

“He Was a Great Sainly Person”

In December of 1970, Srila Prabhupada spent fourteen days in Surat, India, with twenty-five of his Western disciples. Five years earlier, he had traveled to the west on the order of his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, to spread Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. ISCKON was still a fledgling movement when he returned to India, but he had a strong desire to preach there.

The India of the 1970s was a place in which spiritual culture was in rapid decline. At the behest of its political leaders, it was following the path of capitalism forged by Western powers. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, once said: “We have achieved political freedom but our revolution is not yet complete and is still in progress, for political freedom without the assurance of the right to live and to pursue happiness, which economic progress alone can bring, can never satisfy a people.”

Srila Prabhupada wanted to remind the people of India that the country's real glory was in it's spiritual culture; this alone could give the



lasting satisfaction and happiness we all desire. The Srimad Bhagavatam is clear on this fact:

sa vai pumsam paro dharmo
yato bhaktir adhoksaje
ahaituky apratihata
yayatma suprasidati

“The supreme occupation for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.” [SB 1.2.6]

Srila Prabhupada's approach to resolving India's spiritual dilemma was very interesting: he returned with his Western disciples to show his countrymen how Vedic culture was capturing the imagination of the entire world. He proudly called his Western disciples, “dancing white elephants.” A white elephant is revered in India and is seen as a sign of royalty.

Nothing could have prepared Srila Prabhupada and his disciples for the reception the people of Surat gave them. The people of Gujarat are famous for being Kṛṣṇa's devotees, but their enthusiasm in welcoming Prabhupada was unprecedented: the whole city closed down, throngs of people headed by the mayor greeted the party at the railway station, thousands attended the lectures and kirtans that Srila Prabhupada gave during his visit, and hundreds of people followed the devotees' daily harinams. During those famous kirtans, shop owners would offer devotees various goods and wares, and people would garland them, anoint them with sandalwood paste and shower them with flower petals.

For eight of their days in Surat, Srila Prabhupada and his disciples stayed at the home of Mr. Bhagubhai Jariwala, a wealthy and pious businessman. Each morning Srila Prabhupada would take a morning walk through the

neighborhood, and would then give a lecture on the first floor of Mr. Jariwala's house. Neighbors would often attend.

Forty-four years after Srila Prabhupada's visit, I found myself in Surat with forty devotees while on a seven-week festival tour of the main cities in Gujarat. I asked the local devotees about Srila Prabhupada pastimes there and they surprised me by saying that our first program would be in a hall that Srila Prabhupada had himself held a program. That night thousands of people came to our four-hour show which included classical Indian dance, theater, martial arts, puppet shows and a big kirtan. I gave my lecture on Bhagavad Gita that night from the very spot in which Srila Prabhupada had spoken. I distinctly felt his presence and empowerment.

The next day the local devotees offered to take our group to Mr. Jariwala's house. It turned out the house was a small four-story apartment building; the windows and doors were all heavily bolted with locks and chains. Standing in front of the building, I noticed many people coming out of their homes, curious to see so many foreigners in their neighborhood.

I tried to envision Srila Prabhupada at this heavily barricaded place.

"Do you think they would let us go inside?" I asked the devotee who had brought us.

"Not very likely," he said. "Mr. Jariwala passed away years ago. His

grandson sold the building to a man that the locals say is a drug dealer; they say he stores all his contraband in the house. You can see he has made it into a small fortress."

"We should still try," I said.

One of the neighbors came forward. "The problem is that no one has ever seen the new owner. Apparently he lives a few streets away, but no one



will dare go to see him personally."

"I'll go," said a tall, stout teenager. "I don't believe the rumors anyway."

"We'd appreciate that," I said. "It would mean a lot to our devotees to have the chance to see where our spiritual master stayed while he was here."

More and more neighbors gathered, and more people started speaking up.

"I saw your spiritual master," said one man. "I was seven years old when he came and stayed in our neighborhood. I used to see him going for a walk

in the morning with his disciples. All of the local children would follow him; he was always talking about Lord Krsna. He made such an impression on us. We would watch him as he paced back and forth on the balcony up there. He would often wave to us, and we felt privileged because we understood he was a great saintly person."

"When he came back to the house he would lecture from the Srimad Bhagavatam," said another man. "I remember how he used to effortlessly quote so many verses from the scriptures. I too was just a boy at the time, but I didn't miss a single class."

"Then every day after the class, he would send his disciples to sing harinam around the neighborhood for one hour," said an older man. "Everyone loved it, and huge crowds would join them. I was twenty years old at the time. Once I approached him and asked how he knew so much about Krsna. He smiled and gave me a copy of Bhagavad-Gita. In fact, he even signed it. I still have it and I read it ever day."

"I remember my parents preparing fruit and sweets for him and his disciples," a woman said. "They would take everything on silver plates to Swamiji and his disciples in the evenings. I remember my mother polishing the silver plates every



afternoon. She told me: 'Everything has to be perfect for the guru.'

"Nobody knew of the Hare Krsna Movement before he came," another woman said. "We

were mesmerized when he suddenly arrived with his white-skinned disciples. His disciples were very serious about their devotional activities. Some of us became more serious about our own

devotion to Lord Krsna as a result of seeing their sincerity. In fact, after all these years people in this neighborhood still talk about his visit."

"My parents used to talk about his visit, but I never met him," another man said. "Are you his disciple?"

"Well, yes I am," I said.

The people looked impressed.

"You are very fortunate," one of them said.

"Yes, I am," I replied, trying to contain a wave of emotion that overcame me.

"Are you going to sing like your friends did when they were here all those years ago?" asked one of the children. "That would be wonderful!"

"Yes, we are going to sing," I replied. "But I was hoping to be able to get inside the building to"

I didn't complete my sentence because I saw the people become suddenly anxious. The crowd parted and a large man, obviously the

owner of the house, walked towards me. He was dressed like a perfect gentleman; he didn't look like a drug dealer to me, but from the corner of my eye I saw some of the children



run into their homes and close the doors.

"I understand you want to go inside my house," the man said in a deep voice. I couldn't tell whether what he said was a challenge or a simple inquiry.

"Sir, my spiritual master, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, stayed in your home with his disciples when he visited Surat forty-four years ago. We would be most honored if we could see the rooms he stayed in."

He broke into a big smile. All my apprehensions melted away.

"You are most welcome to visit my house," he said. "I would be honored. I have heard of your spiritual teacher. He was a great saintly person. Great sinners need the mercy of saints." He winked at the crowd, obviously aware of the rumors circulating about him.

"Follow me," he said, as he led us across the street. He unlocked several padlocks and beckoned us. "I will show you where he gave his classes."

We passed row after row of large open burlap sacks full of various textiles. On the first floor, he led us into an airy and empty room.

"This is where the classes happened," he said. "He would sit there against that wall on a cushion and his students and people from the neighborhood would sit around the room."

He led us into another room. "And this was his bedroom," he said. He pointed to a corner of the room. "His bed was just over there."

"You seem to know a lot about his visit, sir," I said.

"He is well known in this neighborhood," he said.

"Can we have kirtan in memory of our teacher?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," he replied. "Sing as long as you want."

Closing my eyes I began chanting Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantra. When I opened my eyes I saw deep loving emotion on the devotees' faces as they responded. I started chanting Hare Krsna and the devotees raised their arms and swayed back and forth. The owner of the house also raised his arms and began chanting and dancing along with us. The local people broke out in big smiles seeing him.

"That looks like the end of the rumors," I thought, laughing to myself. I concluded the kirtan with the premadvani prayers, and the locals and the owner of the house joined the devotees as they bowed their heads to the ground.

"We were all perfect strangers one hour ago," I thought to myself. "Srila Prabhupada, your potency continues to purify the world." Aloud I said, "Now we must follow in our master's



footsteps and take the chanting to the streets.”

We thanked the owner of the house, and as he put the big locks back on the door he smiled at us. “You are welcome back anytime,” he said.

“We will return,” I said. “Your home is a holy place.”

As we gathered our instruments for harinam, one of the local men who had been in the kirtan came up to me.

“I want to caution you that a lot of Muslim families now live in this area,” he said. “In fact, most of the vendors in the market across the street are Muslims. Gujarat has a history of Muslim-Hindu tension.”

I decided to assess the situation before beginning the harinam. I walked thirty meters to the corner and surveyed the large open-air market; there were hundreds of

people shopping at stalls selling a seemingly endless variety of goods: fruits, vegetables, textiles, furniture. One tall bearded Muslim man in the midst of the throng made eye contact with me, and held my gaze. He was surrounded by ten or fifteen other similarly looking men.

“Wait here,” I said to the devotees. Taking a couple of male devotees with me, I crossed the street and walked toward the Muslim men.

“Salaam-alaikum,” I said extending my hand to the man.

“Wa alaykumu s-salam,” he replied. He took my hand and broke into a big smile.

“We are devotees of Lord Krsna from Western countries,” I said. “We are here to honor our spiritual teacher who stayed in a building across the street many years ago.”

“It is the duty of the spiritual practitioner to honor he who shows the path to Allah,” said the man. “As you honor your teacher, we honor Mohamed. Praise be upon him.”

He was so friendly and open that I decided to take another step. “We would like to celebrate the glory of God by singing His names throughout the market place. We would like to know if you or anyone else would object to us doing this.”

Some unfavorable looks crossed the faces of some of the men. A few of them began whispering to each other. But the tall man, who obviously was prominent among them, shook his head.

“Nobody will object. Allahu Akbar – God is great. You may sing His names in this market.” Some of the men looked surprised, but he continued. “We have no differences

here in our neighborhood between Muslim and Hindus. But just case, I will send my two brothers to accompany you. Should any trouble arise from any Muslim in the market they will take care of it.”

He gestured for two men to step forward. “This is Abdul Qawi and Ahmed. Ahmed is the karate champion of Gujarat.”

I shook both of their hands. “Gentleman,” I said, “let’s proceed.”

As the devotees chanted and danced in ecstasy through the market, I thought of how Srila Prabhupada

had sent his disciples out to chant on the very same street so many years ago. A number of fruit vendors offered us bananas, apples and grapes. People smiled and waved at us as we passed, and when we stopped people rushed forward to dance with us. But I also noticed Abdul Qawi and Ahmed exchanging strong words with a group of young Muslim men. When Ahmed saw me watching he smiled and waved as if to say, “We have it under control.” A huge crowd gathered, and I saw Hindus, Muslims and Farsis all with big smiles on their faces.

We chanted and danced for several hours and then got back in our vans to return to the temple.

“Can’t we chant longer?” one of the devotees asked me.

“No we can’t,” I replied. “Abdul Qawi and Ahmed have to go to work.”

The devotee looked back at me with a blank face. “Who?”

“I’ll explain later,” I said with a smile. “Besides, all of you have to rest up for the festival tonight.”



“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.”

[Divya-prabandha, Tiruvaymoli 5.2.1 by Nammalvar, one of the twelve great Vaisnava saints from South India. He appeared in 3102 BC.]

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Diary of a
traveling
monk

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A Thousand Lectures on the Absolute Truth

By Indradyumna Swami

It was a week after the Sadhu Sanga Retreat in North Carolina last May, and I was in Los Angeles waiting to board a flight to London and then on to Warsaw, when an older gentleman walked up to me. He looked at my sannyasa robes. "You must be a Hare Krishna," he said with a strong Polish accent.

"Well yes," I replied, "I am."

"Where are you going?" he said.

"Actually," I said, "I'm off to Poland."

"Is it your first trip there?" he asked.

"Well, no ... "

"Hare Krsna is a famous religion in my county," he said, interrupting me with a smile.

"Oh really?" I said feigning ignorance.

"Oh, yes," he said. "They have wonderful festivals." Then he walked back to his place in line.

"Well now," I thought, "if that's not one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me... It's the result of pushing on our festival program along the Baltic Sea Coast for the last twenty years."

At the airport in Warsaw the next day, the woman behind the immigration window looked up at me with a big smile. "O Guru," she said. "Festival of India. Welcome."

"They almost never smile," I thought. "And to be addressed as Guru, well, that's something really rare."

"Officer," I said as she stamped my passport, "have you been to one of our festivals?"

"Four" she replied. Then her face took on an official expression. "You may proceed now."

"Two auspicious omens," I thought as I walked down to the baggage carousel. "First the man at the airport in Los Angeles and now the immigration officer. It's got to mean a good start for our twentieth-anniversary summer tour."

I reached my apartment in Warsaw an hour later. I started to repack my bags but fell asleep and didn't wake up till the next morning, just in time to rush back to the airport and catch a flight up north to the Baltic Sea Coast. A disciple drove me to the site of our first festival, where the devotees were putting the finishing touches on the exhibits. And just an hour later I was on stage delivering a talk to seven hundred people. As I walked down off the stage I stopped a devotee passing by. "I feel so



satisfied," I said. "And you know, I don't think I could count the number of times I have given that talk over the last twenty years."

"Oh I could," he said with a smile. "A thousand times."

"A thousand times?" I said. "How do you get that?"

"Well," he said, "we do about fifty festivals each summer. Multiply that by twenty years and you get a thousand lectures on the absolute truth." He started to chuckle. "Hey, you know what?" he said. "That would make a great title for one of your diary chapters—A Thousand Lectures on the Absolute Truth."

The next day I woke up exhausted. "Twenty years of festivals has taken its toll on me," I said to a devotee as I struggled to crawl out of my sleeping bag. "I'm sixty-five now."

"My dad's the same age as you Maharaja," he said. "The other day he told me that the sixties are the youth of old age."

"That helps a little," I said.

My heart was beating in anticipation as the vans and buses pulled away from the base that morning, taking the devotees on harinam to advertise the next festival. As we drove along I remembered the words of my godsister Sitala Dasi. Some months earlier we had reminisced about the first time I went on harinam. It was in 1971, just after I had moved into the temple in Detroit. After a few hours of singing on the streets and selling Back to Godhead magazines, we were all in a van driving back to the temple. Sitala turned to me. "So," she said, "how did you like your first day on harinam?"

"I could do this for the rest of my life," I replied.

And indeed I have. I am indebted to my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, who encouraged his disciples to share Krsna consciousness with the whole world through the chanting of the holy names. I could never give it up.

The great devotee Prahlada Maharaja once spoke the following words: "My dear Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, because of my association with material desires, one after another, I was gradually falling into a blind well full of snakes, following the general populace. But Your servant Narada Muni kindly accepted me as his disciple and instructed me how to achieve this transcendental position. Therefore my first duty is to serve him. How could I leave his service?" [SB 7.9.28]



Upon reaching the town we all jumped out of the buses and vans. The sun had just dissipated a chilly fog, and devotees were taking off their sweaters and coats when a man walked up to us. "Welcome to

our town!" he said. "Everyone knows that whenever you people come with your mantra the clouds run away and the sun shines."

"Just see!" he said looking up at the sky as the last bit of fog disappeared and the sun shone brightly.

Within moments we had crossed through the town and descended on the beach, which had quickly filled up with people as soon as the sun came out. As we were taking off our shoes to walk barefoot in the sand a young man in his late twenties approached me.

"The priest was talking about you people in his sermon last Sunday," he began.

"Oh no," I thought. "Here it comes. And just when everything was going so well."

"He told us you were coming soon," he said.

I braced myself for some harsh words.

"He told us not to be afraid of you," the young man continued. "He said that that you worship the same God as we do, but you call him by a different name: Krishna. He encouraged us to attend your festival and learn more about your religion. He said we should each try to be as good a follower of Christ, as you people are of Krishna."

I was dumbstruck hearing these words after decades of harassment and abuse from the local priests. After a few seconds I managed to speak. "Yes," I said, "please come. And offer your priest my deepest respect and admiration."

"I never imagined it would come to this point," I thought, "at least not in my lifetime."

I remembered Nelson Mandela's words in 1996 at our Festival for the Children of the Rainbow Nation in Durban. I was standing next to him when a reporter asked him about his long struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa. "It always seems impossible," Mandela said, "until it's done."

My thoughts came back to the present. "Of course," I thought, "we still have a long way to go in establishing Krishna consciousness in this country, but now we've got our foot in the door."

As we started chanting and dancing down the beach giving out invitations, I noticed a mother grabbing her young daughter and pulling her to her side. "Don't be afraid, darling," the mother said. "They won't kidnap you. They're just collecting money for the poor people in India." Her words brought a smile to my face.

Then I noticed a group of devotee women sitting in the sand some distance away. I called another devotee over. "Please go and tell those matajis not to sit down now," I said. "We have a lot of invitations to pass out. Tell them to help with the distribution."



The devotee ran over to the women. After a minute he returned. "Maharaja," he said chuckling. "They're not devotees. They won the saris in the dance competition at the festival last night. They're proudly wearing them around town and on the beach."

The hours went by as we chanted and danced among the throngs of people on the beach. Often we would stop, and when a crowd gathered I would give a short lecture and invite people to the festival that evening. One time, we started down the beach with an especially loud and enthusiastic kirtan while people followed and danced alongside us. Suddenly a woman came running up to me. "Please stop!" she said. "My baby is asleep. It's her afternoon nap. If she wakes up she'll be very upset."

"Maharaja," said a devotee smiling, "we can't stop the kirtan for one baby. Anyway, if the baby wakes up hearing the holy names she'll get mercy."

"And the people will think ill of us," I replied. "Stop the kirtan!" I yelled.

Most of the devotees had not seen the woman and were surprised that I ordered the blissful kirtan to stop.

"Keep walking!" I shouted.

We walked in total silence for a good twenty meters. "OK!" I shouted. "Kirtan!" The devotees began chanting enthusiastically.



Then I heard a man talking to his wife. "These people have etiquette," he said. "They are ladies and gentleman. They took care not to wake up the child. Take one of their invitations, dear. We're going to their festival."

The devotee who had objected to stopping the kirtan also heard the man. I winked at him.

After all the invitations had been passed out, I took the kirtan through town on the way to the festival site. As we stopped at a red light, a taxi drove by. The driver put his head out the window and shouted out the name of one of Srila Prabhupada's books. "Yes!" he yelled. "Teachings of Queen Kunti! Yes!"

That evening thousands of people passed through our festival site. Again I found myself on stage sharing the truths of the Bhagavad Gita. When I saw that people were not catching a point, I would illustrate it with an anecdote. When they caught the point and their faces lit up, I felt as if I'd achieved a great victory.

As I walked around the festival grounds that evening, a woman came up to me. "Good evening," she said. "Are you the wise man everyone is talking about?"

"No," I said. "I'm his servant." I put a Bhagavad Gita in her hand. "Here is one of the books he wrote," I continued. "You will get great satisfaction from reading it." She bought the book.

A young man standing nearby spoke up. "Is that the Bhagavad Gita?" he said.

"Yes, it is," I replied.

"I want one too," he said.

"Wow!" I thought. "This is my lucky day... No, it's not just a lucky day. It's often like this out here on the preaching field. Every sankirtan devotee experiences these special moments."



"Last year," the young man continued, "I went to Woodstock and met you people there. I went to the Questions and Answers tent and listened attentively. Suddenly I had all the answers to the questions of life that I had been asking. It was as if a light had been turned on. Seriously. I wanted to buy the book that the speaker was quoting from, the Bhagavad Gita, but I had no money. I have been waiting all year to buy the Bhagavad Gita. I was so surprised to find you people in town today. In fact I just walked into this festival by chance."

"Nothing happens by chance," I said, "especially in spiritual life." I picked up a Bhagavad Gita from a table nearby and handed to him. He smiled as he gave a generous donation.

A couple of hours later I was heading to the stage for the final kirtan when Nandini Dasi came up to me. "Sri-la Gurudeva," she said, "do you remember Rewal, the town where they canceled our festival many years ago when the priest objected to it? They actually asked us to leave town."

"Yes," I said, "of course I remember. The incident is seared in my memory."

"Of course, years later they welcomed us back," Nandini said, "but I thought you would appreciate the letter I received from the present Mayor of Rewal."

She handed me the letter:

"Respected Agnieszka,

"Remembering our longing for lifetime cooperation in organizing the Festival of India in Rewal and surrounding towns, it is our pleasure to inform you that we will allow you to use all the locations you requested for this year's events free of charge. Your festival is one of the most attractive and popular events of the year in our city, actually on the entire Baltic Sea coast. Each year it attracts thousands of local people and tourists hankering for the exotic and cultural experience you present so well. We are confident that this year our cooperation will be smooth and harmonious, as it has been for several decades.

"If you have any specific needs we will be happy to attend to them. Please just contact us at city hall.

"With Respects,

"The Mayor of Rewal"

"How happy Srila Prabhupada would be to hear this message," I thought. "But in fact he must know. This event could not have gone on for so many years without his blessings."

The kirtan that evening was wonderful. I noticed many people I had seen on the beach that afternoon chanting and dancing with us. When the music stopped and the lights went down I started walking back to my van. Just as I was about to open the door a family of four came up to me. The wife and two daughters were dressed in beautiful saris they had won during the competition at the last kirtan. "Please can you sign our Bhagavad Gita," the man said. "We'd be very grateful."

"Sure," I said.

"Is this your first Hare Krsna festival?" I asked as I started to sign the book.

"Yes," the man replied. "It's our first time."

"What part of the festival did you enjoy the most?" I continued.

"Actually, we just arrived ten minutes ago," the man said with a smile. "But the atmosphere here was so overwhelming, so gracious and loving, that we went straight to the book store as it was closing to buy this book to understand more about you people. We were able to join in the dancing for three minutes. We loved every second. My daughters memorized the whole song and can't stop singing it."

"Do you have a card?" the man continued. "We'd like to keep in touch. My wife and I feel we're on to something deeply spiritual and satisfying."

I handed him my card. "Another good sign," I thought. "It's going to be a great summer just like all the others we have spent chanting and dancing along this coast for the past twenty years."

That night as I rolled out my sleeping bag, I thought about my reply to Sitala Dasi after my first harinam. "What to speak of this lifetime," I thought as I drifted off to sleep, "I could go on distributing the nectar of the Holy Names forever if that would please my spiritual master, my eternal friend and guide."

"O swan gliding in the lakes of the Vraja-vasis' love, I wish that I may wander everywhere always chanting and drinking the nectar of Your names. Those most sweet names arise from the ocean of Gokula and spread the glories of Your infinitely varied dress and ways of acting. As I wander, behaving like a madman, may I distribute joy to everyone in all the worlds.

[Narada Muni, Brhat Bhagavatamrta 1.7.143]



Diary of a
traveling
monk

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 14

Chapter 3

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Forever Your Servant

By Indradyumna Swami

Dear Srila Prabhupada,

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

Once again, I stand before you on the annual occasion of your auspicious Vyasa Puja, the celebration of your appearance in this world. I take this opportunity each year to reflect on the great mercy you have bestowed upon me in the form of service to your mission. I am very happy to be a small part of your great legacy in fulfilling Lord Caitanya's prophecy that His holy names would be heard in every town and village on this planet. I can report that beyond a doubt this is happening here in Poland, due in part to the festival program we have been maintaining for over 20 years.

The preaching you started nearly 50 years ago continues to grow and expand despite the rapid advancement of Kali Yuga portrayed in ominous headlines and photos of the world's daily newspapers. This alone is proof of the blessings you received from your own guru maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Once, when some of your sannyasi godbrothers complained to your spiritual master that he was giving you – a householder at the time – too much attention, he shot back, "Don't complain. In the end he will do everything!" And indeed it has come to pass.



No one can contest your achievements in establishing Krsna consciousness around the world: your books, the farms you began, the gurukula system you introduced, the scientific approach you established for preaching Krsna consciousness—the list goes on and on. But no less amazing in my eyes was your ability to deliver me. Before meeting you I fully embraced all the dreadful activities that characterize this horrible age. Once my father chastised me saying, "Son, you're a misfit! There's no place for you in society. I shudder to think what will become of you!" Srila Prabhupada, what he said was true; there was no place for me in material life. But by taking shelter of your lotus feet I was elevated to the topmost transcendental position of being your humble servant, a destination for which even the demigods surely aspire.

yatha kancanatham yati
kamsyam rasa vidhanatah
tatha diksa vidhanena
dvijatvam jayate nram

"As bell metal is turned to gold when mixed with mercury in an alchemical process, so one who is properly trained and initiated by a bona fide spiritual master immediately becomes a brahmana."

[Sanatana Goswami, Hari-bhakti-vilasa 2.12]

I have a long way to go before I attain perfection, but by serving you I am confident I can attain the supreme destination. The seeds of such service were sown in my heart when you accepted me as your disciple in a letter to my temple president on December 10, 1971. In that letter you mentioned the specific service that I would eventually take up as my life and soul. You wrote:

“I am very glad to accept these students as my duly initiated disciples and their names shall be as follows; Brian Tibbitts: Indradyumna Das, Ilene Tibbitts: Krpamayi Dasi and Heidi Paeva: Hrisakti Dasi. These are all very nice boys and girls and I have very much appreciated their attitudes of devotion and surrender as displayed in their letters to me. ... I very much approve of your enclosed brochure, and I am pleased by your festival plan for colleges all over the state. I have received intimation from Rupanuga of a very large festival he is planning for Central Park. His conjecture is very nice and I want that many such festivals should be held in every town and city. I am always thankful to Krishna that I have somehow got so many wonderful boys like yourself to assist me in this way.”

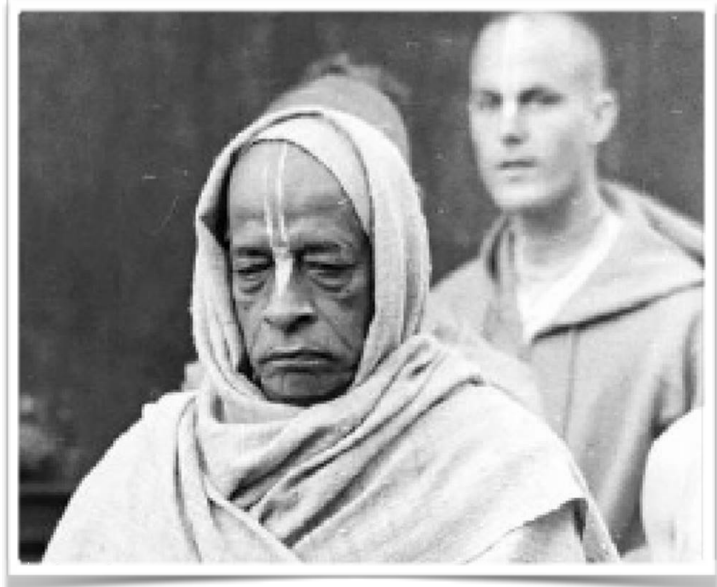
It is through the festival programs I help organize, Srila Prabhupada, that I have established my deepest link with you. My constant prayer is that these festivals will please you as they bring hundreds of thousands of people into contact with Krsna consciousness each year. By such service I hope to achieve the goal of pure devotional service to the Lord. Srila Prabhodananda Saraswati made it very clear that the awakening of pure love of God is entwined with service to the samkirtan movement:

yatha yatha gaura-padaravinde
vindeta bhaktim krta punya rasih
tatha tathotsarpati hrdy akasmat
radha-padambhoja-sudhambu-rasih

"To the degree that we surrender to Lord Caitanya's service, to that degree we gain qualification for the service to Radharani's lotus feet in Vraja."

(Caitanya-candramrta, verse 88)

Each year, the meaning of this verse becomes clearer to me, for whenever I work hard to spread Krsna consciousness a strong desire to visit Vrindavan awakens within my heart. Conversely, after spending time in the dhama an equally strong desire appears in



my heart to spread the glories of the holy names far and wide. I am confident that one day I will become qualified to understand and serve the innermost desires of your heart. I must only remain loyal to you and continue to endeavor to share my good fortune with others.

param gopyam api snigdhe
sisye vacyam iti srutih

tac chruyatam maha bhaga
goloka mahimadhuna

"The Vedas say that to a loyal disciple one may speak the confidential secret. Therefore, O most fortunate one, now please hear the glories of Goloka."

[Bṛhad Bhagavatamṛta, Part 2, Chapter 1, text 6]

Srila Prabhupada, I am very happy in my service to you. I harbor no doubts, misgivings or illusions about my position as your servant. I would do anything for you. If you ordered me to go to hell and preach, I'd jump on the first train spiraling down to that lake of fire, happily chanting the holy names all the while. If you instructed me to preach in heaven, I'd arrive in that celestial abode with no other interest than to serve your order. This is because I've already

seen heaven and hell in my many years of service to you in this world, and I've concluded there is no shelter other than your lotus feet.

Some time ago I had a dream in which you were sitting with a number of my senior godbrothers including Tamal Kṛṣṇa Goswami, Giriraj Swami, Radhanath Swami, Vaisesika Prabhu and others. I was observing the scene from some distance away. At one point you smiled and said to them, "So all of you are going back to Godhead." I was dumbstruck by your mercy, while at the same time wishing I could be as fortunate as them.

Suddenly Giriraj Swami noticed me and, being the dear friend that he is, he pointed me out to you. "Srila Prabhupada," he said, "Indradyumna Swami is sitting over there. Can he come too?" You turned and looked at me and with a smile said, "Yes, he's a nice boy. He can also come."

Of course it was only a dream. However, you once said that although dreams are illusions, "dreams of the spiritual master are very nice." Srila Prabhupada, I've never known your words to be untrue. It is one of the reasons that I have full faith in you and that my desire to assist your mission in this world becomes stronger day by day. You once wrote to me that you felt your spiritual master was always "watching over and protecting you." Please also watch over and protect me as I assist you with your service in this world. Then at a suitable time, when you see fit, please grant me eternal service to you in the transcendental abode.

Forever your servant,
Indradyumna Swami



Diary of a
traveling
monk

NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 14
Chapter 4
October 12, 2014

Inspiring the Inspired

By Indradyumna Swami



Our team of 300 devotees was exhausted. We had already done 24 festivals along the Baltic Sea coast plus a "Krsna's Village of Peace" festival at Woodstock, and now we were faced with the blissful but daunting prospect of doing 24 more over the second half of the summer. But everyone took courage, knowing that the results of our efforts would far outweigh any austerities we encountered. The devotees needed some pepping up, I thought, so I shared with them something that has been one of my favorite sources of inspiration over the years. It was a letter Srila Prabhupada wrote to my godbrother Prabhavisnu Prabhu in 1972:

"I can understand that it is not an easy matter 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 the greatest yogis and so-called jnanis. But let any man see our devotees working so hard for Krishna, then let anyone say that they are not better than any millions of so-called yogis and transcendentalists; that is my challenge! Because you are rightly understanding through your personal realization this philosophy of Krishna 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 Krishna. That I can very much appreciate; thank you very much for helping me in this way." [January 3, 1973]

I was hoping we could all share this inspiration with the festivalgoers, but ironically, it was they who became the source of inspiration while we became the receivers.

It began on the day of our first festival back on the Baltic Sea coast, when we turned our harinam around near the end of the beach. A woman called out to us: "Hey! Why are you turning back? There are more families further on down the beach. Why won't you give them a chance to hear you sing and watch you dance? And how will they get an invitation to your festival?"

"Well thank you ma'am," I thought. "Now wasn't that just what we needed to hear to get us started again!" We turned back and continued down the beach.

After chanting on the beach, we made our way into town to the main street, crowded with tourists and locals. I was following behind the kirtan party when I felt a man behind me put his arm around my neck in a choke hold. All I could see were the tattoos on his sweaty arm.

"So you're the festival guru, is it?" he said in broken English.

"Festival guru?" I said, squirming to get free.

"That's right," the man said. "We all know you. You've been coming for years."

"You're choking me," I said. "I can't breathe."

He loosened his grip a bit. "Sorry 'bout that," he said. "I just wanted to make it clear to my men that I'm the one protecting you this time."

"Protecting me?" I said, feeling a bit nervous.

"That's right," he replied. "This is a bad town. Lots of muggings, robberies—even rape and murder. But I got your back, buddy."

"Got my back?" I asked.

"Yep," he said. "And I earned it." He finally let me out of the headlock.

"See them guys over there?" he said.

I looked over at two men. One had a swollen eye and the other had blood running from his nose. It didn't help me relax.

"Uh, yeah," I said with a hard gulp.

"I fought with them," he said. "I fought for the right to be your bodyguard the next few days."

"Well, uh, that's very nice of you," I said.

"I'm the UFC champion for Europe," he said, smiling.



"You mean you're a cage fighter?" I asked. Now I was curious.

"That's right," he said. "Two years in a row. Nobody takes me down."

"Is there some reason you are giving me this honor?" I asked. I was beginning to breathe easy.

"You people bring a peaceful atmosphere to the town," he said. "Some color. Some happiness. Me and my boys appreciate it. Changes the mood of the place, you know? And we always eat at your restaurant. Damn good food even if it's vegetarian."

"So you'll come tonight?" I said.

"Tonight?" he said. "I'm by your side for the next 72 hours."

"All right then," I said. "Let's catch up with the singing party."

That evening, with the UFC champion by my side, I walked around the festival site checking whether everything was going smoothly. In the restaurant I saw a woman standing next to the glass counter where the take-outs were for sale. "This is a samosa," she said to her friends. "And that is alu-patra. It's made from potato and delicious spices. Over there is a sweet called burfi, made from milk. I recommend you try them all."

"You seem to know our food very well," I said to her, as her friends began buying.

"Yes, of course I do," she replied. "I have come to least one of your events each summer since 1996. You might say I am addicted to your food. I also used to enjoy talking to one of your members while I ate. I don't see him here this time."

"What's his name?" I asked.

"Hari Caran," she said.

I hesitated. "I'm sorry," I said, "but he passed away two years ago."

Tears came to her eyes and began rolling down her face. She seemed unable to say anything more. She took up the prasadam she had bought and walked out of the tent.

As we were about to leave, a young woman in her early twenties walked into the restaurant carrying a large bundle of red roses. She was dressed in brightly colored traditional Polish clothes, even a head scarf. She looked poor, and I noticed her open money purse was empty.

"Anyone for a rose?" she said. "Only five zloty."



When no one showed even the slightest interest, she stood silently gazing at the prasadam behind the glass counter.

"She must be hungry," I thought.

"Excuse me," I said with a smile. "If you're hungry, you can have all you want for a single rose."

Her eyes opened wide and her eyebrows went up. Her head tilted slightly. "Really?" she said.

"Yes," I said. "As much as you want."

She gave me a rose and began choosing her meal. She walked outside with a big smile on her face and sat down at one of the restaurant tables. The stage show had just begun, and I saw that she became absorbed in watching it as she ate. After an hour I sent her a fruit drink from the restaurant.

Later in the evening, she came up to me on her way out of the festival site. "Sir," she said, "I came here to make money, but I feel like I've discovered something much more valuable. Thank you for noticing me and showing me some kindness."

As I continued on my way I walked past a nearby tent, where a cooking demonstration was concluding. "That's it, honey," I heard an older woman say to her husband. "From this day on we are vegetarian. Not even fish or eggs."

I wanted to see how the festival site looked from a distance, so I went outside the gate, where I noticed a live-butterfly exhibition next door. The woman selling tickets called me over.



"Why don't you come in?" she said. I hesitated, but she smiled. "They're God's creatures too."

"OK," I said. "But only for two minutes."

She brought me to the front of the line and ushered me inside. "Hey," said a man in line, his eyebrows furrowed, his mouth bent in a frown. "There's a line here, you know. And why doesn't he have to pay like the rest of us?"

"When you do some good for the world like these people," said the ticket seller, "then I'll let you in free."

Colorful and beautiful as the butterflies were, I was eager to return to the festival. As I entered the grounds, a middle-aged woman came up to me.

"I met you ten years ago to the day," she said. "It was at a festival just like this, but somewhat smaller. When I showed an interest in the philosophy, you spent an hour speaking to me and convinced me to

start chanting Hare Krsna on beads. You encouraged me by saying it was enough to chant one or two times around the beads each day. But I soon became attracted to the chanting and for the last 10 years I have been chanting 25 times around the beads each day. You also explained to me the importance of following the four rules. Since that day I have followed them strictly.

"You gave me a Bhagavad-gita. I have read it many times and memorized over 100 verses. I share the wisdom I have learned with whomever I meet, and as a result, a number of people in my town are also chanting and reading Bhagavad-gita. Some of us meet regularly and chant together. Except for those people, I don't associate much with others. My dream is to go to Vrindavan before I die.

"In the Bhagavad-gita Krsna says that to be successful on this path one has to accept a spiritual teacher. For the past 10 years I have thought of you in this way, and today I want to ask if you will accept me as your disciple. I have many friends who will vouch for me."

"It's not possible," said a young male devotee standing nearby. "The GBC have established a rigid procedure to test the aspiring candidate. And you have to take what's called the bhakti satri course, and then a test..."

"Be quiet," I interrupted, and turned back to the woman. "Have your friends contact me. And you please write to me every four weeks for the next six months. I'll check with our leadership and see if I can give you initiation some time this year."

It was time for me to give my talk on the main stage. As I talked about the basics of Krsna consciousness, I saw many people listening attentively. A number of them nodded their heads in approval whenever I made a significant point. Then I thought about last Kartika, when I prayed with all my heart to Sri Sri Radha Govinda, the presiding deities in Jaipur, begging Them to empower my words so that I could convince others about Krsna consciousness. When I saw the audience's response, I remembered Sri Sri Radha Govinda again and felt Their presence.

After my talk, there was a line of people waiting for me to sign the books they had bought. The first man in the line handed me his Bhagavad-gita.

"I want to make it very clear," he said, "that I don't accept a single thing you said during your 45-minute talk."

I stopped signing and looked up. "Well, OK," I said. "But then why are you buying this book?"



"Because you presented the subject so well," he said, "that I'm afraid you'll convince those who are skeptical of God's existence that He actually exists and that scientific arguments to the contrary are not valid."



"Are you a scientist?" I asked.

"Yes, I am," he replied, "and a well-known one too. I plan to study this book cover-to-cover to learn all your arguments."

"Fine," I said. "Maybe in the process you'll become convinced of the existence of God."

"That will never happen," he said, but he gave me a smile as he walked off holding the book tightly under his arm.

Next in line was a family: grandparents, parents, and children. "We just want you to know how much we appreciate your festivals," said the grandfather. He pointed to the young woman in the family. "This is my daughter Kinga, and these are her two children. She was 10 when we first met you all. Now she is 24. We have enough money to fly anywhere in the world for our vacations, but she insists we come here to the Baltic Sea Coast each summer to be part of your event. Last year we all became vegetarian, and now we read the Bhagavad-gita together every evening. We are in touch with devotees on the internet."

Another woman handed me a photo album along with her Bhagavad-gita. The album contained photos of our festivals from every summer of the past 15 years. Next to each photo was the invitation we distributed that particular summer.

"We keep track of our happiness," the lady said with a smile.

As the festival closed that evening, I felt a sense of deep satisfaction, knowing that thousands of people from all walks of life—young children, elderly couples, UFC champions, flower girls, and atheists—had had the chance to experience the wonderful world of Krsna consciousness. I began to wonder if I hadn't even received more inspiration than I had given.

"If things continue like this," I thought, "one day the whole world will be inundated by love of God. It's not impossible. The saints have predicted it":

"In every home throughout the world there is a tumult of hari-samkirtan. On every body are tears, hairs standing erect, and other symptoms of ecstasy. In every heart is the most exalted and sweet spiritual path that leads far away from the path of the four Vedas. All this has appeared now that Lord Gaura has descended to this world."

[Sri Prabhodananda Sarasvati, Sri Caitanya-candramrta, text 114]

Diary of a
traveling
monk

NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 14
Chapter 5
August 17, 2015

Our Happy Summer Days

By Indradyumna Swami

After a month of harinams and festivals and a mammoth three-day Woodstock festival, our tour devotees were exhausted. When I mentioned during a meeting that we had seventeen more festivals to go, I saw many devotees catch their breath and roll their eyes upward. “It’s our duty,” I said. “We can’t give up, we can’t give in. We’ve inherited a tradition that goes back five hundred years. Many great devotees have served selflessly for this very moment that we are living: when the holy names of Lord Krishna are being broadcast all over the world. We have to push on for this next month. So much can be achieved.”

There was a loud roar of approval. I felt proud of the devotees. They understood the responsibility we had and the mercy we could deliver. They were ready to push on despite their fatigue.

Krsna’s Village of Peace had been an astounding success at the Woodstock Festival in July, and whatever follows a large memorable event is usually anti-climactic, but not so with our festival tour. The smaller festivals afterwards along the Baltic Sea coast were no less remarkable.



While advertising our first post-Woodstock festival with a melodious and colorful harinam, I was stopped by a middle-aged couple just before we got to the beach. “We don’t want to take your valuable time,” the man said, “but we just wanted to thank you for bringing your festival back to our town this year.”

“It really is the highlight of our summer,” his wife added.

“You all look a bit tired,” the man said. “Must be because of your hard work at Woodstock.”

“How did you know we were at Woodstock?” I asked. They looked like middle-class people, not the kind who would go to Woodstock or even be interested in it.

“Your big chariot was on the evening news,” the man said. “It looked like hundreds of you were singing and dancing alongside it.”

“Really?” I said. “I didn’t know.” I felt so happy I almost started laughing.

When we reached the sand, we all stopped to take off our shoes. A few meters away, I heard a father and his young daughter talking as they looked at one of our festival posters.

“Daddy,” the girl said, “what is reincarnation?”

I saw the man look again at the poster. I knew there was no mention of reincarnation on it. “Tell me, Daddy,” the girl said again, “what is reincarnation?”

“Well,” he mumbled, “ummm... you see... uh... Let’s go get some ice cream, shall we, darling?” He took her hand, and they started walking away. She looked back at us. “Daddy,” she said, “what is karma?”

As they disappeared into the throng of beachgoers, a woman rushed toward us.

“Are you going to sing?” she asked.

“Yes, we are,” I said.

“Oh, wonderful!” she said. “Do you sell CDs of your singing on the beach?”

“Well, not exactly of our singing on the beach, but we have CDs of our singing in our centers.”

“No,” she said. “I am looking for a CD of your singing on the beach.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I have been hearing you sing on this beach every summer since I was a little girl,” she said. “It has always been a memorable part of my summer vacation. Now I have my own children and they also enjoy it. We want a CD of your singing on the beach so we can remember our happy summer days all year.”

Soon we were chanting and dancing down the beach while a number of devotees passed out invitations. Twenty minutes into the kirtan, three older couples approached us.

“Can we help distribute the invitations?” a man said.

“Well, sure,” I said. “Why not?”

A devotee pulled a large stack of invitations out of her bag, and the couples began giving them out with big smiles. One of the women walked beside me for a few minutes, and as she handed an invitation to a young mother and her children, she turned to me. “It would be sad if people didn’t get the opportunity to see your fine show,” she said. “We’ve seen it every summer for the last three years.”

A little further along the beach, a young man selling popcorn started making fun of our singing. He chanted the Hare Krsna mantra going between falsetto and low tones

to make people laugh. I tried to move him along, but it was obvious he was enjoying the attention he got mimicking us. He followed us for an hour and a half, chanting Krsna’s name a thousand times, albeit in jest. At one point he even began dancing. Because he was in front of the kirtan party people thought he was one of us and asked him where and what time the festival was. I decided to stop trying to intervene because he began speaking respectfully. “The festival is just off the beach over there,” he said. “It starts at 5:30 pm. Be on time. You don’t want to miss it.”



I smiled and remembered a verse by Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya:

sankirtanarambha krte pi gaure

dhavanti jiva sravane gunani

asuddha cittah kim u suddha cittah

srutva pramattah khalu te nanartuh

“When the Golden Lord’s congregational chanting of the holy names had only just begun, the transcendental qualities of the name cleansed the ears of the living entities. Thus, astonishingly, those of impure mentality became pure in mind, and as they continued to hear, became intoxicated and began to dance.” (Susloka-Satakam, Text 32)



During our two-hour harinam, we covered the whole beach and gave out over seven thousand invitations. Towards the end of the kirtan, a rough-looking young man rushed in front of the kirtan party.

“Shut up!” he screamed. “Shut up! Just shut up and get off this beach!” He shouted at us again and again, his speech peppered with obscenities. When he took a swing at one of the boys playing mridanga, our security men jumped on him. After a short tussle, he was pinned to the ground, his face in the sand. I could see he was going to have a big black eye soon.

“Let me up!” he screamed. A crowd had gathered to watch the harinam, and some of the people shook their heads as if telling us not to let him up. One of the security men held him still for another minute or two until he calmed down.

“OK,” he said. “Hare Krishna. Now let me up.”

The security man holding him loosened his grip. “No!” I called out to him. “Not just yet!”

“Hare Krishna!” the boy yelled. “Hare Krishna! Krishna Krishna Hare Hare! Please let me go!”

The security man looked at me. “Not yet,” I said with a smile.

“Hare Krishna!” he screamed. “Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna! And Hare Rama too!” Then he looked at me. “Please,” he said softly.

“OK,” I said. “Let him go.” He got up, brushed off the sand and walked away.

“Why did you wait so long to let him get up?” one of our boys asked.

I smiled. “It says in sastra:

eka hari name yata papa hare

kono paper sadhya nai tato papa kare

“One recitation of the Hare Krsna mantra is so powerful that unlimited sinful reactions in the heart are immediately removed.’ That was the most important moment of that boy’s life because he was chanting. I thought we should let him chant as much as he could.”

By the time we returned to the festival site it was almost time for the program to begin. The crowd got larger and larger, and I saw a woman who had been the mayor of the town many years ago. She was a good friend of ours.

“So nice to see you again,” I said.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world,” she said.

“You still remember us after all these years?”

“How could I forget you?” she said. “My daughter and I often wear the beautiful saris you gave us. And this year we’ve brought my new grandchild to your festival for his first time. Just imagine! Three generations of followers. I guess it’s a tradition in our family now.”

After speaking to her for some time I wandered over to one of my favorite spots at the festival: the book tent. I was surprised to see a furious argument going on between a mother and her teenage daughter.

“Just buy the book for me, Mom!” screamed the girl. “Buy me a Bhagavad Gita!”

“But it’s not the Bible!” her mother shouted back.

“Mom, I don’t understand you,” the girl said, shaking her head. “I’ve been an atheist most of my life, and now finally after speaking to the Hare Krishnas I think there may actually be a God. I thought you’d be happy about that. How can you deny me the chance to read their book where they say God explains himself? Do you want me to continue being an atheist?”

The mother took a deep breath. “We’ll take one Bhagavad Gita, please,” she said to the devotee at the book table.

Another woman walked over to the book table. “I would like to purchase the Srimad Bhagavatam,” she said.

I turned to her. “Maybe you’d like to start with the Bhagavad Gita?” I said. “The Bhagavatam is more advanced.”

“No,” she replied. “It’s not for me. It’s for my son. I bought him a Bhagavad Gita twenty five years ago at your festival. He’s read it at least fifty times and he wants to move on to something deeper now. He even has a website where he teaches Bhagavad Gita As It Is.”

“Really?” I said.

“Oh yes,” she replied. “It’s very popular. He says it’s because he never says anything different than the author, Swami Prabhupada.”

“My thanks to him and to you,” I said.

Passing by the gift shop I saw a woman coming out clutching a CD to her chest.

“I am so grateful to him,” she said to me.

“To who?” I asked.

“To Mr. Das,” she replied. “I can’t say his whole name.”

She held up a CD by Bada Haridas Das. “I bought another one of his CDs last year at your festival. When my father passed away later that year the CD gave me some solace. It was the most difficult period in my life. I played that heavenly music day and night, and that man’s soft voice gave me the comfort I needed. And today I was so happy to find a second CD by him.”

A short while later I gave my talk from the stage. For me it’s the highlight of every festival because it is where I can share the wisdom of Krishna consciousness. The large crowd listened attentively, even while sitting in the summer heat. When I finished, a man was waiting for me as I came down from the stage.

“Great talk,” he said.

“Thank you,” I said. “Whatever I know, I learned from my spiritual teacher.”

“My family and I have attended a number of your festivals over the years,” he said. “They’re special because all the entertainment has a message behind it. Most events these days have little meaning. Just today the hairs on my body stood on end several times during the singing at the beginning of the event.”

At the outdoor restaurant across the way, I suddenly saw the man who had had the tussle with our security men at the beach. He was sitting at a table eating a large plate of samosas and talking to a devotee. His eye was beginning to look badly bruised.

The devotee waved for me to come over. “Maharaja,” he said, “I’d like you meet Krzysztof. He’s had a hard life but he says things are changing now that he’s met us. He really likes the chanting.”

I smiled and pointed at the black eye. “That’s quite a shiner you’ve got there, Krzysztof.”

“Yeah,” he said with a little smile. “I got into some trouble earlier in the day.” As I walked away, he winked at me with his black eye.

The rest of the festival went on like this: one surprise after another. Actually, though, in one sense it’s not at all surprising: Our festivals are part of Lord Caitanya’s sankirtan movement and His business is turning sinners into saints. I again remembered the prophetic words of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya who envisioned the mercy of Lord Caitanya spreading all over the world:

“Out of His spontaneous compassion He restored all people back to consciousness, and through the means of His holy names enabled them to pass beyond the impassable ocean of the age of Kali, the age of quarrel. Thus news of the names of Krsna was told from person to person.”

[Srila Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Susloka Satakam, text 46]

Time passes quickly when you are doing something you love, and since the devotees love spreading Krsna consciousness, the summer flew by. Our schedule was intense—a festival every day—but the reward of seeing people smile and dance with us was enough to keep us going. And we got this reward every day.

One evening during harinam on the beach before the evening festival, an elderly woman came up to me. “I just love the way you people sing,” she said. “I can’t wait for the festival tonight.” We stood watching the devotees as they danced. The woman smiled a little smile. “I have a big desire in my heart,” she said. “I wish that all the people on this beach would jump up and start singing and dancing with you. Do you ever feel like that?”

“All the time,” I said.

“I have been watching you for many years,” she said. “I once read a book that explained that you are singing the names of God. Your singing is like a spiritual first-aid kit. People get cured of their awful ways.”

Farther on the beach another woman came running toward us. “It’s you!” she said, out of breath. “The Hare Krsnas! I found you!” She bent over to catch her breath, and then looked up with a smile. “No, actually you found me.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I was trying to decide where to go on vacation this summer,” she said, still out of breath, “but my co-workers told me not to go overseas. They said the weather in Poland was supposed be good this summer and that I should just come to the Baltic Sea coast. They said if I was lucky I might even run into the Hare Krsnas and be invited to your festival. Many of them have been to your festivals and they just raved about it. Are you having a festival here?”

“We sure are,” I said, handing her an invitation.

“Will there be samosas?” she asked.

“Oh? You already know about samosas?”

“Well, I’ve never actually had one,” she said. “But they are one of the things my friends told me about. They said I had to try one if I found you, and they asked me to bring some back to the office.”

“Well, yes,” I said. “We’ll have plenty of samosas. We make six hundred for every festival. We have a restaurant tent, and you’ll find them there.”

On our way back to the festival site we passed through the town. A man called out to me from a restaurant, “Hey Guru! Come here! I want to talk to you!”

I took the chance and walked over to the restaurant. The man took my hand and shook it vigorously. “Thank you,” he said. “My wife here said that if you shake hands with a guru you get lots of blessings. Thank you so much!”

“Um... no problem,” I said. “We’re having a festival this evening. Please come if you can. You’ll get lots of blessings there too.”

I was jogging to catch up with the harinama party when a woman rushed out of a store and ran up to me. “Stop!” she shouted. “Can you just stop for a minute! I want an answer from you, and I want it now. Why do you people only sing in this part of town? Why only here, huh?”

“This part of town?” I asked. “What do you mean?”

“Oh don’t act like you don’t know,” she said, looking me in the eye, her clenched hands pushing on her hips. “Years ago you used to come and sing in the other part of town where my store is. We used to look forward to it all summer. Don’t you care about us on the other side of town anymore?”

I didn’t know what to say.

“Answer me!” she demanded. “Why should the people in this part of town be the only ones who get to hear your singing?”

“Well,” I began, “we came here to chant because...”

“Look,” she said, cutting me off, “if you don’t turn around right now and come to my part of town, I’m going to tell all my friends and neighbors not to go to your festival.”

I called out to the kirtan party and waved for them to come back.

“You lead the way,” I said to her. We chanted behind her as she led us to her part of town, and we stayed for an hour, chanting and dancing. She waved to us from the doorway of her store as we left. “See you tonight!” she shouted with a huge smile.

Our detour had made us late for prasada. The devotees ate a hurried meal and began preparing for the festival. Half an hour or so before the festival was to begin, I saw a man, a woman and their young daughter sitting in the front row of benches.

I walked up to them. “It will be a little while before things get going,” I said.

“That’s OK,” the man said. “We could use a little break. We just drove up from Warsaw. Our daughter was adamant that we come.”

“Oh, I see,” I said. “So is this your first time with us?”

“No, no,” the woman replied. “We were at another one of your festivals earlier in the summer. But when we got home our seven-year-old daughter couldn’t stop talking about it. She loved everything: the singing, the dancing, the puppet shows, the make-up tent, the food. Everything. And day and night she insisted on wearing the sari she had won at the dance competition.”

“She was pestering us constantly to come back,” the man said. “She just wouldn’t stop. It was driving us crazy. So in the end I asked my boss for another week’s vacation. Fortunately he understood the situation. He had been to one of your festivals himself, so he agreed. I had to take money from my pension fund to pay for the trip.”

“So here we are,” the woman said with a laugh. “And we’ll be at every one of your events over the next week.”

Forty five minutes later as Bada Haridas began the first bhajan on the stage, a woman walked up to me. “I just wanted to thank you for all you’re doing,” she said. “I know you have very high principles.”

“Thank you,” I said. “You must have read some of our books then.”

“No, not yet,” she replied. “I was speaking with my neighbor about you last summer. Her son had become interested in your movement and was thinking of joining. My neighbor was concerned and went to our local priest for advice, but the priest told her not to worry. He said her son probably wouldn’t stay long because your principles are so high and your discipline is so strict. Then he said that if her son did decide to stay it would be all the better for him.”

Hungry from the day’s activities, I decided to go to our restaurant. Inside the tent, a young teenage girl carrying a plate of prasada came up to me. “I’ve always wanted to thank you for how you changed my life,” she said.

“Five years ago I came with my parents to your festival. I put on a sari in the fashion tent, and when I came out you were standing there. You said I looked like an angel. I was just a child then, but I was touched by your words, and I decided I should actually become like an angel. I started going to church more, and every night I prayed to God.

"Then last year I found a Bhagavad-gita in our house. My parents had bought it at your festival. I started reading it and found many instructions about how I could become the angel you saw in me. I even became a vegetarian and I started learning English so that if I ever met you again I could thank you and learn more about your way of life."

"I... I hardly know what to say," I replied. "I am so moved by your story. Let's sit and talk for a while." We had been talking for about twenty minutes when a young man interrupted us. "Are you the leader here?" he asked. "Someone told me you're in charge of the show."

"Yes," I said. "I do help manage things."

"I have a question about the big chariot that you have parked in the middle of the field out there. Man, that thing is gigantic! One of your people told me that it gets pulled through the streets with long ropes on special days."

"Yes, it does," I said.

"Well, my question is this: Where do you keep the slaves who pull it?"

"Uh... Did you say 'slaves'?" I asked.

"Yeah. I figure it must take between fifty and a hundred slaves to pull that massive cart down the street. Do you keep them locked up somewhere?"

I had to try hard to keep from laughing. "Actually we don't use slaves," I said. "We pull the chariot ourselves. It's said that by pulling that chariot one makes spiritual advancement. Everyone is eager to pull the ropes."

"So there aren't any slaves?" he said.

"Nope," I said. "No slaves." He shook his head and wandered off into the theater tent to wait with the others for the show to start.

As he left, another man came up to me. "Can you sign this Bhagavad-gita?" he asked. "I just bought it."

"Sure," I said.

"I've been attending your festivals each summer for fifteen years," he said as I began writing. "But this time something just clicked, and I decided it was high time that I bought a book and went deeper into your philosophy."

Sorry it took me so long."

I smiled. "Better late than never," I said and handed the book back to him.

Then I saw a man dressed in a suit, wearing old-fashioned glasses and carrying a small briefcase. He looked like an old professor, and I could see that he wanted to talk to me. I excused myself from the young woman I had been talking to, and stood up to receive him.

"May I have a brief word with you?" he asked.

"Of course, sir," I said. "I am at your service."

"It's only a quick question," he said. "I just want to know when you will begin your lecture."

I looked at my watch. "In about thirty-five minutes," I said, "when the theater is over."

"Very good," he said. He turned to leave, but I called after him.

"Excuse me sir," I said. "Is this your first time with us?"

"Oh no," he said. "I have been attending your event for many years, as far back as I can remember. It's been going on for twenty-eight years now, hasn't it?"

A smile broke out on my face. "You have a great memory, sir," I said. "Yes, it's been exactly twenty-eight years."

“Each time, though, I only come for one hour,” he said. “I come just to hear you speak. I write your words of wisdom down and try to imbibe them in my life throughout the year.” He opened his briefcase and showed me a notepad and pen. “I have become a much better person through the years and have gotten closer to the goal of life.”

“What do you mean when you say ‘the goal of life’?” I asked

“You know very well what that means,” he said with a smile.

When I was giving my talk from the stage that evening, I saw him on the last bench furiously writing. At the end of the lecture, I made my way over to where he had been sitting, but he had gone.

As I walked back toward my van, I saw a woman carrying an especially large plate of samosas. It was the woman I had met on the beach whose co-workers had told her to visit our festival. “Hey!” I called out. “I see you got your samosas!”

She turned toward me. “I can’t thank you enough!” she shouted back. “I love your festival! And my friends were right. These samosas are fantastic!”

“Everything about this festival is auspicious,” I thought. “I feel so fortunate to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord, delivering His message in such an attractive way.”

The last kirtan of the evening went on for about an hour. Everybody was dancing—children, parents, everybody. Afterwards, a middle-aged man came up to me, his eyes welling with tears, a gentle smile on his face. He stopped for a minute and took a deep breath. “Hearing you people sing,” he said, “is like touching the feet of the gods.”

“The people had fallen into the sinful life of this age of quarrel, being overwhelmed by grief and delusion, disturbed by anxiety to acquire money for family and relatives. Considering the situation, the Golden Lord took birth in order to protect them. Being very merciful, He made manifest His delightful form as the giver of His holy names.”

[Sriila Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Susloka-Satakam, text 4]





Whenever I come to Mumbai I stay at the home of my disciple Narottam Dasa Thakur Das and his wife Manjari Devi Dasi. Today, Narottam had come with me to the hospital for my PET scan, a checkup for any recurrence of the cancerous skin cells I had had surgically removed last year.

“I’m doubly nervous,” I said to Narottam as we sat in the waiting room. “What if the cancer comes back? I’ll have to go through another operation and all the rest.”

“We’re all praying for you,” said Narottam.

“And I’m nervous about the scan,” I said.

“Why?” asked Narottam. “Scans don’t hurt.”

“I know,” I said. “But it gives me the creeps when they lay me out on the table and roll me into that machine. It’s as if they were feeding me into the mouth of some big monster.”

I looked across the room and saw a janitor pushing a broom across the floor. “And just look at that guy over there,” I said. “He’s talking loudly to himself and laughing at his own jokes. It’s annoying, and it makes everything worse.”

“Maybe he’s a little crazy,” said Narottam.

“He’s not crazy,” said the man next to us. “I come here often and always see him. He’s just eccentric.”

The janitor strode past us, his thinnish frame dressed in a khaki-colored uniform, his brown eyes darting here and there. He was pushing his broom in wild motions, seemingly unaware of the patients in the room. I could see that others were disturbed by him too.

“Now he’s singing to himself,” I said to Narottam. “And off key at that.”

The man next to us laughed. “He keeps the place pretty clean, though,” he said. “And he means well.”

The receptionist behind the desk called out to the sweeper. “Mahesh! Deliver this package to Doctor Agarwal. He’s in room sixteen on the fourth floor.”

Mahesh’s broom made a loud clattering sound as he dropped it on the floor and hurried over to the desk. “Yes, Ma’am,” he said. “Right away, Ma’am.” His voice was high-pitched and reedy. As he walked toward the elevator he read out the address on the parcel in a loud voice. “Doctor Agarwal, room sixteen, fourth floor. Wow! A big package of stuff for the doctor!”

As the elevator doors closed, obscuring his grinning face, I breathed a sigh of relief. “Eccentric is an understatement,” I said to Narottam. “Anyway, it’s quiet at last.”

But just ten minutes later the elevator door opened and he was back. “Done!” he shouted. He hurried to pick up his broom and began sweeping again in the same big strokes, all the while singing in his shrill voice. The noise was oppressive, but I managed to doze off for a few minutes till I heard my name being called over the loudspeaker. I walked into the examination room, where I saw several nurses and, to my surprise, Mahesh busily organizing items in a medical cabinet. “Oh no,” I thought. “What’s he doing here?”

“Mahesh,” said one of the nurses over her shoulder, “could you kindly take this bag to Doctor Reynolds in room 404.” Mahesh





didn't say a word as he danced across the room to collect the bag. He opened the door with a theatrical flourish and disappeared down the hallway.

"While we are preparing the solution for your scan," the nurse said to me, "please put on this hospital gown and then come and sit in this chair." I went into another room to put on the gown, then came back.

"Ouch!" The nurse was sticking a needle into a vein on my wrist. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Mahesh had come back into the room. Suddenly, my chair began to slip under the pressure of my weight and knocked against the table where the nurse had all her equipment. A glass bottle

teetered on the edge, and as she reached out to grab it, she accidentally yanked the needle out of my wrist.

"Mahesh!" she called, "Quick! Help!"

Mahesh dashed across the room, caught the bottle and put it back on the table. The nurse picked up the syringe, which was now in my lap. "Mahesh," she said, "could you please hold this gentleman's chair while I inject him."

"Yes," he said. He gripped the chair with both hands, a serious look on his face.

"Ouch!" The nurse found another vein. Mahesh leaned over and, to my surprise, began to speak in fluent English. "Sir," he said, "this is a most auspicious day for me. Somehow by dint of my past pious activities, I have the good fortune to serve a sadhu. Such opportunities are rare."

Then he quoted a verse from the Padma Purana:

aradhananam sarvesam

visnor aradhanam param

tasmat parataram devi

tadiyanam samarcanam

"My dear goddess, of all types of worship, the worship of Lord Vishnu is the best, and even better than the worship of Lord Vishnu is the worship of His devotee, the Vaisnava."

"What?" I said. "How do you know that verse?"

"I study sastra," he replied softly, still gripping the chair.

"You're a devotee of Krsna?" I asked.

"One day," he said. "One day I hope to become a devotee of the Lord."

"Are you from a family of Vaisnavas?"

"No," he said. "I am an orphan. The devotees of the Lord are my family."

Then he quoted a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

mac-citta mad-gata-prana

bodhayantah parasparam

kathayantas ca mam nityam

tusyanti ca ramanti ca



“The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are surrendered to Me, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss enlightening one another and conversing about Me.”

I suddenly realized that I had been so busy criticizing him that I hadn't noticed his peaceful face and his moist, sparkling eyes.

“Sir,” Mahesh said, smiling slightly, “when I saw you in the reception room earlier, I knew in my heart that the Lord had sent you to give hope to all the unlucky people suffering in this place. Your presence alone brings joy.”

The nurse's voice brought me back to the present. “The injection is done,” she said. “Please go to the next room to wait for your scan.”

“Sure,” I said. “But first let me ask Mahesh if —” I turned back to him, but he had gone.

“Where did he go?” I asked the nurse.

“To sweep, probably,” she replied without looking up.

As I waited in the adjoining room, I felt a wave of guilt wash over me. “I misjudged that man,” I thought. “I was ridiculing him in my mind, but he is more of a devotee than I am. I've committed a serious offense. I'll have to beg him to forgive me.”

Suddenly a sign flashed my name. It was my turn for the PET scan. A nurse welcomed me and helped me lie down on the scanning machine. “Stretch your arms over your head,” she said. “You need to lie completely still for a full ten minutes.” Although I had been nervous about the monster, I relaxed and slowly drifted off to sleep. I woke up when I felt someone touch my feet. I heard a voice singing softly: “Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.”

I opened my eyes. It was Mahesh. “Mahesh,” I whispered, “I need to talk to you.”

But again he vanished as quickly as he had appeared. The scan ended and the sense of shame came over me again. “I'm just an offender,” I thought as I changed into my clothes. I followed the exit signs until I came to the reception room, now twice as crowded as before. I was signing some papers at the reception desk when I heard the high-pitched voice of Mahesh singing. I looked up and saw him dancing across the back of the room pushing his broom.

I rushed across the room. “Mahesh! Mahesh!” I called out. “I need to speak to you!” But before I could reach him, he had disappeared through a glass door. As he danced down the hallway to another part of the hospital, I fell on my knees and prayed for forgiveness:

vancha-kalpa-tarubhyas ca krpasindhubhya eva ca

patitanam pavanebhyo vaisnavebhyo namo namah

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaisnava devotees of the Lord. They are just like desire trees who can fulfill the desires of everyone, and they are full of compassion for the fallen conditioned souls” [Sri Vaisnava-pranati].



As I stood up, I suddenly remembered that I was in a crowded waiting room. Everyone was staring at me. “Let them stare,” I thought. “At the worst they’ll think I’m crazy; at the least they’ll think I’m eccentric. But I’ll know I am paying my respects to the wonderful Vaishnava I unexpectedly met today.”



Srila Prabhupada has written:

“Your complaint is that you have met two of my young disciples in California and they appeared to you as having ‘a very negative outlook towards the people they meet.’ Of course, I do not know the case, what are the circumstances, but kindly forgive my beloved disciples for any un-kindness or indiscretions on their part. After all, to give up one's life completely for serving the Lord is not so easy thing. And maya, or the illusory material energy, she tries especially hard to try to get back and entrap those who have left her service to become devotees. So sometimes in the neophyte stage of devotional service, in order to withstand the attack of maya and remain strong under all conditions of temptation, young or inexperienced devotees will adopt an attitude against those things or persons possibly harmful, threatening to their tender devotional creeper. To come to that platform of understanding things as they are, that is not a very common thing, and therefore such persons who attain to it, they are described as ‘great souls.’”

[Srila Prabhupada letter to Lynne Ludwig, April 30, 1973]



“Welcome home!” Mahavan dasa, a Russian disciple, greeted me as I came out of New Delhi’s slick new airport terminal, tired after my flight from Bangalore. Mahavan is my secretary when I travel in India. A brahmachari in his thirties, he wears saffron, shaves his head, and stuffs his bag with the latest gadgets—cell phones, iPads, ear buds, chargers.

“We’re not home yet,” I said. “I wish we were, but Vrindavan is

still a good three hours away.”

“Well, let’s get there quickly,” he said. “The car is just over here.”

We began working our way through the crowd of people that were going into and coming out of the terminal when Mahavan suddenly pointed to an elderly man in soiled burgundy-colored robes in the midst of the throng. “Gurudeva,” Mahavan said, “look at that man. It looks like he’s asking people for help. I think he’s a beggar.”

“He’s not a beggar,” I said. “He’s a Buddhist monk from Tibet. It’s part of his tradition to approach others for alms. It helps the monks develop humility.”

“But he doesn’t have a begging bowl,” Mahavan said, “and he looks desperate.”

No one was giving the man anything. As we watched, a teenage boy shoved him aside. The monk covered his face with his hands and sat down on a bench. A moment later, an affluent-looking couple walked past, and he got up and approached them, but they too ignored him, and when he persisted the man shouted at him. The monk looked flustered. He sat back down on the bench and stared straight ahead, as if in contemplation. Despite his bedraggled condition, he appeared effulgent.

I was shocked at the way people were treating him. I felt it was my duty to help him, so I started to walk toward the bench when he noticed me and jumped up to hurry over and grab hold of my sleeve. “Please let me stay with you for a while,” he said in English. “I need the shelter of spiritual people.”

“Sure,” I said. “Why don’t we sit down?”

“Do you have the time?” he asked softly.



“For someone like you I have all the time in the world,” I said. We walked toward the bench he had been sitting on. He continued to hold onto my sleeve.

“Are you hungry?” I asked. “Can I get something for you to eat?”

“Thank you, no,” he replied. “I am not hungry.”

“Have you lost your way?” I asked. “Maybe I can help you get to your next destination.”

“Just a minute,” he said. He straightened his back and closed his eyes, assuming a meditative pose. As he slowly inhaled and exhaled, he became calm, serene, and composed.

“How in the world did he manage to find such peace right after being mistreated?” I wondered. The minutes passed, and I felt a wave of tranquility come over me as well. Finally he opened his eyes. He didn’t look directly at me, but stared into the distance as he told me his story.

“My name is Tsering Lama,” he said. “I come from the Sera Monastery in Lhasa, Tibet. I have lived there since I was five years old.”

“Wow!” I said. “How old are you now?”

“I am seventy years old.”

“And what service do you do in the monastery?” I asked.

“I study the scriptures,” he said. “Since my childhood I have studied the teachings of Master Lama Tsongkhapa who lived in the fourteenth century. He was the founder of the Gelug-pa School which I belong to, and a highly respected teacher of the Buddhist scriptures. My main service is to debate with others about the scriptures. It is an integral part of our tradition.”

“I am honored to meet such a learned scholar,” I said. “And I am sorry to see how people are treating you today.”

He shook his head, as if to suggest the mistreatment was of no concern or perhaps to dismiss my praise. “It has been my lifelong dream to visit Bodh Gaya,” he said. “It is the place where Buddha attained enlightenment. That holy site is here in India in the state of Bihar. Several months ago I said goodbye to my beloved disciples and set out on foot alone for Bodh Gaya.”

I wondered how many hundreds or even thousands of disciples such a man could have.

“When I arrived here in Delhi,” he continued, “two men invited me to spend the night at their home. I was exhausted from months of traveling, so I accepted their invitation. That night they fed me and



gave me some tea to drink. The next thing I knew I was waking up on the sidewalk in a Delhi slum. It seems that the tea they gave me was laced with some drug that caused me to fall unconscious. I discovered that they had stolen everything I possessed: my clothes, my passport, my money, of course, and even my sacred chanting beads. I had been saving that money since my childhood for this pilgrimage, and suddenly it seemed impossible that I would make it to Bodh Gaya.

“Now I have nothing. I have been here at the airport for three days begging for money to complete my journey. Nobody has given me a single rupee, most likely because I look so dirty and disheveled.”

I took his hand. “I will help you,” I said.

“No, no,” he said. “I will not take money from a holy man like you.”

“It’s OK,” I said. “I am not holy yet. I’m trying, but I’m just a beginner, really. I have a long way to go. Believe me, you can safely accept some money from me.”

“What you say in humility is not true,” he said soberly. “I studied your face. I can see your true self through your eyes.”

“You can see me through my eyes?” I asked.

“Yes” he replied. “I have learned this from our Tibetan masters.” He looked straight into my eyes with a steady stare. Feeling uncomfortable, I looked away, but he caught my chin with his hand and turned my head toward him so he could study my face. His small hand had a powerful grip.

I also looked at his face. His dark brown eyes peered out from slanted eyelids that curved upward at the outer corners, reminding me of Tibetan art. He had a small flattish nose, and his thin lips, though fixed in a determined line, seemed to be slightly, almost imperceptibly, smiling. He obviously had not shaved for some days, and his golden skin bore a few small scars. He seemed to glow with a radiance that I could feel more than see, and the softly pungent fragrance of Tibetan incense still hovered about his stained, travel-weary clothes. Though his head barely came up to my nose, I had the feeling that I was standing in front of someone large and powerful, someone who could knock me over with the flick of a finger.

After some minutes he spoke. “You have served your master well in this life.”

“Well, I have done some service,” I said. “Like I said, I’m trying, but...”

“You have spread his glories through the written word, through discourses, and through festivals that you hold in distant lands.”

Distant lands? How could a Tibetan monk know about the festivals in Poland?

“But your service was interrupted last year by disease,” he said.

“Well, yes. I had a bout with cancer and...”

“In March,” he said.

I caught my breath. “Yes,” I said. “Yes. You are exactly right. It was in March of last year.”



“And there is more disease to come,” he said.

“Oh really?” I said. I could hear the disappointment in my own voice.

“But don’t worry,” he said. “I will help you.”

He got off the bench and sat down on the ground in a full yoga asana. He closed his eyes once more and quickly seemed to be transported to another plane. After a few minutes his eyebrows furrowed in the intensity of his meditation and his lips moved as he chanted mantras in the Tibetan language. People stopped to stare at the unusual sight: a sannyasi sitting on a bench and a Buddhist monk meditating on the ground next to him. They looked at me as if asking for an explanation, but I had none. I could only sit silently while he offered prayers on my behalf.

Twenty minutes later he opened his eyes and turned to me. “I have removed the obstacles,” he said. “You will live a long life in service to your master.”

“Well, gosh,” I said. “Thanks so much.” I got up and helped him back onto the bench.

“Compassion is central to the teachings of Buddha,” he said.

“I know that,” I said. “But why are you being so kind to a stranger like me?”

“We are not strangers,” he said. “I am returning a favor you offered me several lifetimes ago.”

I felt the hair on my arms stand up.

“You mean... Are you saying we were together in a previous...?”

“Some things are better left unsaid,” he replied. “And I must go. I must try to fulfill my dream.”

“Wait,” I said. “Wait a minute. I want to help you.”

“No,” he said. “As I already told you, I would not accept money from you. You are using it to help people less fortunate than yourself.”

“But wait,” I said. “How do you know how I use money? We’ve only just met.”

“As I told you,” he said, “the eyes show the light of the soul.”

He turned and started walking away toward the terminal.

“No!” I said running after him. “I won’t let you be mistreated by those people again. “Please take this donation. It’s enough to get you to Bodh Gaya and back to Tibet by train.” I pushed some bills into his hand.

He looked at the money for a long time. When he looked up his eyes were moist.

“I will accept your kindness,” he said slowly. “And I will not forget you.”

He started walking away again, but then stopped and turned back.



“We won’t meet again in this lifetime,” he said. “But I will leave you a special gift in the monastery in Lhasa. When you arrive, mention my name. The monks will direct you.” He took a small piece of paper from the sleeve of his robe and wrote down the address of the monastery. I felt goose bumps erupt on my body.

“Please make sure you go there,” he said. “What I am leaving for you will be a great asset in service to your master.”

“Do you mean money?” I asked.

“Oh, no,” he said. “Nothing like that. It is something more wonderful than anything money could ever buy. You will not be disappointed.” With that he disappeared into the crowded metro station. I turned to Mahavan. “What just happened? Was that a dream?”

“No,” he said, looking as astounded as I felt. “I saw it with my own eyes. Will you actually go to Lhasa?”

“Yes, of course I will,” I replied. “I’ve always wanted to go to Tibet. And now I have the best reason ever: to increase my service to my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada.”

“Can I go with you?” Mahavan said.

“You must come,” I said, “just to remind me that I’m not dreaming when we discover what the monk has left us. And to confirm that service to a great soul never goes in vain.”

“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.” [Srimad Bhagavatam 5.5.2]



I settled into the science classroom in the school that would once again be our base for our summer festival tour. The walls were crowded with test tubes, microscopes and colored bottles filled with liquid. Guru Kripa das laughed out loud as he looked around the room.

“Gurudeva, you’ve stayed in this room for three months every summer for last fifteen years. That means you’ve lived in this science lab for a total of four years! Have you ever noticed the monkey brain in the jar of formaldehyde?”

“Well, yes I have,” I said. “But I try not to look. Srila Prabhupada once said that sometimes a preacher lives in a palace and sometimes in a simple hut. But he never mentioned a science lab!”

The next morning we held a meeting with the 250 devotees who had joined us for the summer tour. There were many new faces; a number of the veterans from previous tours had not returned this year, either because they had to work, were recently married or had other responsibilities. Scanning the crowd, I suddenly realized I was the only devotee present who had been on the first Polish tour twenty six years ago.

I welcomed the devotees and gave a talk requesting them to give everything to Lord Caitanya’s sankirtan movement for the next three months. The tour, I explained, is a unique kind of festival within Srila Prabhupada’s movement. Temple festivals provide devotees with the opportunity to enjoy kirtan, katha and prasadam, but our festival program is specifically for non-devotees. Our job is to work in the background in order to give them the chance to experience the kirtan, classes and prasadam that we enjoy. It means a lot of self-sacrifice on the part of the team, but the reward is seeing others happily experiencing Krsna consciousness for the first time.

“Our festival is part of the sankirtan movement,” I concluded, “and thus it is part of the modern day pastimes of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. His movement did not conclude when He left this planet. He Himself predicted that the holy names of Krishna would one day be heard in every town and village of the world. That being the case, we should look for present day miracles happening in our midst. This will help us to remain inspired during our three-month sacrifice.”

“Do you mean miracles like seeing our guests walking on water?” one devotee asked.

“Not miracles like that,” I replied with a smile. “Just look for a change of heart in people when they come to our festival. That’s the real miracle. To have a genuine spiritual experience is no ordinary thing in the age of Kali!”

The devotees didn’t have to wait long to see such changes of heart. The next day, within minutes of our harinam party entering the crowded beach to advertise our first festival, a gentleman began enthusiastically taking photos of us. That he was taking photos wasn’t unusual in and of itself; what was unusual was that he didn’t stop. He continued following us for forty five minutes, shooting frame after frame of the brightly dressed matajis, the mrdanga players and the synchronized devotee dancers. Finally I walked over to him.

“Sir, why so many photos?” I asked.

“My daughter recently started practicing your faith,” he said, still shooting away. “She has been trying to explain it to me. I wasn’t very understanding of her choice and so she was becoming quite upset with me. When I saw you all - so many people who are obviously from different countries and backgrounds - singing and dancing happily in unison down the street I was convinced there could be nothing wrong with your movement after all. So I am taking all these photos to send to her to show my approval.” He shook my hand and waved as we continued on.



A few minutes further down the beach, a lady jumped up from her towel and came over to me.

“Welcome, welcome, welcome,” she said. “We are so happy to see you! Each year when you people come to town it means summer has finally arrived!”

That evening the crowds flooded into our festival grounds. I watched, spellbound; even after twenty six years, the sight still amazed me.

As I watched some festival goers settled down to enjoy the continuous stage show, while others milled around the restaurant, the shops, the book stalls, the yoga classes, the face painting, and the many other attractions.

“These are the most precious moments of my life,” I thought, as I began my customary walk around the festival site, Guru Kripa and Mathuranath by my side. “So much endeavor goes into collecting for and planning these events, but when I see so many hundreds and thousands of people enjoying Krsna consciousness I feel full satisfaction.”

As I was walking, I noticed a woman in her twenties with a sad look on her face standing at the perimeter of the festival. She was holding a big basket of flowers.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“I’ve been trying to sell these roses for nine hours,” she said. “I’m hungry and tired and I’ve only sold two. My boss is going to kill me. And while I’m feeling bad, all the people at your festival are having a great time. I just wish I could come in, but I can’t. I really depend on this job, and I can’t afford not to sell the flowers.”

“How much do they cost?” I asked.

“They’re two zlotys each,” she said.

“I’ll make a deal with you,” I said. “I’ll buy the whole basket if you promise to come to the festival and stay until the very end.”

There was a long pause. She regarded me with wide-eyed amazement.



“Really?” she said at last.
“You’re not joking?”

“Not at all,” I replied. “I can ask someone to take you to the fashion booth where you can put on a sari for the evening. Then you can have your face painted with beautiful flowers and you can go to the restaurant and eat for free. And then you can just sit in the front row and watch the show.”

Her eyes filled with tears as I pulled out 100 zlotys, took all the flowers, and handed them to Mathuranath.

“The pujaris were looking for some nice flowers for the deities this afternoon. We can give these roses to them.”

One of the lady devotees took the flower girl towards the stalls. Guru Kripa turned to me.

“Gurudeva,” he said, “this festival is free, but you just paid that girl to come. It’s so unusual.”

“There’s a saying in Sanskrit,” I said. ‘Phalena pariciyate’. It means ‘judge something by the result.’ Let’s see how she’s doing at the end of the festival.”

I continued my walk around the festival site. On the stage, our new theatrical performance “Vrindavan” was in full swing, the audience mesmerized by the performance of the thirty two actors. Meanwhile, all sixteen tents that bordered the festival area were full of people soaking up the various aspects of Vedic culture on display. In the book tent, people were browsing through Srila Prabhupada’s books and asking the devotees behind the counter questions. I saw an elderly woman concluding her purchase of *Bhagavad-Gita* at the cash register.

“It’s a wonderful book,” I said to her.

“Oh yes, I know,” she said. “I’ve read this edition several times. I come to your festival every year and purchase four or five copies.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Well, I am 85 years old and lots of my friends are beginning to pass away,” she said. “When each one does, I give a *Bhagavad-Gita* to their relatives so they can understand what death actually is and that the soul is reborn.”

“Now that’s a little miracle,” I thought to myself. “An old woman who has never lived in a temple or been formally trained in Krsna conscious is sharing the wisdom of Srila Prabhupada’s *Bhagavad-Gita* with others!”

It was time for me to head to the stage to give my lecture.

“How many times have I given this talk?” I asked Guru Kripa.

“At least 108 times,” he said.

“More like at least 1008 times, if not double that,” I said.

With *Gita* in hand I walked onto the stage and went straight to the front, my translator Mondakini dasi by my side. As a young boy I was always shy about speaking in public, but I’ve never experienced fear when delivering a lecture on Krsna consciousness. The reason is simple: the philosophy is perfect and complete. For a person who studies it and lives it, the philosophy is attractive because it provides a logical explanation of spiritual life and a positive alternative for solving all problems by returning to the spiritual world.

At the end of the lecture, I descended the stairs to find a small group of people with *Bhagavad-Gitas* in their hands, waiting for me to sign them.

The first to approach me was a sixteen-year-old girl who said that it was the eighth summer festival she had attended.



“Since my first festival I have had a special attraction to your food. I also love your theatre shows. I’ve watched all the shows you’ve ever produced; my favorite is the one about Lord Rama. As I was sitting listening to your lecture today, it dawned on me that it’s about time I started studying your philosophy, so I ran over to the book tent and bought this *Bhagavad-Gita*.” She blushed and looked at the ground. “Sorry it has taken me eight years to come to this point.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about,” I said. “That’s how the process works.”

Next two girls approached me with a *Bhagavad-Gita*.

“It’s for our parents,” one of them said. “Our family is going through a difficult time. We were listening to your lecture and realized that your philosophy solves so many problems, so we’re hoping the wisdom in this book can guide our family to happier times.”

“I’m sure it will,” I said.

I signed ten *Bhagavad Gitas*, and as I was finishing two boys ran up to me.

“When’s your talk?” one of them said, gasping for air.

“Well, actually, I already spoke,” I said. “It was about an hour ago.”

“Oh no!” he said. He turned to the other boy. “You were eating your dessert too slowly. I told you we’d be late!”

“How old are you boys?” I asked.



“I’m twelve”, said the taller boy, “and my brother is ten.”

“And you came to hear my lecture?” I asked.

“Yes!” said the older boy. “We’ve come to your festival for the last three years and our favorite part is your talk. So much knowledge.”

“Yep,” said his younger brother. “As you always say, ‘Out of 8,400,000 species of life, the human form of life is the most important.’”

I shook my head in amazement. “Yes, I do say that.”

“Every lecture,” the older boy said, and they both laughed.

“But there’s always something new for us to think about too,” said the younger one. “We’re very grateful to you.”

“Why don’t we go and talk in the restaurant?” I suggested. “Because you guys missed the talk you can have whatever you want to eat.”

Their eyes lit up. “Great idea!”

Walking to the restaurant beside the boys, I marveled at how Srila Prabhupada’s movement appeals to people of all ages. “Even to very young philosophers,” I thought.

Outside the book tent I saw the flower girl emerging with a big smile on her face and one of Srila Prabhupada’s books under her arm.

“So there’s the result!” I said aloud.

“What did you say?” asked the younger brother.

I gave a huge smile. “I said I could do this forever!”



aneka janma krta maj jato 'ndhau
siddhim kurusva prabhu gaura candra
samuj jvalam te pada padma sevam
karomi nityam hari kirtanam ca

“I have been immersed for many lives in this ocean of birth and death. Oh Lord Gauracandra! Oh golden moon-like master! If You bestow upon me continuous service to Your brilliant lotus feet, I shall chant and describe to others the glories of Sri Hari forever.”

[Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Susloka-Satakam, text 99]