It won't be the first time," I said.

We arrived at the airport with only minutes to spare. I made it to the check-in just as it was closing. When I reached the security check the man in front of me, obviously with plenty of time to spare, was slowly putting his belongings onto the x-ray machine belt. When his cell-phone rang and he answered, I lost my patience.

"Stop talking and move on," I said gruffly. "I'm late for my flight."

I immediately knew I'd made a mistake. There had been no need to raise my voice.

On the other side of the screening, when a security officer took my things aside to search them, the man in front of me smiled with satisfaction. I checked my anger. "Better to tolerate it," I told myself.

I remembered a time when Srila Prabhupada scolded his servant for being impatient in a similar situation: "What is the difference between us and them if we cannot practice tolerance?"

When I finally boarded the plane there was no room in the overhead compartment for my carry-on bag. A hostess said she would take the bag and check it under the plane.

"That's not an option," I said. "I have valuables in this bag."

"I'm sorry," she said. "Take the valuables out and give me the bag."

I took the valuables out and handed over the bag, while several impatient passengers glared at me.

The stewardess came back five minutes later with the bag. "It's too late to put it under the plane," she said. "You'll have to keep it under your seat."

"But it won't fit," I said.

«What is the difference
between us and them if we
cannot practice tolerance?»

I tried to push the bag under the seat in front of me, but I ended up having to put it in the space for my feet. Sandwiched between two other passengers with my legs resting on the bag, I cursed the traffic, the rain, and my forgotten passport. I was irritated, sweating, tired, and hungry. As I settled in for an uncomfortable flight, I felt a headache coming on.

"Traveling can be such austerity!" I said to myself.

As I sat there feeling sorry for myself, I saw a book sticking out of the pouch in the back of the seat in front of me: The Narrative of Robert Adams. The cover was an old painting of a Westerner enslaved by Arab pirates. As the plane took off, I began reading the book.

I was at once humbled: The austerities I have gone through as a traveling monk in the past forty years are nothing compared with those of Robert Adams.

Adams left New York in June 1810 as a merchant seaman on a cargo ship named Charles. Two months later, the ship was destroyed in a storm off West Africa near Capo Blanca. Miraculously Adams and his shipmates all made it to shore, only to be captured and enslaved by a group of Moors.

Sold to another group of Moors, Adams was separated from the other seamen and taken deep into the Sahara, where he suffered for months in service to his new masters. After some time his captors were defeated in battle by the Tuaregs, who bound him hand and foot and took him to their king in Timbuktu. Intrigued by his new slave, the king granted him the freedom of the city for six months but eventually traded him to a group of nomads for tobacco.

Forced back into slavery, Adams was dragged into the desert again. Reunited with some of his shipmates at a remote Saharan slave market, he was eventually freed with a ransom paid by a British consul in the region. The consul arranged passage for him on a ship to Europe, where he made his way to London. With no work and no money or friends, Adams lived as a beggar.

In November 1815 he was discovered half-naked and starving on the snowbound streets by an employee of the Company of Merchants of Trading to Africa, who took him to the owners of the company. Intrigued by his story, the owners offered him an advance and free passage back

to America in exchange for the rights to a book about his misadventures. The narrative was published in 1816.

I finished reading just as our plane came in to land at Skopje airport. "Never again will I utter a single complaint about any austerity, big or small, that I may meet in my travels," I pledged as I put down the book.

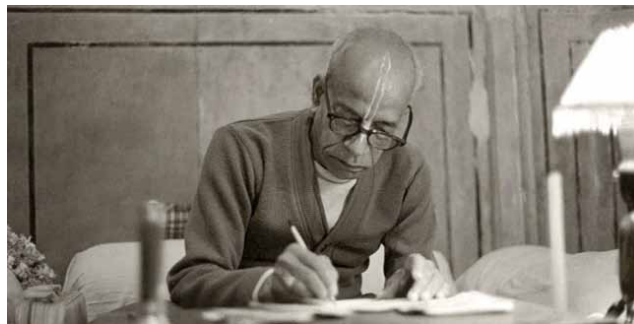
"What's more," I thought, "the austerities of preaching are nothing compared with the happiness of devotional service. For the next few days I'll relish the chanting of the holy names and discussions of Krsna conscious philosophy with the Macedonian devotees. It is all blissful service to my spiritual master."

As I approached the exit I smiled at the stewardess who had made me put the bag under my seat. "Thank you," I said. "Thank you for everything."

Her eyebrows went up. Then she smiled. "You are most welcome, sir," she replied courteously.

That night I found a letter Srila Prabhupada wrote to Prabhavisnu dasa in January 1973:

"I can understand that it is not an easy manner to travel extensively over long periods of time without proper food, rest, and sometimes it must be



very cold there also, and still, because you are getting so much enjoyment, spiritual enjoyment, from it, it seems like play to you. That is advanced stage of spiritual life, never attained by even great yogis and so-called jnanis. But let any man see our devotees working so hard for Krsna, then let anyone say that they're not better than millions of so-called yogis and transcendentalists, that is my challenge. Because you are rightly understanding through your personal realization this philosophy of Krsna consciousness, therefore in such a short time you have surpassed all the stages of yoga processes to come to the highest point of surrendering to Krsna. That I very much appreciate. Thank you very much for helping me in this way."



As my flight landed in Skopje, Macedonia, I couldn't hold back a smile when I saw that the airport was named after one of my childhood heroes, Alexander the Great. Like many other boys, I had been fascinated by the adventures of the young Alexander as he conquered much of Asia, even part of India.

But most important, Alexander was one of the first to awaken my curiosity about spiritual life, a curiosity that my spiritual master, Sri A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, would turn into a full-fledged pursuit of the Absolute Truth.

My mind drifted back to when I was eleven. We were given a school assignment to write about one of our heroes from the past. I chose Alexander the Great. That very afternoon I enthusiastically went to the public library to read up on him. What I found that day changed my life.

As I read through one of the many books about this conqueror, I learned that he was born in 356 BC. But how did he die?

"Did his final moment come in the midst of a furious battle?" I wondered as I flipped to the end of the book. "Was he alone, surrounded by enemy soldiers? Did he cry out the name of his country with his last breath?"

I was surprised to learn that nothing of the sort had happened. Alexander, who had fought passionately for many years, conquering and pillaging entire nations, died of an unknown disease on his way home to Macedonia. And instead of glorifying his country at the end of his life, he shared with the world the deep wisdom he had acquired.

As Alexander lay on his deathbed, he called his generals. "I will depart from this world soon," he said with half-closed eyes, "but I have three desires. Please fulfill them without fail."

His generals immediately agreed.

"My first desire," Alexander said, "is that my physicians alone will carry my coffin to my grave."

The generals nodded in consent.

"My second desire is that the path to my grave be strewn with the gold, silver, and precious stones in my treasury."

The generals looked at each other, perplexed, but again nodded their consent.

"My last wish," said Alexander, "is that my hands be kept dangling out of the coffin."

The generals recoiled but consented. Then Alexander's top general stepped forward. He kissed his king's hands and placed them on his own

«My mind drifted back to when I was eleven. We were given a school assignment to write about one of our heroes from the past.»

chest. "Dear King," he said, "We assure you that your final desires will be fulfilled. But please tell us why you have given us such strange orders?"

Alexander opened his eyes. "I would like the world to know three lessons I have learned in life," he said.

The generals, physicians, and a number of trusted soldiers moved closer to the bed. I also brought the book closer to my face, eager to know the lessons Alexander had learned.

"I want my physicians to carry my coffin," said Alexander, "because people should realize that no one can protect us from inevitable death. Life should never be taken for granted."

"Having my treasury strewn on the path to my grave will show that we cannot take anything with us at death. People should realize that chasing after wealth is futile."

"And having my hands dangling from the coffin will show that we come into this world empty handed and leave empty handed."

As I sat in the library that day, I thought I had never heard such wisdom before, and coming from someone so special, it made a deep impression on me. As I was about to close the book, the last paragraph caught my eye. It was Alexander's final words:

"Bury my body, do not build a monument to me, and, again, keep my hands outside my coffin so everyone may know that the man who won the world died with nothing in his hands."

When I got home that afternoon, I went through my dresser drawers and closets and started throwing my belongings out on the porch.

My mother thought I had gone mad. "What on earth are you doing!" she exclaimed. "What's got into you?"

"We can't take anything with us at death," I said.

My mind came back to the present as the plane was landing.

I was met outside the airport by a small group of devotees and driven to the temple. As I unpacked my bags in my room I spoke with some young devotee men.



"Interesting, isn't it," I said, "that the airport here is named after Alexander the Great."

"Macedonians are proud that he was born here," a devotee said.

"Unfortunately," said another, "there's an ongoing debate with our Greek neighbors, who say he was born in Greece, in a region they also call Macedonia."

"Anyway, it's not so important," said the first devotee. "After all, he wasn't very enlightened. He just plundered other people's property."

"No," I interjected. "He had some wisdom. He changed some hearts. He changed my—" I stopped before finishing the sentence and went back to unpacking my bags.

The boys stood quietly. "Guess we'll see you later at the program, Maharaja," said one. "It will be downtown on the main square."

"There's a huge statue of Alexander the Great right in the middle of the square," said another.

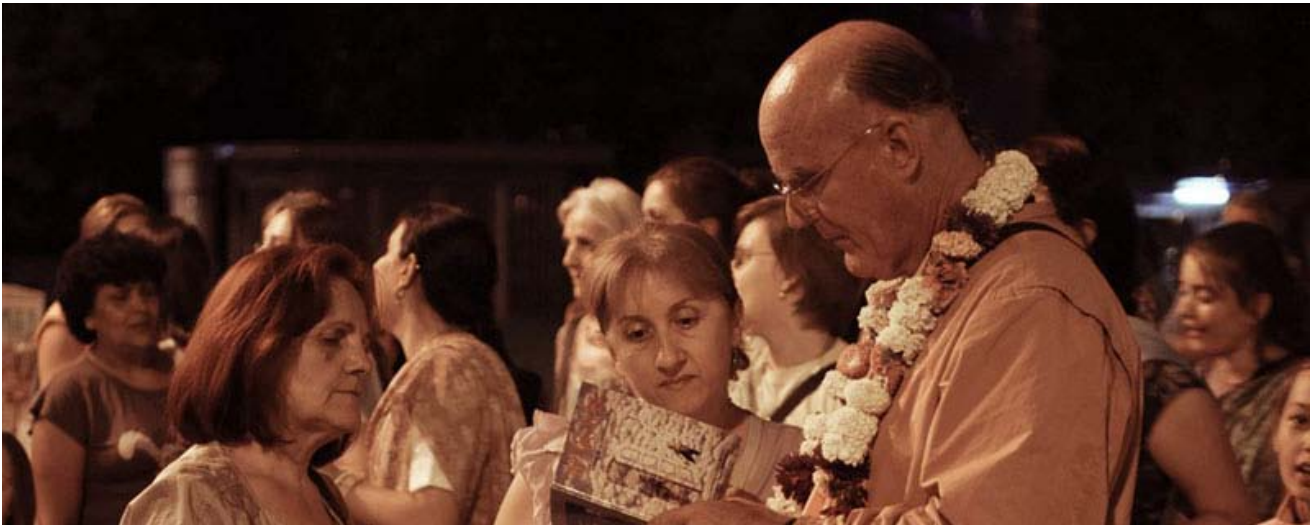
I looked up. "I'd like to pay my respects," I said.



That evening, I found a conversation where Srila Prabhupada spoke of Alexander's greatness:

"A thief accused Alexander the Great that, 'What is the difference between you and me? I am a small thief and you are a big thief. That's all. Why you are punishing me? You are a big thief. You are doing same thing.' Then he was let loose. Alexander the Great, actually he was great. He was the emperor and an ordinary thief was accusing him. And he said, 'Yes, I am thief.' He admitted. That is greatness. If he was not great then he would have hanged him or punished him; 'Oh, you are accusing me?' But no, he accepted. That is greatness. Mistake is one fault, but to accept that, 'I have done mistake,' that is greatness."

[Morning Walk, Melbourne, April 24, 1976]



I sat in my room in the temple building in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, taking prasadam and listening to a bhajan by devotees downstairs in the temple itself.

"That's such a sweet bhajan," I said to a devotee, "and it's been going on for hours."

"Yes, Maharaja," he said. "The Macedonians are very musically inclined. We love to sing and play musical instruments. We even have our own form of a tamboura here, a four-stringed instrument. Devotees use it often in bhajans."

Two hours later I left for the square in the city center with a group of twenty devotees. The square, renovated in recent years, is a popular place for the people of Skopje to spend warm summer evenings sitting, talking, and eating in nearby restaurants. As we approached the square I saw the huge statue of Alexander the Great.

"That statue is quite impressive," I said to a devotee.

"Yes," he replied. "Alexander the Great was from Macedonia. He left here to conquer the world. He built a huge empire, but it was too much to manage, and he never returned home."

I had been reading TKG's Diary by Tamal Krsna Goswami while traveling, and just that morning I had come across a passage where Goswami quoted Srila Prabhupada on the same point:

"Srila Prabhupada actually said that Alexander the Great could not maintain his large empire," I said.

"Prabhupada said, 'Suppose I conquer Bombay and then Karachi, but in the meantime Bombay is lost? That was Alexander the Great: too much expansion.'"

"Srila Prabhupada said it was for this reason that he was emphasizing the importance of book selling over opening temples. He said, 'Don't make me Alexander the Great in my lifetime. People have recognized I am great. Don't make me small.'"

The devotee, pointed to the other side of the square. "There's also another important landmark over there," he said. "It's the home of Mother Teresa, who was born here in 1910 and left at seventeen to go to India as a missionary. The house is now a national memorial."

As we walked closer I noticed a large crowd around the house. "Macedonians are honoring the anniversary of her departure today," the devotee said.

"Let's take a look at it while devotees are setting up the bhajan," I said.

"It was true to the spirit of a missionary's life, a life I had also chosen by taking sannyasa, the renounced order of life."

"Yes," he said as we neared the entrance. "Let's go inside. You'll be doing a program in the outdoor amphitheater tomorrow night. The amphitheater is part of the memorial. The program is advertised all over town: An Evening with Indradyumna Swami. We're expecting about a hundred and fifty people."

"Have any important people, like town officials or other dignitaries, been invited?" I asked.

"Well, not that I know of," he said. "We basically just focused on our friends and the public. But who knows? The word is out now."

As we entered the memorial, I noticed a few pamphlets and brochures about the life of Mother Teresa. I picked one up and began reading a poem she had written on the boat as she left Europe in 1928. As I read, I was so touched by the poem that I had to sit down. It was true to the spirit of a missionary's life, a life I had also chosen by taking sannyasa, the renounced order of life:

Farewell

I'm leaving my dear house
And my beloved land
To steamy Bengal go I
To a distant shore.

I'm leaving my old friends
Forsaking family and home
My heart draws me onward
To serve my Christ.

Goodbye, O mother dear
May God be with you all
A Higher Power compels me
Toward torrid India.

The ship moves slowly ahead
Cleaving the ocean waves,
As my eyes take one last look
At Europe's dear shores.

Bravely standing on the deck
Joyful, peaceful of mien,
Christ's happy little one,
His new bride-to-be.

In her hand a cross of iron
On which the Savior hangs,
While her eager soul offers there
It's painful sacrifice.

"Oh God, accept this sacrifice
Help, please, Thy creature
To glorify Thy Name!

"In return, I only ask of Thee,
O most kind Father of us all:
Let me save at least one soul-
One you already know."

Fine and pure as summer dew
Her soft warm tears begin to flow,
Sealing and sanctifying now
Her painful sacrifice.

[Gonxhe Bojaxhiu]

"Maharaja," the devotee said, rousing me from my absorption, "we should get going. The devotees are already doing bhajan in the square."

As we hurried to where the devotees were singing, I noticed a large crowd around them. It reminded me of our public kirtans in Poland in the early 1990s. Upon reaching the devotees I was again overwhelmed by the beauty of the music and the singing. I stood quietly for several minutes listening and then spoke to the devotee with me.

"I think all of you must have been Gandharvas in your last life," I said. "Lord Caitanya sent you here to liberate these people."

I went up to a devotee giving out prasada sweets from a basket. "Would you mind giving me the basket and letting me distribute the prasada?" I asked her.

As I gradually made my way to the other side of the square with the basket, I was surprised that not a single person refused the prasada. The sound of the kirtan soon faded into the distance. Small groups of elderly women chatted on benches while their husbands played cards on rustic wooden tables. A number of young couples walked past me, obviously surprised by my bright saffron robes, but everyone was courteous and respectful. In fact, several times after a short discussion people invited me home for dinner. One elderly couple even asked if I needed a place to stay that night.

"This is where I want to be," I thought. "It's where I am happiest: distributing Krsna consciousness on the street."

I laughed to myself thinking that even the fumes from passing cars were exhilarating, as they reminded me of the years I spent distributing books and doing harinam in cities around the world.

After forty-five minutes a devotee came looking for me. "Maharaja" he said, "the devotees would like you to lead bhajan."

When we arrived back at the bhajan party I took the microphone and gave a talk, one that I've given a thousand times on the street. "I could do this forever," I thought as I spoke. "In fact, this is the path to immortality." I then remembered one of my favorite verses:

"In public places I glorify Your mercy, which is granted to even the lowest creature and which enables me, even though I am lowborn, to live in this forest of Vraja, the place where Your great devotees, filled with pure love for You, aspire to take birth even as a blade of grass."

[Sri Rupa Goswami, Utkalika-vallari, verse 65]



The next morning, after a blissful program accentuated by more beautiful bhajans, everyone started preparing for the evening program. Later, as we drove into town, I asked the devotees if there would be security at the amphitheater. Macedonia used to be part of Yugoslavia, and I thought of several incidents of violence I'd encountered years earlier in Croatia and Bosnia.

"No need," a devotee said. "We generally don't have problems."

When we arrived at 8:00 p.m. the devotees were just starting the bhajan.

"Fallen angels," I said to myself, smiling as their melodious kirtan filled the amphitheater and the square beyond. "Who would not be attracted?"

Soon the outdoor theater filled with guests. When the bhajan finished I took my seat in front of the crowd. As I was adjusting my microphone and speaking to my translator, I suddenly noticed five heavy-set well-dressed men enter the amphitheater and take up strategic positions around the festival program.

Noticing small microphones and wires sticking out from behind their ears, I thought they must be a security team. Looking off to the left, at the entrance to the program, I noticed a smaller man, most likely the head of the team, standing with two guards on either side of him.

"I guess it is actually a little dangerous down here," I thought, "but the devotees probably didn't want to alarm me. They must have hired these guys just in case something does happen."

My mind peaceful, knowing that any disturbances would be easily dealt with, I picked up a Bhagavad-gita and began my lecture. The audience was attentive and appreciating my talk, so I went deeper into the philosophy, even explaining who Krsna is: His name, fame, form, and pastimes.

Then I stressed that the philosophy of Krsna consciousness is practical in our modern age. I quoted Srila Prabhupada, who said that we have spiritual solutions to material problems. People would nod when they agreed with a point I was making, especially the chief of the security team.

In just short of an hour I finished my talk. I felt embarrassed by the rousing applause. "I only did my duty as a sannyasi," I said to my translator.

As I rose to make my way to the book table I noticed the security team moving quickly to the exit.

"Why aren't they staying until the end of the program?" I wondered.

When I arrived at the book table there was a crowd waiting for me to sign their newly purchased books. Pen in hand, I set about signing the books, as well as writing a few words of encouragement.

Suddenly a breathless devotee ran up to me. "Maharaja!" he said. "Wasn't that amazing! It's just incredible! I can't believe it."

"What happened?" I said.

"You didn't see?" he said. "The prime minister of our country attended your lecture. He arrived just as you began and stood at the entrance with guards on either side of him. He stayed to the very end of your talk."

"I saw the security," I said, "but I didn't know the prime minister was here. That certainly is the icing on the cake of a wonderful visit to Macedonia."

"There's also the cherry on top of the icing," said the devotee with a big smile.

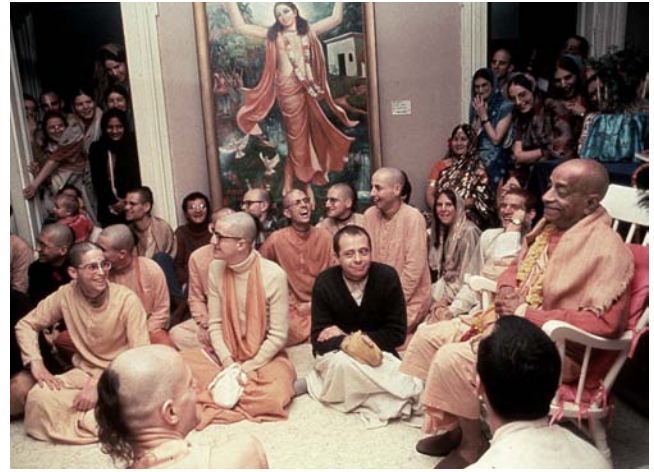
"And what could that possibly be?" I said.

"The Prime Minister sent a message with his secretary saying that he loved your talk."

I shook my head. "Lord Caitanya's mercy has no limits," I thought.

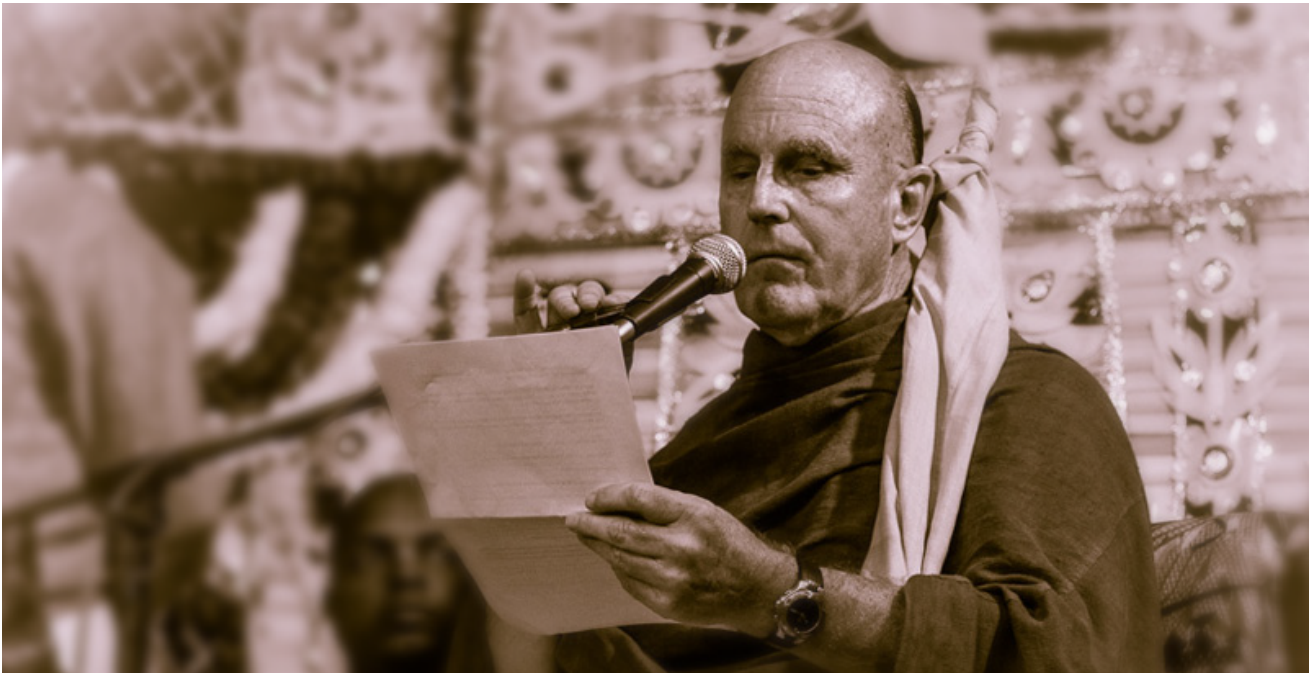
Srila Prabhupada writes:

"The Krsna consciousness movement is spreading all over the world simply by describing Krsna. We have published many books, including Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta in seventeen volumes, four hundred pages each, as well as Bhagavad-gita and The Nectar of Devotion. We are also publishing Srimad-Bhagavatam in sixty volumes. Wherever a speaker



holds discourses from these books and an audience hears him, this will create a good and auspicious situation. Therefore the preaching of Krsna consciousness must be done very carefully by the members of the Krsna consciousness movement, especially the sannyasis. This will create an auspicious atmosphere."

[Srimad-Bhagavatam 8.1.3, purport]



Dearest Srla Prabhupada,

Please accept my humble obeisances in the dust of your lotus feet. All glories to you.

As each year passes, it becomes more difficult for me to observe and celebrate the anniversary of your departure from this world. When you left I was in the infancy of my spiritual life. My eyes were just opening to the transcendental truths about the Lord which you so kindly shared with us. But what can a child understand about the Absolute truth? My attachment was to you and you alone. You authorized such sentiments when you sat up in your bed in New York's Beth Israel Hospital in 1967 and said, "I don't know Kṛṣṇa. I only know my Guru Maharaja."

It is only now, thirty-five years later, that I have obtained, by your mercy, a tiny but precious attraction to Sri Kṛṣṇa, His name, His fame, His associates and this land, His most beloved Sri Vrindavan Dhama. For that I am very grateful. But I will be honest; my strongest attachment is still to you and you alone. How could it be otherwise? You are my connection to Kṛṣṇa. Through service to you, I serve Him. Your instructions are always the foremost thing in my mind.

You told me personally: "Preach boldly and have faith in the holy names." That one instruction gave birth to all the good fortune in my life and will continue to maintain me until my final breath. In pursuit of that order, I have in turn instructed my own disciples to do the same; together, we, along with our entire ISKCON movement, are trying our best to spread the glories of the Holy Names far and wide. If there is any lamentation in my life, it is simply that as old age approaches I see there is still so much service to be done, but so little time in which to accomplish it.

Nevertheless, there remains the deep satisfaction that comes from seeing countless people all over the world touched by the mercy of your divine grace through the service of your faithful followers. And that is true even here in Sri Vrindavan Dhama.

The other day our parikrama party visited a remote village in Vraja. As we entered the village a farmer noticed us and called out, "Jai Prabhupada, Jai Prabhupada! Jai Prabhupada!" as he loaded his bullock cart with cow dung. Others villagers who were nearby heard his cries, and also called out loudly "Prabhupada! Prabhupada! Prabhupada!" It was like a transcendental chorus and it was music to my ears. How wonderful it is that you, the one who made Vrindavan famous throughout the world, are honored and remembered by those who live here even now.

"Your instructions are always the foremost thing in my mind."

Later that day, a school teacher in the same village invited me into his humble home. It was nothing more than a ramshackle dwelling with a few rooms and courtyard that had in it three cows and an old buffalo. As we entered a dusty room I was shocked to see a full set of your English Srimad Bhagavatams resting on a spotlessly clean shelf. Noting my surprise the schoolteacher beamed and said, "I only read your spiritual master's books. Whatever I know about Vrindavan I have learned from him." Standing there, I was so proud to be your disciple.

As we were leaving the village, another man noticed us and said to his friend, "Who are they?" The friend replied, "They are Vraja-vasis from Rama Reti." He didn't call us as foreigners; he identified as genuine Vraja-vasis. I can't think of anything more honourable than being called a Vraja-vasi, especially by a Vraja-vasi. Thank you Srla Prabhupada for bringing us here to Vrindavan, our eternal home, where, by your mercy, we are embraced by the local people.

It would not be difficult for me to stay here for the rest of my life. In fact, you have authorized it, for you have written:

"According to the varnasrama institution, one has to retire from family life in middle age: pancasordhvam vanam vrajet. One should voluntarily retire from family life at the age of fifty and go to Vrindavan or a forest. This is recommended by Srla Prahlada Maharaja." [Srimad Bhagavatam, 7.5.5]

Of course, I know it's too early for me to retire. Your instruction to me to preach remains intact. Even if it means defying the laws of nature, I will try to increase my preaching a thousand-fold as each year passes. And why not? You did it. At the advanced age of sixty-nine, you took on the greatest challenge of bringing Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the west. May I follow in your illustrious footsteps!

In the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement our stated goal is to one day, with purified hearts, see the Lord face to face again. I hope I am not breaking with tradition by saying that my cherished goal is to once again see you, my beloved Lord and master, face to face. Having your darsan again will naturally mean seeing Kṛṣṇa, for in the spiritual world, I will serve you in your service to Him. That will be my greatest pleasure and

my greatest treasure.

But it seems such a long time to have to wait. Fortunately I sometimes see you in dreams. You once told your disciple Hayagriva that although most dreams are simply functions of the mind, dreams of the spiritual master are of spiritual significance.

Recently I dreamt I was chanting softly outside your room one morning somewhere near the seaside. At one point you came outside wearing only a gamcha and said, "I am going to take my bath."

Nervously I said, "May I come with you Srila Prabhupada?" You nodded and I followed you down to the beach.

Reaching the shore, I saw the sea was somewhat rough so I said, "Srila Prabhupada, may I accompany you into the water to assist you?"

Again you nodded slightly and I held your hand as you entered the water. As the first waves crashed against you, I held you firmly and you quickly splashed some water on yourself. Shortly thereafter you indicated we should leave.

We came out of the water and I helped dry you off and then handed you your clothes. When you were dressed, I gave you your glasses and finally your cane and we started walking back to your room.

A few meters from the house, you stopped and turned to me.

"You did well," you said. "Thank you for your service."

I was too embarrassed to reply.

Then you said, "If you could have one wish granted, what would it be?"

I thought for a moment and replied, "I've always wanted to be your personal servant, Srila Prabhupada."

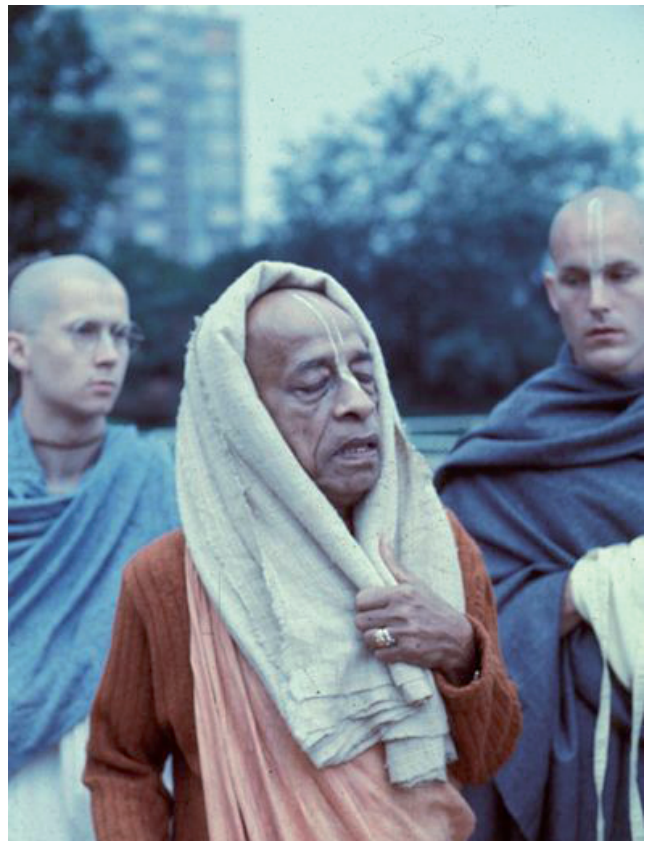
"Alright," you said. "You can travel with me. Your service will be to prepare my bath, cook for me and carry my bags."

Stunned I said, "When can I begin?"

You smiled and said, "When your preaching work is finished."

Srila Prabhupada, it was only a dream, but then again, it was a dream about you and thus it was very significant. And if ever a dream were to come true, I pray it will be that one. Until then I will continue with my service here, faithfully following your instruction to: "Preach boldly and have faith in the holy names."

Your eternal servant,
Indradyumna Swami





As our taxi slowly made its way to the airport through the Delhi traffic, Sri Nama Vanamali Krsna Dasa turned to me. "Why are you going to Bhutan?" he asked. "Everyone there is Buddhist."

"Well," I said, "it's a sannyasi's duty to travel far and wide to introduce Krsna consciousness, especially in places where people know little or nothing about our spiritual tradition."

"But I heard that in Bhutan it is forbidden to proselytize," said Sri Nama.

"That's true," I said, "and we don't plan to do so. But just by traveling and mixing with the people I am confident we can generate an interest in Krsna consciousness. What's more, I am going to Bhutan to learn something."

"Like what?" asked Sri Nama.

"I have read that the government and the people of Bhutan are very careful to maintain their ancient spiritual culture while slowly introducing material progress. That the culture exists on such a large scale in modern times intrigues me. And I believe we, as ISKCON, can learn from that."

"Over the years Bhutan has cultivated a unique approach to development based on a principle they call Gross National Happiness, whereby development in society takes place when material and spiritual advancement complement and reinforce one another. Their king said recently that Gross National Happiness is far more important than Gross National Domestic Product."

"He sounds like a king in Vedic times," said Sri Nama.

"I've heard that the people love him," I replied. "That is rare in our present times. Listen to this from this travel brochure. It's from his coronation speech in 2008."

"Throughout my reign I will never rule you as a king. I will protect you as a parent, care for you as a brother, and serve you as a son. I shall give you everything and keep nothing; I shall live such a life as a good human being that you may find it worthy to serve as an example for your children; I have no personal goals other than to fulfill your hopes and aspirations. I shall always serve you, day and night, in the spirit of kindness, justice, and equality."

"Wow!" said Sri Nama. "It reminds me of Maharaja Yudhistira's rule described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam, where all the citizens were happy."

"In a recent survey," I said, "45.2 percent of Bhutanese reported being very happy, 51.6 percent happy, and only 3.2 percent being unhappy. That's something I'd like to see."

"What's more, I am going to Bhutan to learn something."

As my Drukair flight circled the airport at Paro, Bhutan, I looked out the window at mountains as far as the eye could see. I would soon discover that the entire country is mountainous. There is hardly a straight road anywhere, most being narrow and winding along mountainsides with steep ravines.

As I exited the terminal I was met by Sri Prahlada Dasa and Sakhi Rai Dasa from Australia as well as our Bhutanese tour guide. Bhutan has taken a cautious approach to the number of foreign tourists it allows into the country, understanding the effects mass tourism could have on its environment, culture, and identity. It limits the number of tourists who visit the country each year, all tourists being obliged to visit via a government-approved travel agency.

Leaving Paro we drove one hour to Thimphu, the capital. Our first destination was Choten, a large national memorial stupa near the center of the city. As we entered the grounds I saw many people circumambulating the stupa, a practice followed by the faithful on auspicious days to gain merit. It was a closed structure with mantras, prayers, and deities inside.

Fifty or sixty pilgrims dressed in traditional Bhutanese clothes were going around the stupa chanting the age-old Buddhist mantra, "Aum mani padme hum" ("I offer my respects to the jewel within the lotus.")

"Who is that jewel within the lotus?" I asked Sri Prahlada.

He smiled. "We would say it is Laksmi, the goddess of fortune," he said, "or better yet Radharani, whose father, King Vrsabhanu, found Her on a lotus flower in a lake. That is described in the Vidagda Madhava by Srila Rupa Goswami."

"But what does the mantra mean to the Buddhists?" I asked.

"They say it is Lord Buddha on the lotus," Sri Prahlada replied.

As we left the stupa and started driving towards our hotel I was surprised to see that everyone was wearing traditional clothes.

"Is today a special day?" I asked our tour guide. "Everyone seems dressed up."

He laughed. "No," he said. "We dress like this every day. It's part of our culture. Bhutanese law requires all citizens to wear traditional dress in

public areas. Men wear a knee-length robe tied at the waist called a gho, and women wear an ankle-length dress called a keyra."

"Look at all the buildings," said Sakhi Rai. "They're all so artistic and beautiful."

"It is Bhutanese law," our guide said. "All new buildings, public and private, must follow the designs and rules of traditional architecture. It's one of the ways we safeguard our culture. You'll see throughout the country that the wooden beams, the windows, and the doors of the houses are painted with floral, animal, and religious motifs. In this way we are reminded of the Buddha throughout our daily affairs."

As we drove outside the city I could see his words coming true. Every structure had a special charm to it. What's more, I could see that religion was highly visible in every aspect of life in Bhutan. On almost every mountain ridge I saw a temple, and at every mountain pass I saw stupas and thousands of colorful prayer flags.

Prayer wheels seemed especially common, large enclosed wheels with prayers written on rolled paper. By turning the wheel one achieves the same result as by reciting the prayers. I saw many people turning the wheels while at the same time praying on their beads.

"Double the benefit," said our tour guide with a smile.

That night I had great difficulty sleeping. When I finally did fall asleep I found myself waking up from time to time gasping for air. When I woke up in the morning I had a headache.

"It's because of the high altitude," said our tour guide. "We're at almost three thousand meters. The altitude affects people in different ways. You'll get over it soon."

Later that morning we drove a hundred and thirty kilometers east to Phobjikha. It took five hours because of the mountainous terrain. Seeing me suffering from nausea, our tour guide smiled sympathetically. "We are a county of short distances, with long journeys," he said.

And for the next ten days I never conquered my fear of the vertical drops off the side of the roads.

When we finally arrived in Phobjikha we walked up a mountain trail to Gangtey Goenpa, a Buddhist monastery built in the sixteenth century. The trail was steep and winding.

I turned to our guide. "How long will it take to get up to the monastery?" I gasped.

"It's a two-hour walk," he said. "It's the only way in. There are no roads to the monastery. That would defeat the purpose. The monks live there in isolation so they can focus on their rituals and prayers. They will be chanting mantras when we arrive. We should move faster."

But Sri Prahlada, Sakhi Rai, and I couldn't go more than a few steps without stopping to catch our breath. "There's less and less oxygen as we go higher," said Sakhi Rai huffing and puffing. "It's going to take us some time to reach our destination."

Sure enough, we reached the monastery three hours later. As we entered the sacred temple I was stunned by the fact that it looked much the same as it must have in the sixteenth century. Nothing had changed. It was like going back in time. Seventy or eighty monks of different ages, sitting in lotus positions, were chanting from memory hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of verses from ancient palm-leaf scriptures at their feet.

The only light came from small windows. The guru, a large man with a shaved head, sat on an elevated seat leading the rhythmic chanting. To keep the rhythm, several monks played on drums that looked like they had been there as long as the monastery. Other monks played large brass cymbals. Two young monks, around ten years old, blew on long brass trumpets.



When I looked at the guru he motioned to me to sit down among the monks. I took out my japa beads and began chanting Hare Krsna, while studying the monks around me. I was deeply impressed. They were all so focused, intent on their spiritual practices and deeply absorbed in their faith.

As the minutes turned into an hour I felt a transformation coming over me, an awakening of the same determination they displayed. Amid the hum of the prayers, the beating of the gongs and cymbals, and the trumpeting of the horns, I found myself fixed on every syllable of the maha-mantra.

Then suddenly, without warning, everything stopped, and the monks sat silently in meditation for several minutes then opened their eyes as one of the younger monks came around with water and rice. He moved quickly from student to student, pouring a little water into each monk's cup and scooping a little rice into the monk's bowl. The guru motioned for him to bring me a cup of water and a bowl of rice as well. The monks finished their meal within sixty seconds, and the mantras and prayers began again.

"Shall we go now?" our tour guide whispered in my ear.

"I don't know," I said. "This is a very deep experience for me."

"If you want to stay, you'll have to stay for six hours," he said. "They have two six-hour sessions a day. Once you sit down, you must finish the session. It would be very impolite if you left."

Feeling a bit embarrassed, I stood up and started to leave. But just as I was going out, the guru signaled for me to come over. When I reached his sitting place, he took a sacred thread from an old box and tied it around my right hand. Then he touched a palm-leaf scripture to my head.

When he saw my beadbag he indicated he wanted see my beads. As I took them out his eyes opened wide.

"They are much used," he said.

"Yes," I replied. "I have had them for many years."

"And what is your faith?" he asked.

"I am a practicing Vaisnava," I said. "And I chant names of God on these beads."

"Which names?" he said.

"The names of Lord Krsna," I said. "Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

"May the blessings of Buddha be upon you," he said.

As we left I was struck by the fact that no one watched us go, so concentrated were the monks on their meditation.

On the long descent back down the mountain trail Sakhi Rai spoke. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "is it all right for us to have such close association with Buddhists?"

"We offer our respects to all classes of transcendentalists," I said. "We don't embrace their teachings, but we accept that they are not ordinary souls." I quoted a verse from the Srimad-Bhagavatam:

mahat sevam dvaram ahur vimuktas
tamo dvaram yositam sangi sangam
mahantas te sama cittah prasanta
vimanyavah suhrdah sadhavo ye

"One can attain the path of liberation from material bondage only by rendering service to highly advanced spiritual personalities. These personalities are impersonalists and devotees. Whether one wants to merge into the Lord's existence or wants to associate with the Personality of Godhead, one should render service to the mahatmas. For those who are not interested in such activities, who associate with people fond of women and sex, the path to hell is wide open. The mahatmas are equipoised. They do not see any difference between one living entity and another. They are very peaceful and are fully engaged in devotional service. They are devoid of anger, and they work for the benefit of everyone. They do not behave in any abominable way. Such people are known as mahatmas."

"You know," I continued, "I was impressed with the focus they have in their spiritual practices. For twelve hours a day they chant and pray. I would like to have that determination in my own sadhana."

"But their determination is to become void," said Sakhi Rai. "How can we be inspired by that?"

"The Visnu Purana uses a material analogy to compare material desire with love of Krsna," I said.

ya priti avivekanam
visayev anapayini
tvam anusmaratad sa me
hrdayan napasarpatu [1.20.19]

"Unintelligent persons have unflinching affection for the objects of sense gratification. Similarly, may I always remember You, so that that same attachment, applied to You, never leaves my heart."

"We've come to here learn, as well as to teach," I continued. "Bear in mind that this spiritual culture has existed in Bhutan for hundreds of years. Let's get some impressions of how ISKCON can also survive the ravages of time."

The next day, after I had spent another restless night combating the high altitude, we drove ten hours higher into the mountains, to Bumthang in the center of the country. Along the way we encountered many pious people who were curious about our dress and especially our beads. Many times we showed our beads and explained the process of chanting Hare Krsna.

I turned to our tour guide. "How do the Bhutanese blend modernization with their spiritual tradition?" I asked.

"We are not against material progress," he said. "It can also be used to serve our spiritual purposes. Bhutan used to be a kingdom with self-imposed isolation. It had its advantages and disadvantages. For example, in health care: communicable diseases were widespread and more than half the children born in Bhutan died at birth or within the first few years of their lives. Malaria claimed hundreds of lives each year.

"But since Bhutan opened up to modernization in 1961, with far-reaching political, social, and economic reforms, the health status of the population has improved with more than ninety percent of the population



benefiting from full health coverage.

"In 2008 Bhutan became a democracy, after hundreds of years of monarchy. The king and the National Assembly work closely together. But while we incorporate modernization, we are careful not to do so at the expense of our spiritual culture. We feel strongly that the holistic development of the individual and society can be achieved through a balance of the economic, social, emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs of the people.

"It's not always easy to find this balance, but we try our best. And once again, we judge our success by the happiness of our people. We have a saying, 'Happiness is a place.'"

After eight hours on the winding roads I needed a break and asked the driver to pull over. Getting out of the car we walked down an embankment and sat down to have lunch. I saw monkeys scampering through the thick foliage. Birds were chirping as the nearby river flowed by. It was an idyllic environment.

"It's kind of sad," I thought. "I haven't been in nature like this since I was a boy. This is calming on the self."

I took my japa beads out and began to chant. In such a natural peaceful atmosphere it was easy to focus on the holy names.

"It's obvious why the yogis in days of yore chose such places for their spiritual practices," I thought. I envisioned myself easily spending a month there in that mode-of-goodness environment.

As I chanted I happened to glance up the mountain and saw a small monastery perched high on a ledge with many small cottages around it.

"What is that?" I asked our tour guide.

"That's a special place of meditation for our monks," he said.

"I can understand how they can meditate there," I said. "I was contemplating spending a month here myself."

He chuckled. "After an initial nine years of training in a monastery," he said, "all our monks are sent to that monastery to meditate in silence for three years, three months, three weeks and three days."

My jaw dropped. "So much for my one month," I thought. Once again I was drawn to the seriousness these Buddhist monks express in their commitment to their sadhana, their spiritual practices.

"Do we have anything equivalent to such determination?" asked Sakhi Rai.

"Yes, we do," I replied. "Devotees like Haridas Thakur and Ragunath dasa Goswami chanted Hare Krsna twenty-two hours a day."

"Then why don't we do that?" he asked.

"We do as Srila Prabhupada requested," I said. "A minimum of sixteen rounds a day. But as you advance you naturally find yourself chanting more. Also, we do service to the holy names by spreading the glories of chanting Hare Krsna all over the world. For that we receive the mercy of guru and Gauranga. But here, we can pray for the determination these monks have in their daily rituals of spiritual life."

"We have come here to learn, as well as to teach," repeated Sakhi Rai with a smile.

"Yes, we have," I said. "And we are accomplishing both."

After lunch we drove on through the forested mountains. At one point we stopped at a small stupa where an elderly woman was selling her wares. I noticed what looked like a very old piece of intricately woven fabric.

I turned to our guide. "Can you ask her what that is," I said.

He spoke to the woman and then turned to me. "She said it was used by her ancestors and passed down through the generations," he said.

"This would make a perfect seat for my puja," I thought.

"How much does she want for it?" I asked our guide.

"She's asking fifty dollars," he said.

As we left the place with a newly acquired piece of Bhutanese history, the guide spoke to me. "It's actually a museum piece," he said.

Day after day we drove through the mountainous countryside, visiting monasteries, astrology schools, and administrative buildings called dzongs that serve also as small refuges for monks. Everywhere we were greeted with friendliness and respect.

"I haven't seen one person get angry since I've been here," said Sri Prahlada one afternoon. "I'm sure it happens, but in most countries you often see people get upset or angry in public."

"The way of life here bears sweet fruit," I said.

After almost two weeks we reached the furthest point of our journey, Monggar in eastern Bhutan.

"We'll be visiting a special monastery today," said our tour guide. "It's called Drametse Lhakhang. It was founded in 1511 by Ani Choeten Zangmo, the grand-daughter of the Bhutanese saint Pema Lingpa."

Although the names didn't mean much to me, they did to him, and I respectfully thanked him for the opportunity to visit there.

That afternoon as we entered the sanctified atmosphere of the monastery we again found monks chanting in the main hall with the guru seated nearby overseeing everything. We walked in slowly, sat down among the monks, and took out our beads again in an attempt to imbibe the mood of concentration.

Afterwards we were taken on a tour of the monastery. As we took in the age-old surroundings I noticed the guru standing nearby observing us.

"Let's go speak to him," I said to the others.

"No, no!" said our tour guide. "We cannot approach such men of wisdom."

"But that's what they're here for," I said.

Pulling him along I walked over to the guru. "Sir," I said, "may I have the honor of speaking with you?"

"Yes, of course," he said, smiling.

"I would like to understand the goal of your practices," I said. "What is it



you hope to achieve through a lifetime dedicated to prayer, meditation, and ritual? My understanding of Buddhism is that by eventually ceasing all material desire, one achieves a state of non-existence."

"We follow the path of Vajrayana Buddhism," the guru said, "which teaches that the consequence of deeds in previous lives, or karma, forces all beings to reincarnate. All human effort should be to attain enlightenment through which the gate to Nirvana is opened. When one reaches the state of Nirvana, he does not take birth again."

"Thank you for your explanation," I said. "But I would like to know if the soul remains an individual when attaining enlightenment. In our philosophy the liberated soul goes to a spiritual abode to associate eternally with the Supreme Soul, God."

The guru looked puzzled. He thought for a moment. "In Vajrayana Buddhism," he said, "we also believe in a heavenly abode: the land of Buddha."

"But what exactly is it like there?" I asked.

"That, no one knows," he said.

"Thank you," I said. "We will take our leave now."

On our way back to the car Sakhi Rai turned to me. "Guru Maharaja," he said, "I thought Buddhism advocated impersonalism. He was referring to a heavenly abode."

As we started driving Sri Prahlada took out his computer. "Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur had a similar encounter with a Buddhist monk," he said. "He writes in text 13 of his Tattva-viveka, First Realization, 'I once asked some questions of a Buddhist monk from Myanmar. He answered my questions by saying, 'God is beginningless. He created the entire world. Assuming the form of Buddha, He descended to this world and then again, assuming His form as God, He returned to Heaven.' From what he told me, I could see that this Buddhist monk from Myanmar did not know the true Buddhist philosophy.'"

"So what's the conclusion?" Sakhi Rai asked.

"The conclusion is that Buddha actually did advocate an atheistic philosophy," I said. "But he did so because people at that time were using the Vedas to condone the killing of animals. Therefore Buddha said, 'Don't follow the Vedas. Follow me.' Thus he tricked them into following the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

"By doing so they would gradually become purified and eventually be able to once again understand the soul as the eternal servant of God. Because the guru we just spoke to is on that path, we must respect him."

I took Sri Prahlada's computer and found ISKCON'S Interfaith Statement. I read it to Sakhi Rai: "In ISKCON we view all communities and philosophies advocating love for God and founded on revealed scripture as representative of the ultimate religious expression. We also respect the spiritual worth of paths of genuine self-realization and search for the Absolute Truth in which the concept of a personal deity is not explicit."

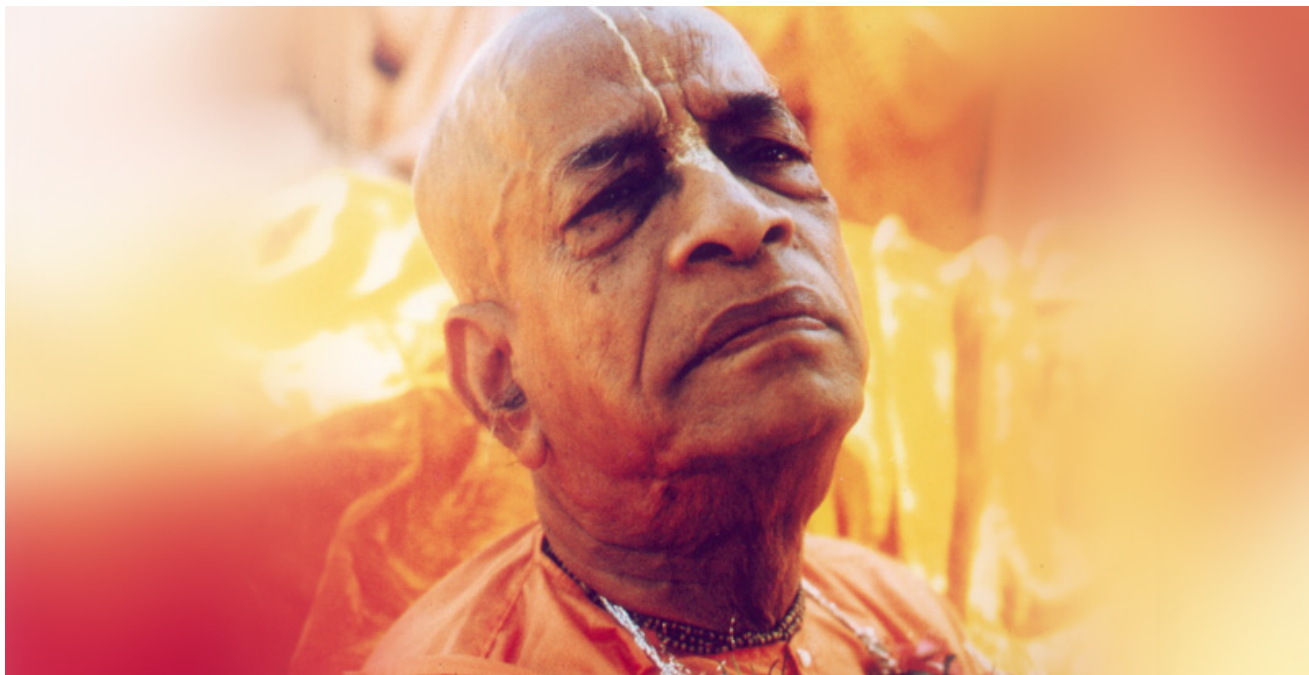
On our long journey back to Thimphu to meet the Deputy Governor of Punaka, I meditated on my good fortune: visiting an entire country devoted both in principle and practice to its faith. I prayed that the International Society for Krsna Consciousness would continue to maintain its founding principles and exist for the next 10,000 years.

The next evening I would be flying back to India. I felt enriched and wiser from my journey into the heart of Bhutan, but I hankered to be back in the transcendental abode of Vrndavana again, where the Supreme Lord performs eternal pastimes with His loving devotees. With renewed determination I looked forward to chanting, praying, and studying the sastra, just as I saw the monks do in Bhutan.

Srila Prabhupada writes:

"Either you follow Buddha philosophy or Sankara philosophy or Vaisnava philosophy, the ultimate goal is Krsna. You have to approach Krsna through these different types of philosophy. They are partial realization. Just like Brahman realization means eternity realization. Paramatma realization means eternity and knowledge. And Bhagavan realization means eternity, knowledge and blissfulness. If you realize Krsna, then you realize simultaneously Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan." [Lecture, Bombay, March 31, 1974.]





Dear Srila Prabhupada,

Please accept my humble obeisance in the dust of your lotus feet.

Here at the Devotee Youth Festival in South Africa, the devotees are glorifying your Divine Grace today. It is not your Vyasa Puja. It is not your disappearance day. It's just an ordinary day, so to speak.

But a disciple does not need a special day to glorify his spiritual master. He is always ready to glorify the spiritual master at every moment of every day throughout his entire life. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur has written:

dhyayan stuvams tasya yasas tri-sandhyam
vande guroh sri-caranaravindam

"One should always remember and praise the spiritual master. At least three times a day [sunrise, noon, and sunset] one should offer respects unto the lotus feet of the spiritual master."

Of all the topics I speak about, my favorites are your name, form, characteristics, and pastimes. I am always remembering you within my heart, speaking about you with my friends, glorifying you in the assembly of devotees, and taking great pleasure in spreading your glories among the fallen and downtrodden souls within this material world. This is only natural because you are the most important person in my life.

You were, in fact, the first devotee I was introduced to. On a warm summer evening in Ann Arbor, Michigan, just over forty years ago, I chanced upon a group of sannyasis chanting the holy names on the lawn of a university. I came forward to listen to their singing, intrigued by their dress, their demeanor, and their obvious joy.

The leader, Visnujana Swami, stopped the kirtan and called me over. "Sit down, young man," he said, "and I will tell you about the glories of my spiritual master."

As he spoke about your personality, teachings, and mission, I found myself slowly accepting you into my heart as my own spiritual teacher.

When Maharaja finished, I had a question. "Can I become his student too?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," Maharaja said. "You must. He's Prabhupada, the master

"Of all the topics I speak about, my favorites are your name, form, characteristics, and pastimes."

at whose feet all other masters sit."

That very evening, without hesitation, I decided to embrace all your instructions and thus began watering the seed that Maharaja had planted in my heart. And day by day thereafter, my faith in you increased along with the faith that you could take me home to the spiritual world, where every word is a song and every step is a dance and there is a constant festival of mirth and joy.

Wanting to surrender fully, I gave the years of my youth in service to you, that period of life when a strong body, powerful senses, and a fruitive mind convince us that there are great opportunities for sense enjoyment. But it was not hard to give those precious years to you, Srila Prabhupada, because service to you was, and will always be, the greatest happiness in my life.

In fact, I passed through youth and then middle age without even noticing it because I felt satisfied in the service of book distribution, harinama, and festivals. When we hate our work, time passes slowly, but when we love it, time seems to fly.

And so it is that I now find myself in the final stage of life—jara (old age)—described by the Bhagavad-gita as one of the four fundamental miseries of the material world. I am beginning to feel the pains that old age inflicts upon us all, but as always, my service to you brings such satisfaction and joy to my heart that I am reminded of Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Absorbed in his service to Sri Krsna, Arjuna felt the arrows of the Karauvas upon his body to be nothing more than thousands of fragrant flowers.

My godbrothers, godsisters, and I have been so fortunate to experience your blessings in our lifetimes. May we now ask something else of you? It is said that children are the future of any society, so may we ask you to also shower your blessings upon the young people of our movement?

Soon our children will inherit the responsibility that you entrusted to your direct disciples: the responsibility of preserving and spreading your

mission. Please bless them with victory. Please bless them with the same bliss we have felt in serving your divine command.

Once in Vrindavana after a public program, you and your servant left by ricksha for the Krsna Balarama Mandir in the dark night. I started walking home with some godbrothers, but I lagged behind and soon found myself alone. Suddenly your ricksha appeared as if from nowhere. You stopped the ricksha.

"What are you doing here?" you asked me.

"I am lost, Srila Prabhupada," I said.

You smiled. "Then follow me home," you said.

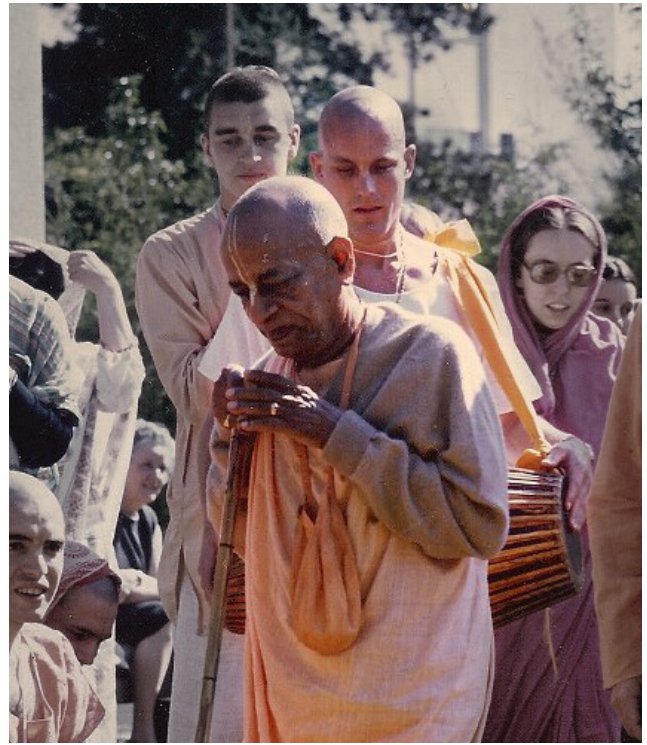
So I ran behind your ricksha the whole way back to Krsna Balarama Mandir.

My dearest master, may I continue running behind you all the way back to the spiritual world, and there, in that transcendental abode, may I serve your every need and desire. May your work here in this world never go in vain. May countless souls experience the satisfaction of taking shelter of your lotus feet for ten thousand years to come.

All glories to you!

Your servant,

Indradyumna Swami.





■ Your Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini, Your Excellency President Jacob Zuma, Distinguished KZN Premier Dr Zweli Mkhize, ministers and government officials, ladies and gentlemen;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I will get straight to the point. There is no need to elaborate on South Africa's social ills: each of us in our own way has felt the repression, aggression and frustration of living in a society split by ethnic, tribal, religious, economic and political divisions. In our heart of hearts each of us desires a truly cohesive society that respects the rights of all others and works as a united body.

My humble proposal today is based on the teachings of the sacred texts of India: it is that social cohesion will be achieved only when we stop seeing our differences and recognize what we have in common. But what do we have in common in a country where language, economic situation, religion and skin color differs so radically from person to person? What we have in common is that we all created by the same God. Think about this for a moment: if we are all created by God, then we have a common father. If two people have the same father they are brother and sister. If four people have the same father they are brothers and sisters. And if fifty million people have the same father they are brothers and sisters. My point is that we are all brothers and sisters here in South Africa. God the Father is the common denominator, the cohesive factor uniting the people of this county.

But one may ask: which God is the common father? The Christian God? The Muslim God? The Hindu God? The Jewish God? No. Just as there is one sun that is known by different names in different parts of the world, God is known by different names such as Christ, Allah, Adonai, Krsna and Un-kulun kula. It is important to understand this, for to achieve perfect social cohesion we must transcend even our religious differences. In other words, we must unite on the spiritual platform by realizing we are all part of the greater family of God. There is a saying about family attachment: "Blood is thicker than water." If we understand that God is the Supreme Father and that we are all his children, the bond between us will be unbreakable.

Another important point is that when we recognize our common identity, our differences will complement each other. In a symphony orchestra the individual instruments are distinctly different but when they play together under the direction of the conductor the effect is simply wonderful. In the same way, when we respect our differences as Africans, whites, coloreds and Indians while realizing our common identity as eternal

servants of God, the supreme conductor, there will be social cohesion in South Africa.

We try to demonstrate this principle in the Hare Krsna movement by propagating the chanting of God's names in public. One tangible result is that in any number of our centers around the country there are now micro-societies of Africans, whites, coloreds and Indians living together in perfect harmony. We want to share this good fortune with others and we try to do so on a daily basis by breaking down social barriers in a practical way. For example, for the past twenty-four years our movement has distributed tens of millions of plates of hot, nutritious food in low income areas such as the outlying towns and villages of Kwazulu Natal. Our pledge today is to work together with others to achieve nothing short of a "Hunger-Free South Africa." When the children of this land are fed they can concentrate on their education, and with education comes career and stability. When there is stability in the lives of the citizens there is less crime and violence; people are more likely to treat one another with generosity and to see each other's commonalities.

We are also attempting to achieve social cohesion by organizing a grand cultural event called the Festival of the Chariots on the Durban beach-front over the Easter weekend in late March. The theme of the festival is similar to the one promoted by today's program: "Culturally many, spiritually one". We encourage all ethnic and religious groups to participate in the seminars and to perform on the main stage. King Goodwill has already graciously accepted our invitation.

In conclusion, let us respect our differences and recognize our common bond as children of God so that we may truly become the Rainbow Nation, a nation of different colors and cultures that is united on the spiritual platform. It is said that there is a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. In a country like South Africa that is blessed with so much diversity, culture and religion, that pot of gold will be the respect we show for each other and the sense of national pride that will flow forth when we finally recognize that we are all brother and sisters.

By solving South Africa's social ailments, the citizens of this great country can one day stand united as an example for the whole world. It is possible. It not a dream. It is not a fantasy for the Vedas say, vasudhaiva kutumbakam: "The whole world is but one family."

May God bless you all. May God bless South Africa. Hare Krishna.



Dear Sir,

I hope you are the right person to address my concerns. I am an associate of Iskcon and follow various devotees. I was following Indradyumna Swami on Facebook and noticed that he was in South Africa. On the 23rd day of March, 2013 I noticed that the photos placed onto his Facebook profile are obviously promoting the ANC and President Zuma. I feel very aggrieved by the fact that Indradyumna Swami/ Iskcon is promoting a Political Party and feel that no Spiritual Person should be preaching from the Podium of a Political Party or Promoting them. The Promotion of the ANC is very blatant.

Feedback would be appreciated.

Regards ...

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter. I am writing to address the concerns you have raised.

In ancient Vedic culture, a king—who was the essence of government at the time—always had an advisory council of brahmana priests to help him in his decision making. These brahmanas were not politically aligned. They were present simply to remind the king of his ultimate duty: to facilitate the spiritual emancipation of the society he governed. In contrast to the situation in the secular governments of today, these priests assisted the king in making sure that the principles of religion (cleanliness, truthfulness, mercy and austerity) were being practiced in the kingdom. The brahmanas did not tell people which religion to follow, but encouraged the universal principles of religion. Without such principles human society becomes divested of its real purpose in life.

Spiritual personalities are required to help guide human society. Therefore, to some degree, they are involved in politics. Politics means to govern and, in Vedic terms, governing entails two basic responsibilities: helping people to live in this world and helping them to get out of it and to go back to their original home in the spiritual sky. The kings understood this but had to be reminded of the principles of spiritual governance.

"Spiritual personalities are required to help guide human society."

This is evident in Lord Krsna's words in Bhagavad Gita:

evam parampara praptam
imam rajasayo viduh
sa kaleneha mahata
yogo nasta parantapa

"This supreme science was thus received through the chain of disciplic succession, and the saintly kings understood it in that way. But in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science as it is appears to be lost." [BG 4.2]

In this light, my association with the ruling party (ANC) should be not seen as having any political ambitions or as an endorsement of a particular political agenda. Rather, following in the line of Vedic culture I was present at their recent meeting in the mood of acting as a "brahminical council." In my opening prayer I stated:

"We stand before You (God) today as one people. Though diverse in our appearance as black, white, Indian and colored, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew and those of African spiritual traditions we share a common bond in that we are all Your begotten children. Let this ultimate spiritual truth be the way forward for achieving social harmony, thus uniting us as one nation with democratic freedoms and equal opportunities for all."

This brings up another important point: the government is presently trying to resolve the ongoing issue of social cohesion without any success to date, despite many long years of endeavor. This is because the solution to the problem cannot be found in politics. However, there is an ideal spiritual solution: stop fighting over our obvious differences and try to see what we have in common. What is it that we have in common? It is that we are all created by the same God. God is one with many names. Because we are all—each and every one of us—created by Him, we are essentially all brothers and sisters. If we have the same Father, we are brothers and sisters.

The politicians need to hear this. They are making and dissolving laws. But without knowing and understanding the universal laws of God from the brahmanas how can they effectively rule? This is the general problem in modern day politics: people have chosen to ignore God for the most part. So regardless of who is in power or which party is ruling, the duty of those who know these truths is to guide the leaders. If that means attending their rallies to openly share these spiritual truths, so be it.

I have shared these truths with democrats, socialists, communists and kings. I am not partial to the ANC. But I am duty-bound as a devotee of the Lord to mix with these people and to humbly try to persuade them to understand how to remedy some of the social evils we face in modern times. My spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, once said to a godbrother of mine: "Write a book called 'Spiritual Solutions to Material Problems.'"

The leaders will not come to us, so we must go to them. That is a clear instruction from my spiritual master. In 1972 he wrote:

"So far your ideas about influencing the leaders of society, yes, that must be done. If such leaders of society can be influenced to preach on our behalf, help us to spread Krsna consciousness in some practical way, that is the best service."

So in essence I was using the podium of the ANC meeting to share ideals of spiritual governance with those present. And I must add that we devotees were well-received by the members of that organization and were treated with all due respect and kindness, for which we are grateful.

As a result of my association with the ANC, the local Durban City Council gave us permission to hold our Festival of Chariots on the prestigious Durban beachfront. This allows hundreds of thousands of people to be introduced to Krsna consciousness.

The photo album that followed my speech at the ANC function was simply to highlight the fact that we were there to share spiritual ideals, to remind the leaders of their highest responsibilities and to encourage them to support our festival on the beachfront. If ten years from now there is another political party in power I'll do the same thing. Please don't see it that devotees who meet with politicians are promoting a political party—be it the ANC or anyone else. We are promoting Krsna. We can't do that by sitting at home. We have to go out and be active for Krsna.



"I am glad that you are entering politics. This will be a good opportunity to preach widely and sell our literatures, so take advantage." [Srila Prabhupada letter to Balavanta das, 1972]

Hare Krsna,

With affectionate regards,
Indradyumna Swami



From Durban's SundayTribune
March 31, 2013.
Article by Vivian Attword.

"The Rath Yatra, or Festival of the Chariots, comes full circle this year; finally returning to the place it was first celebrated in Durban – at the Amphitheatre on the Bay of Plenty. In a fresh incarnation that, more than ever, expresses the open-handed generosity of Hare Krishna devotees, the event has drawn in people of every culture, creed, colour and persuasion in a glorious spectacle spanning four days.

After a week of dire weather; Friday dawned clear and hot and thousands gathered to take part in the ritual of pulling the three massive chariots and the sacred deities along the beachfront. A thousand bright flags bearing the slogan "Culturally Many – Spiritually One" were held aloft and waved by excited children and adults alike.

To the intoning of the mantra "Hare Krishna, Hare Rama", many hands grasped the thick and wiry ships' ropes tethered to the chariots and began a two-hour exercise in devotion that left those hands blistered, but spirits high.

"Come, take the rope and walk a little way with us," said a priest gently, and we joined the procession for a time. It was impossible not to feel proud to be a part of a moment of perfect unity in the city where the sun always shines.

A cacophony of sound surrounded us, as waves of dancers and musicians swept by, celebrating the Zulu tradition alongside Indian culture and with even a nod to colonialism in the form of toothy little drum majorettes and a skirling Scottish bagpipe band.

There were jazz trumpeters with dazzlingly polished instruments, great Chinese dragons snaking through the masses and even SpongeBob SqaurePants and Co to delight the tots.

"We have a lot of clashing in our country on political, racial and even religious grounds, but we are all spiritually interconnected," said His Holiness Bhakti Swami Chaitanya, governing body commissioner for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in South Africa.



"We wanted people to realise more clearly that underlying all our differences is a spiritual oneness, and embrace that on a practical level. We are coming together to celebrate our spiritual unity."

The Festival offers a diverse programme today and tomorrow, with demonstrations, seminars, free mass yoga classes and music.

Whether you want to enhance your spiritual understanding, try out the delicious cuisine, marvel at jugglers, mime artists and stilt walkers or learn more about the environment and your role in maintaining its balance, this event is unmissable.

The KZN Philharmonic will perform today at 6pm, and the sensational Freshlyground will transport your senses tomorrow (also at 6pm).

Programmes are available free of charge and for those on a shoestring budget, they can enjoy a really delicious free meal – one of tens of thousands that will fill empty tummies this weekend.

The festival grounds stretch from the sunken garden at the old Amphitheatre on North Beach, right along the lawns at the Bay of Plenty. Ample parking is available."



Dear Ananta-santi Prabhu,

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

It was with great sadness that I learned of your recent departure. I rarely, if ever, express any deep emotion, but upon hearing of your demise I broke down and cried, for you have always been a true hero to me. By the Lord's arrangement, you met our spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, on his first visit to the former Soviet Union in June, 1971. Knowing your heart, he initiated you after only a few days and instructed you to spread Lord Caitanya's movement throughout your country. Srila Prabhupada's confidence in you was revealed when he said of you, "Just as you can judge whether rice is properly cooked by picking out one small grain, so you can know an entire nation by observing one of its handpicked youths."

With Srila Prabhupada's blessings you fearlessly proceeded to spread the holy names around the Soviet Union, often at great risk. Your effort was initially single-handed, but you made devotees and soon their preaching was causing great alarm amongst the communist leaders of the time. In a 1981 issue of *Kommunist*, the official journal of the Communist Party, Semyon Tsvigun, the Deputy Chairman of the KGB secret police, wrote that "the three greatest threats to the Soviet way of life are Western culture, rock-and-roll music, and Hare Krishna."

Such warnings did not deter you, however, and you continued preaching Krsna consciousness with great vigor. After 11 years, your efforts finally attracted the attention of the KGB who arrested you in 1982.

While awaiting trial, you were confined to the Butyrskaya Investigations Prison. In June, 1983, you were tried and found guilty of "infringement of person and rights of citizens under appearance of performing religious ceremonies." As punishment you were committed to the dreaded Smolensk Special Psychiatric Hospital rather than being put into prison. This enabled the authorities to keep you for an indefinite period of time. In the psychiatric hospital, you were continuously administered haloperidol, a neuroleptic drug that caused convulsions in your facial muscles and deterioration of your mental condition. In April, 1986, you were transferred to the Special Psychiatric Hospital in Oryol where you received the same severe treatment.

By that time, you and the other imprisoned devotees in the Soviet Union had attracted worldwide attention from human-rights organizations and devotees from within our movement. When numerous parcels and letters

"Just as you can judge whether rice is properly cooked by picking out one small grain, so you can know an entire nation by observing one of its handpicked youths."

began arriving at the psychiatric hospital, the staff responded by strapping you to your bed and administering large doses of the drug sulfazine. This caused you to suffer high fevers, pain, and hallucinations. When your wife visited the hospital and asked the doctors when you would be released they replied, "One's understanding of life and reality are not so quickly cured."

Years later you were freed, but being acutely affected by the inhumane treatment you received in prison, you drifted away from devotional service and the association of devotees for some time. No one should hold this against you, however, for it was clearly the result of the hideous drugs administered to you during your confinement. In recent years, you re-established loving relationships with many devotees and took up the practice of Krsna consciousness again.

My dear godbrother, Ananta-santi, I have no doubt that upon leaving your body you were delivered straight to the spiritual world where Srila Prabhupada personally received you and engaged you in service. Surely the residents of that transcendental abode must have arranged a magnificent festival to honor you on that day. Certainly you deserved it. The sacrifices you made in spreading Krsna consciousness, the suffering you underwent in executing that mission, and the determination you displayed to serve the order of our spiritual master are rare even amongst Gaudiya Vaisnavas.

May all Vaisnavas know of your exploits. May they honor the pain you endured and the faith you regained despite all efforts by communist authorities to destroy it. Lest we forget, may we constantly remember your unique contribution to Lord Caitanya's sankirtan movement. From your transcendental position please look down upon this humble soul and grant me the same courage that you had to spread the glories of the holy names far and wide despite the greatest opposition.

With the deepest respect and admiration,

Your servant,

Indradymna Swami



Anatoli Fedorovich Pinyayev (Ananta-santi dasa) was the first Soviet Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee. Because of his active preaching throughout the USSR and because of the spiritual influence he had on many people, he was subjected to severe persecution for five and a half years at the hands of the staff at various Soviet psychiatric hospitals. The following excerpts are from an interview with him conducted in February 1988.

I started preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness after Srila Prabhupada visited Moscow in 1971. Gradually people in the Soviet Union became more and more attracted to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and it became quite widespread. The authorities, however, became afraid because so many from the intelligentsia were interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Everything spiritual was considered to be criminal and thus they started repressions.

It was just like an explosion of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Soviet Union. The authorities were terrified so they tried to discredit the movement and present it as simply a group of crazy criminals. Because I was the first one to preach and the only disciple of Srila Prabhupada, they tried to repress me and present me as a crazy criminal. The court accused my godbrothers and me of teaching vegetarianism, which they said is harmful to the body, and for teaching mantras and praying, which they said is harmful for a person's mental condition. On this ridiculous pretext they were accusing us.

I was imprisoned and they tried to present every person who was following Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this country as crazy. They then put me in a mental prison, a mental jail. There the doctors said that they were taught that religious believers are insane, and that only insane persons can think that there is a God, that there is spirit, and that we are not these bodies but spiritual sparks.

I was given courses of medication for many months. They gave me drugs three times a day. It was so bad that I was only able to lie in bed. This drug was special; it made it impossible to concentrate on anything. If I tried to chant loudly they would give me such large doses that I could have died. Lying on the bed I had so much material discomfort; these drugs make you restless and force you to change the position of your body all the time. I was feeling very weak and so much discomfort. It was just like torture for months and years. The only pause in the torture was when I was sleeping at night.

Initially, when the psychiatrists considered me crazy, they brought me from the regular prison to a psychiatric prison in Smolensk. It was on the

"The authorities, however, became afraid because so many from the intelligentsia were interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

same site as the ordinary prison but it had special cells for psychiatric prisoners. It had the bad aspects of both a mental asylum and prison. We were living in small cells with about twenty people in each. There was not enough fresh air. We took baths irregularly, sometimes not for 23 days. Many people there had insects on their bodies.

The entire place was very dirty. The food was prepared very badly. People there often had their teeth fall out and their gums would bleed. I was taking very little food. Everything was a problem there. Even the janitors were criminals. It was a place for crazy criminals and there was constant fighting amongst them. There was pressure from the doctors, the janitors, the criminals, everyone. Everyone was very much disturbed. My relatives were told that I would never be released.

The prisoners were punished for everything. I was trying to wash my clothes and every morning I tried to wash at least parts of my body. But I was punished many times for this. They did not like this. The janitors tried to beat me up several times.

There was psychological pressure all the time. Drugs were given for any reason and on any pretext. Somehow or the other the doctors decided I was eligible for release from this special psychiatric prison to a normal psychiatric prison. The KGB did not like this because their aim was to keep me there for my whole life. So instead I was transferred to another special psychiatric prison in the city of Oryol.

Everyone in that place was astonished by the fact that I was imprisoned for preaching religion. They saw that the authorities were especially oppressive towards me; they could not understand why.

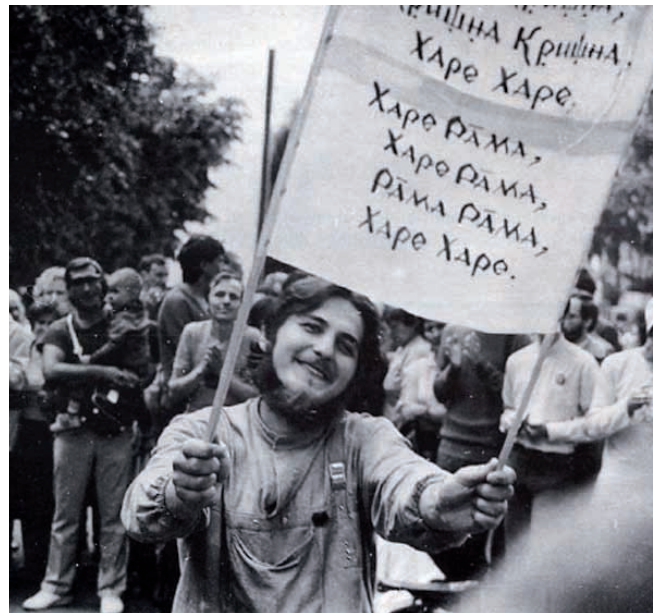
I found out from my mother that my godbrothers all over the world had started a campaign for my release, as well as the release of other imprisoned devotees in the Soviet Union. The situation changed a little. During the last half year in Oryol some changes were expected, so I started to preach more at that time.

In Smolensk I was kept in one ward where there was a doctor who was famous for his sadistic inclinations. In Oryol, however, my last doctor told

me that I was completely sane. He said he understood that I was in the mental prison because of the political situation. Before "perestroika" every aspect of spiritual and intellectual life was oppressed in our country. He said, "Time is working for you. Because of the changes in our society and because of the help from abroad, sooner or later you will be released." He was a little compassionate towards me and I preached to him. I was very thankful to my godbrothers and people all over the world who did something to somehow release me.

I was released from the Oryol psychiatric prison in a very strange and unusual way. One day my doctor called me in and said he was a little bit agitated. He told me that some papers had come from Moscow saying that I should be released. He said that there would be a special professor coming from Moscow to be part of a medical commission that would release me.

When the professor came, he talked to my doctor for a long time about me without me being present. In the end he told my doctor, "Yes, he is completely sane. We will release him, but we will leave his diagnoses for now because his condition may appear again in the future." When my doctor told me about this, I requested him to ask the professor, "Who can guarantee that *you* will not go crazy after some time?" My doctor told me, "Yes, I asked him this question and he told me that he also finds the symptoms of mental disease within himself."



Most of the following devotees have been officially adopted by Amnesty International as:

Prisoners Of Conscience



Sannyasa dasa
(Suren Karapetyan)
Sannyasa dasa, twenty-nine years old, graduated in cybernetics from Yerevan State University. He is confined indefinitely in a Soviet psychiatric hospital.



Kamalamala dasa
(Karen Saakyan)
A twenty-nine-year-old radio technician, he is confined indefinitely in a Soviet psychiatric hospital.

Sachisuta dasa
(Sarkis Ohanjanyan)
Sachisuta is serving two years in a labor camp.

Sarvabhavana dasa
(Gagik Buniatyan)
Gagik Buniatyan is serving a two-year sentence in a labor camp.

Advaita Acharya dasa
(Agvan Arutyunyan)
Agvan is serving a three-year sentence in a labor camp.



Yamaraja dasa
(Jacov Dzidzhevadze)
A thirty-year-old musician, Yamaraja is serving two and a half years at a labor camp in Sukhumi.



Japa dasa
(Yuri Fedchenko)
A graduate in biology from Moscow State University, thirty-one-year-old Japa dasa is serving a four year sentence in a labor camp in the Stavropol Territory.



Visvamitra dasa
(Vladimir Kritski)
Visvamitra is a computer scientist serving eight years in a strict regimen labor camp near Perm and is thirty-six years old.



Vakresvara Pandita dasa
(Ashot Shaglamdzyan)
Vakresvara Pandita is serving two and a half years in a labor camp.



Anatoli Samollov
Anatoli is serving three years in a labor camp.



Amala-Bhakta dasa
(Yevgeny Lyubinsky)
Amala-Bhakta is serving a four-year sentence in a labor camp. He has a wife and three small children.

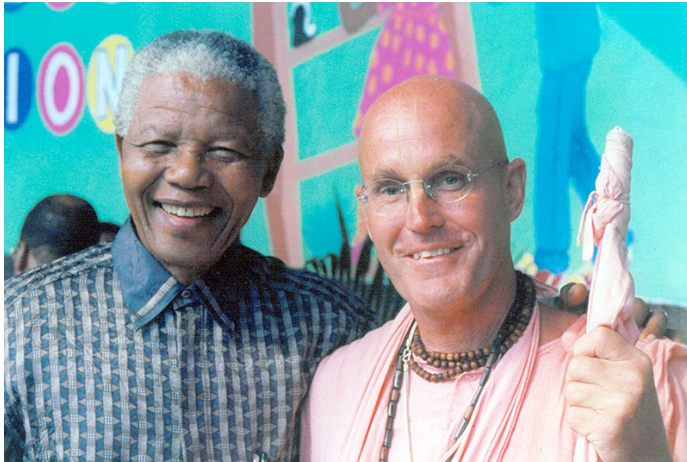
Nugzar Chargaziya
Nugzar is serving two years in a labor camp.

Sanatana-Kumara dasa
(Sergei Priborov)
A music instructor, Sanatana-Kumara is now serving a four-year sentence in a labor camp in the Stavropol Territory.

Atmananda dasa
(Armen Saakyan)
Formerly a scientist at the Yerevan House of Scientists, thirty-two-year-old Atmananda dasa is confined indefinitely in a Soviet psychiatric hospital.

Asutosa dasa
(Aleksei Musatov)
At twenty-eight years of age, Asutosa is indefinitely confined to the Special Psychiatric Hospital in Smolensk. He previously worked as a kindergarten guard.

Alexander Levin
Alexander is currently serving four and a half years of compulsory labor in Udmurtskaya A.S.S.R. He is a twenty-six-year old journalist.

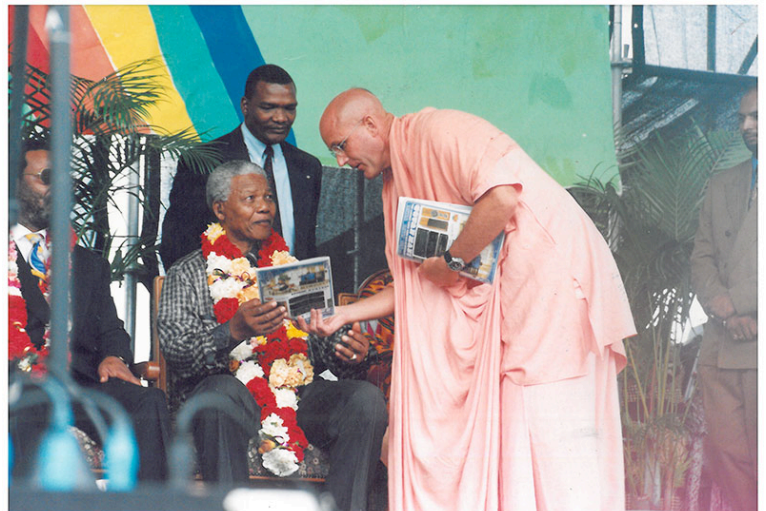


***Memorial Address for Nelson Mandela
Delivered at Edison Power Group
Memorial Function
Durban, South Africa
December 6, 2013***

Dearest Madiba,

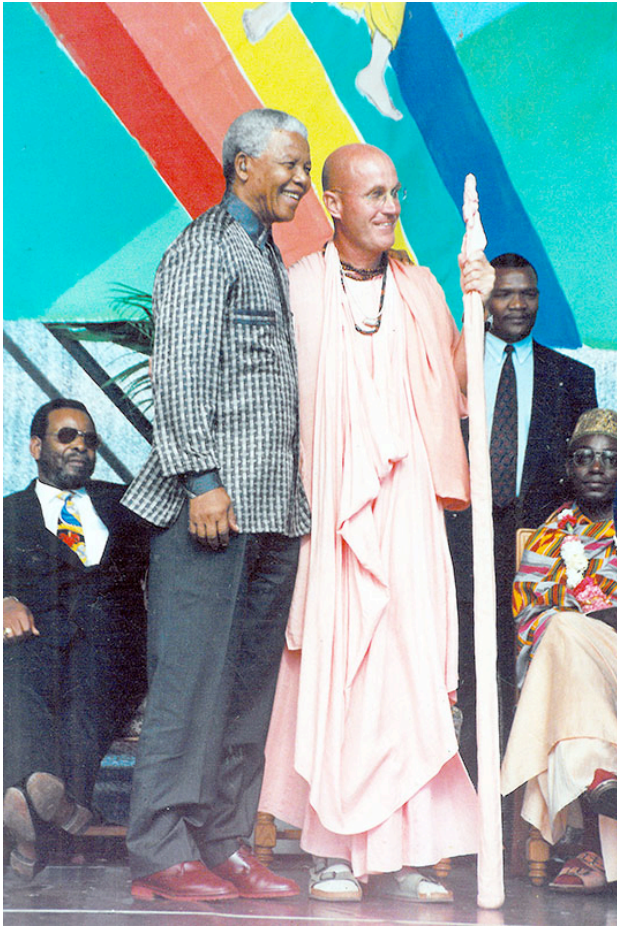
It was with profound sadness that I learned of your departure from this world yesterday. Though all of us were aware that your demise was imminent, somehow we find it difficult to accept you are no longer with us. In more ways than one, you were the leader of this great nation of South Africa, a profound statesman, a courageous freedom fighter, the veritable father of this nation, the most resilient prisoner ever born. At the same time, you were humble, tolerant and wise, and possessed a seemingly bottomless capacity to forgive. The list of your good qualities goes on and on.

But Madiba, tonight I would like to address what I feel was your greatest quality: your ability to make everyone - regardless of their race, religion or creed - feel welcome under your leadership. I experienced this personally when you graciously accepted the Hare Krishna Movement's invitation to be our special guest at the "Festival for The Children of the Rainbow Nation" in 1997. The long program was attended by 50,000 boisterous children, and, after it was over, I was walking you back to your car, surrounded by many security men.



I was anxious about whether you had enjoyed and appreciated the event, so I turned to you and asked, "Mr. President, did you like the festival?" You stopped and taking both of my hands in yours said, "Maharaja, this was the very best day of my life!" Suddenly all the anxiety and fatigue I was experiencing, all the worries and woes associated with organizing a program of such magnitude vanished. You kept holding my hand until we reached your car and as you got in you smiled at me as if to say, "Well done." I realized your greatness came not only from your ability to accomplish great political feats, but also in your kindness and compassion to reach out and touch the hearts of the private citizen, even a foreigner like me who was trying through spiritual ideology to propagate your desire for social cohesion.

Madiba, you had a unique ability to rise above all political, ethnic, tribal and religious barriers to help the citizens of this country identify as one people, as South Africans. Historians have discussed - and will continue to discuss -



your ability not only to forgive and exonerate your enemies but also to engage them in rebuilding this great nation. Where is such an example in the recent history of the world? I do not think it exists apart from your selfless efforts.

Nevertheless, men like you must be at helm of every country and nation in the world, for Lord Krishna says in His Bhagavad-gita:

yad yad acarati sresthas / tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramanam kurute / lokas tad anuvartate

“Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.” (Bhagavad-gita 3.21)

Madiba, thank you for taking a moment of your precious time to encourage a simple soul like me. And thank you for affirming your care and concern when we met on a flight from Johannesburg to Mauritius years later. I was sitting in business class waiting for the flight to take off when a team of security men boarded and began barking orders to everyone to move back to the economy section. Most passengers jumped up and moved, but I was slower because I had a number of possessions to gather. The head of the security was screaming at me to move on, when you entered the cabin.

“Maharaja, what a pleasure to see you on this flight,” you said. “Please sit next to me and we will converse on the flight to Mauritius.”

The security man’s jaw dropped as I moved over and sat in the aisle seat across from yours. We chatted for some time and I answered your questions about how the Hare Krishna Movement could help the people of South Africa. You showed special interest in the idea that peace would come to the country when everyone realized they were part of the greater family of God.

As we approached our destination, you said, “So Maharaja, the event your movement organized years ago was really great. I can still see the smiling faces of all those thousands of children.”

“Yes, Madiba” I said. “It was historic.”

Madiba, those of us present tonight join with the people of this nation and pledge to carry on the great work you started: the preservation and unification of all the people of this land.

In closing, I want to say it was an honor to be a small part of your historic life. It was an honor to be a part of the history of this great nation of South Africa.

With deep gratitude,
Indradyumna Swami

