

# DIARY OF A TRAVELING PREACHER

VOLUME 8

INDRADYUMNA SWAMI



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*shifting the paradigm*

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## DEDICATION

To Earl “Chinna” Smith and Inna “Kiddus 1” Deyand

Icons in the world of Reggae music, you proved yourselves  
humble servants of the Lord by sweetly singing His holy names  
with thousands of kids at Woodstock.



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# FOREWORD

When I received a phone call from my dear friend Indradyumna Swami asking me for a favor, I was eager to satisfy him. But when he asked me to write the foreword for the current volume of his *Diary of a Traveling Preacher*, I was a bit hesitant. I'm no writer by any means, neither am I a great scholar. Yet I do have a small qualification: I have personally witnessed many of the remarkable pastimes and adventures of Indradyumna Swami in his service of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness for Lord Caitanya.

In the life of Narada Muni, we see the travels of a great preacher who covers every corner of the universe. He encounters adventure, intrigue, danger, challenges, and achieves great successes. His ability to be so successful is due only to his attachment to the Supreme Lord and his desire to act as an order carrier of His teachings. As we read the pages of *Diary of a Traveling Preacher*, we cannot help but think of the similarities. Indradyumna Swami leaves no corner of the globe untouched as he travels in service to Srila Prabhupada, spreading the mission of Lord Caitanya. Whether he is floating down the Amazon River, speaking to leaders of gypsy villages, unlocking for his disciples the treasures of the holy *dhamas*, or spreading the holy name to hundreds of thousands of kids at the Polish Woodstock festival, his message is the same: take this holy name and chant.

This comes at no small price. He has sacrificed a peaceful life of contentedly living in one place, and put the very health

of the body he uses in the Lord's service at peril. Yet it can be said that there is no greater satisfaction for a preacher than to give everything in the battle for the *sankirtan* movement of Lord Caitanya. And, yes, he has received satisfaction, for the Lord has seen fit to reciprocate with him for his service. Many times he has been blessed with gifts of rare and exotic Deities of the Lord from ancient and forgotten tirthas.

A reader seeks to be entertained when reading – to feel the emotions of the character of the book, to observe the character's development, to share with the character the daily challenges of his or her life. Indradyumna Swami is not afraid to open up and reveal himself. He shows us his strengths and weaknesses and how he develops and grows on the path of devotional service. He shows himself to be like you and me, yet by doing so he shows himself to be much different than you and me. He shows himself to be what we want to be, what we desire to be, but what we know we are not: a traveling preacher. What greater happiness can there be in this life?

Please now put aside these insignificant words of mine and plunge into the real world of bliss and excitement that is shared with all of us for our encouragement and advancement in the service to guru and Gauranga. Dive deep into *Diary of a Traveling Preacher, Volume 8*.

Chaturatma dasa  
New Raman Reti Dhama  
January 16, 2008



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I would like to thank Advaita Candra dasa for kindly printing my diaries each year. He spends many hours to prepare these books for publication, although they bring him little (if any) profit. I am grateful to him for his selfless contribution.

I am also indebted to my editors, Ken White and Umapati Swami, who make sense of what I write and who give clarity to my thoughts and realizations.

A big thank you goes to Jal Keli dasa for his cover design, to Sri Thakur Mahasaya dasa for file and photo preparation, and to Mayapriya dasi for the design and layout of the book.

And last, but not least, I thank the readers of my diaries who inspire me to share with them my experiences in preaching Krsna consciousness throughout the world.

Indradyumna Swami



DIARY OF A  
TRAVELING  
PREACHER

VOLUME 8





# AN UNSUNG HERO

| JANUARY 1 - 15, 2007 |

After my preaching tour in South America, I flew to Africa. As I handed my ticket and passport to the woman behind the check-in counter at Johannesburg Airport, she looked up and asked where I was going.

“Nairobi, Kenya,” I said with a smile.

“Business or pleasure?” she asked curiously.

“For the mission,” I said enthusiastically.

Glancing up, she said, “You like your work, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do, ma’am, very much.”

“How many bags are you checking in, sir?” she continued.

“No bags,” I replied.

“No bags?” she said in surprise. “Then how much carry-on luggage do you have?”

“Just this Buddha bag,” I said, showing her the small red bag I had slung over my shoulder.



“That’s all?” she said.

“Yes,” I said proudly.

It was my New Year’s resolution to cut down on my possessions and travel with only the essentials. It hadn’t been easy. But I was determined. Once Tamal Krishna Goswami met Srila Prabhupada at New York’s Kennedy Airport for a flight to London. Maharaja was beginning his tenure as Prabhupada’s secretary. When Srila Prabhupada saw that Maharaja had only one small carry-on bag, he said, “Thank you very much,” indicating he was pleased with Maharaja’s renunciation.

During the flight I read from the Lonely Planet series about Kenya. A country of thirty million, it was once dubbed by the British “The Jewel of East Africa” because of its scenic beauty and abundant natural resources. But like most countries, it has had its days of despair, most notably during the time of the slave trade in the late nineteenth century and during a bitter struggle for independence from the British in the early 1950s. But no less ugly, I read, has been the reign of Kenya’s own politicians since independence. Corruption, arrests of dissidents, censorship, and economic woes have all stifled Kenya’s democratic growth.

Of course, for devotees of Lord Krishna the most significant part of Kenya’s history began when Brahmananda Swami introduced Krishna consciousness to the country in 1971. Like all missionaries before him, Brahmananda faced a daunting task in pioneering a spiritual movement on the dark continent. In appreciation of that service, Srila Prabhupada once shed tears reading of Brahmananda’s efforts to preach to the Africans. And in recognition of his disciple’s austerities, Srila Prabhupada himself visited Kenya twice.

I was visiting the country to see a group of young boys from the ISKCON temple in Kisumu. I was considering bringing them to our festival tour in Poland this year. Little Go Kool is a group of ten-year-olds who sing Krishna conscious rap songs with choreographed dance. They are part of an orphanage run by devotees in Kisumu. The group would be performing at a festival in Nairobi organized by Mahavisnu Swami and Giridhari dasa from England.

When I arrived in Nairobi, Govinda Prema Dasa, a young man in his twenties, greeted me.

“Welcome to Kirata-suddhi,” he said warmly. “It’s the name Srila Prabhupada gave our temple. It means the place where the Kiratas, the people of this land, are purified.”

“Judging from the friendliness of the immigration and customs officials,” I said, “it seems they like us here.”

“Oh, yes,” he replied. “We’ve been chanting, dancing, and distributing *prasadam* for more than thirty-five years in Nairobi.

“In general, Kenyans are quite accommodating people,” Govinda Prema continued as we drove into the city. “There are more than seventy tribes in the country, but there is rarely any violence between them. For the most part they have accepted us as well.

“Just over there are some Maasai warriors,” he said, pointing to a group of ten men in traditional tribal dress walking along the road.

“That’s one tribe that stayed aloof from the modernization in Kenya,” he said.

Looking close as we passed by, I saw that the men wore large bead necklaces and red blankets and carried ball-tipped clubs. Some of them had dyed their braided hair orange.

“They’re nomads,” Govinda Prema said. “They drink the blood of their cows by making a small incision in one of the animal’s veins.”

I cringed at the thought.

“But they never kill the cow,” he said quickly, “and these warriors have probably come into the city to sell their herbal medicines, which are quite effective.”

“I’ll keep that in mind if I get sick here,” I said in an attempt at humor.

“By the way,” Govinda Prema said, “did you get a yellow fever vaccination before coming?”

“Yes, I did,” I said, pulling out my vaccination certificate. “They won’t let me back into South Africa without one. It cost me \$100 and hurt like hell.”

Govinda Prema laughed. “There’s no yellow fever in the big cities,” he said, “just in the countryside. In Nairobi you can get a fake card like that for \$2 from any travel agent. You do have to worry about malaria, though. Use a mosquito net at night.”

“Did you ever get malaria?” I asked.

“Many times,” he replied, smiling. “Now the mosquitoes are looking for new people to bite.”

I laughed half-heartedly and then dozed off, exhausted from traveling.

An hour later I woke up as we entered the driveway of our temple compound. I was amazed to see a large temple structure, replete with Vedic motifs.

“I didn’t know the temple was so big,” I said.

“It was built in 1994 – and here comes the devotee who was responsible for the construction,” Govinda Prema said as a devotee hurriedly walked toward our car. “This is Umapati dasa, our temple president.”



“I’m pleased to meet you,” I said to Umapati.

“He collected several million dollars to build this temple,” Govinda Prema said proudly. “He chants thirty-two rounds a day and hasn’t missed a *mangala-arotik* in sixteen years.”

Umapati looked down shyly. “Enough!” he said. “This temple was Srila Prabhupada’s desire and therefore it exists. He personally brought our Radha-Krishna Deities to Nairobi and installed Them.”

As Umapati showed me around the temple complex, we came to the *prasadam* hall. “This was our first temple room,” he said. “We used it until the main temple room was completed upstairs.

“One day thirty-five men, all armed with AK 47s, burst in while we were having Srimad-Bhagavatam class. They had come to steal. They ordered us to lie on the floor. When they saw the murti of Srila Prabhupada on his *vyasasan*, they screamed at him, ‘Get down on the floor like the others!’

“Of course, the *murti* didn’t move. Three or four times they yelled at Srila Prabhupada in an increasingly threatening tone. ‘Get down or we’ll shoot you!’ one of them shouted while pointing his rifle at the murti. Then the thieves became frightened by what they saw as Srila Prabhupada’s fearlessness and suddenly fled. Srila Prabhupada saved us!”

“That’s quite a story,” I said.

“We’re not always so fortunate,” Umapati continued. “Local people often steal from us. But it’s less of a problem since we’ve been distributing a thousand plates of *prasadam* a day around the city. We get big crowds of Indians and Africans at our Sunday Feast programs. Tomorrow you’ll get to meet the local people at the festival. The devotees are setting it up right now in a slum outside the city.”

In the temple the next morning before class I met Giridhari dasa, a humble devotee in his early forties. He and Mahavisnu Swami are the main forces behind the festivals in East Africa. Tribhuvanath dasa, my godbrother, started the festival programs in 1995 and continued them until his death in 2002.

“Tribhuvanath was a great pioneer in spreading Krishna consciousness throughout Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Congo, and Kenya,” Giridhari said with great emotion. “Not many people know how hard he worked and what risks he took while preaching in this part of the world. He faced many hardships in spreading Lord Caitanya’s movement. He’s an unsung hero.”

I nodded in agreement. I had known Tribhuvanath from the early ’70s in London. Sometimes I would take my *sankirtan* party from France to England to associate with the British devotees. We’d often go out on harinama with Tribhuvanath, who would lead the chanting on the street for hours with a big smile on his face. People were naturally attracted to him.

“He steadily built up the festival program here in East Africa with a small team of devotees from England,” continued Giridhari. “He was very dedicated and worked without any desire for recognition. You can’t imagine how difficult it was in those days, having to deal with repressive governments, civil wars, poor transportation, meager facilities, little money, disease, and lack of manpower.

“Once we were arrested in the jungle in the Congo and thrown into a wooden jail for days, surrounded by guards with rifles. We thought we were going to die. One day, with no explanation, they released us.

“One time Tribhuvanath came down with cerebral malaria and almost died. But it didn’t slow him down. For seven years

he did thirty festivals a year, from November through January. He had so much energy and a strong desire to give people the holy names. When he wasn't doing the festivals he was raising funds to support them. Only death could stop him."

Giridhari then became a little overwhelmed. He said, "You'll get an idea of what he did all those years when we visit the festival today."

As I sat down to give class I thought, "Just as Srila Prabhupada felt so much appreciation for the service of Brahmananda, no doubt he has the same feelings for Tribhuvanath. Pioneering Krishna consciousness in places like this requires great faith in the spiritual master and Krishna."

That afternoon the devotees drove me to the slum where our festival was to take place. I was nervous as we drove into the sprawling area of ramshackle huts packed together.

"They pay two dollars a month rent," said one devotee. "Some of these people walk twenty-five kilometers to work each day, and another twenty-five back home."

I was sitting in the front seat when a large group of street children noticed me. They jumped up and started running toward the van shouting what sounded like "Food! Food!"

"It seems they want *prasadam*," I said to the devotee driving the car.

"No," he said, laughing. "They're saying 'Muzungu! Muzungu!' It means 'White people!'"

As we drove along the dusty road I was shocked to see people selling used shoes, torn clothes, toilet paper, and decaying vegetables by the roadside.

As we got closer to the festival site, I became curious to see what it would look like. I imagined it would be much like my festival sites in Poland, with a large stage, a vegetarian restau-

rant, shops, and many tents housing displays depicting Vedic culture. I was in for a big surprise.

As we rounded a bend and crossed over an open sewer, I suddenly saw the festival site before me. It consisted of one small stage.

“That’s it?” I said to the driver.

“Were you expecting something more?” he said.

“Well, yes. I mean . . .”

He laughed as he said, “If there was more they’d steal it from right under our noses. It’s happened before. At one festival they took everything. These are desperately poor people. This is Tribhuvanath’s formula. Be patient. You’ll see that it works. Remember: you’re in the heart of Africa, not Europe or America.”

I got out of the van and made my way through the large crowd. “How many people do you think are here?” I asked the devotee accompanying me.

“It’s our usual crowd of several thousand,” he replied.

When we finally got to the stage, I sat down on a chair. Seeing me, a number of small African children standing in the first row waved and shouted, “Muzungu! Muzungu!”

“Are you sure they’re not coming just to see some white people?” I said to Giridhari.

Smiling, he replied, “That may be part of it. But most of these people come knowing it’s a spiritual program. They’re interested because material life has absolutely nothing to offer them.”

Looking out at the crowd, I saw that most of the guests had no shoes. I also saw people carrying an assortment of cups, bowls, plates, and even pots.

Noticing me, Giridhari said, “They’ve heard that Hare Krishna means food distribution, but they’ll have a lot of good questions. You’ll see.”

As I sat waiting for the stage show to begin, I looked around the field. It appeared that we were set up in a dirt parking lot. We were surrounded on all sides by dilapidated buildings, with laundry hanging from the railings. At the far end of the lot was a bar, New Joes, with no windows. The crowd waiting for the program seemed to be of all ages, and they were so packed together that no one could move.

Finally, the stage program began with a *kirtan*. At first, people stared at the devotees, many hearing Krishna’s holy names for the first time. Then a few began to move with the tempo of the *kirtan*. Some chanted.

Next the devotees did a short skit. The crowd liked it. Then Little Go Kool came on. The group of eight boys looked at me nervously. They knew they were auditioning for the chance to come on the festival tour in Poland. If they qualified, it would be the trip of a lifetime for them.

When they began singing, the crowd came alive. It was good rap music, but more important, the boys sang with realization. They had all grown up on the streets, struggling to survive on their own. The devotees in Kisumu had literally picked them up off the streets and brought them to the temple orphanage.

As they performed, I could see that many kids in the audience related to them. The boys sang:

“Once upon time on the streets of Africa, So many homeless children, The boys high on drugs and crime, The girls engaging in prostitution, Smoking weed, sniffing glue, The cops always chasing after us. This is how we used to be. But now we

have a new life Off the streets of Africa. This is a tale of some lucky ones And the story of their victory.”

When the boys sang about the evils of AIDS, many parents pushed their children forward to hear clearly. When the group sang Hare Krishna, the same kids chanted along and danced.

As the boys came down off the stage I gave them a thumbs-up, indicating I liked their show. They grinned from ear to ear, but remained composed until they got into the bus, and then they started jumping for joy and singing at the top of their lungs.

Then suddenly the master of ceremonies turned to me and said, “You’re on.”

“Already?” I said, surprised.

“It’s only a three-hour show,” he said, “and mostly *kirtan*.”

I began my lecture by explaining the purpose of human life and then went on to discuss the miseries of material existence. But as I was talking I became increasingly aware that my audience had much more realization of the subject than I did. After a few minutes I became uncomfortable. “Who am I to tell them material life is miserable?” I thought. “Better just spell out the positive alternative.” I then began to explain the benefits of chanting Hare Krishna – how it purifies the heart and awakens love of God.

Then I started a *kirtan*. Some people responded to the chanting, but many held back. Then I had an idea. I picked up the pace of the *kirtan* and then stopped singing, while indicating to the devotee playing a mrdanga to let loose. As he started a solo, the entire crowd suddenly started dancing in their African fashion. I let it go on for some time. At one point several devotees looked at me as if to say, “What’s going on?” At that moment I began singing again, but just two words of the mantra

at a time. This time everyone responded. We went on like that for forty-five minutes – I would sing two words of the mantra, and the entire crowd would respond. When I finally left the stage, some of the men from the crowd came up and shook my hand enthusiastically.

But as soon as I sat down, the master of ceremonies came over and said, “Maharaja, you have to go back onstage again. It’s time for questions and answers.”

“But I thought they were going to take *prasadam* now,” I said.

“They will,” he replied. “But you can answer questions at the same time.”

I surrendered, though I wondered how a question-and-answer session would go during the mayhem I imagined would take place as *prasadam* was distributed.

My apprehensions disappeared as I came onstage and saw a long line of people – not waiting for *prasadam*, but waiting to ask questions. There were more than a hundred people lined up in front of a devotee holding a microphone. As soon as I stood in the center of the stage, the devotee handed the microphone to the first person.

“Sir,” the man said respectfully, “you were explaining the principle of reincarnation. What is the proof that we change our bodies at the moment of death?”

And so it went for well over an hour, as the people calmly took *prasadam* and listened as I answered their questions. At the end of the program we had another rousing *kirtan*, and then I left the stage.

As I walked back toward the van, I was amazed to see a huge crowd of people around the book table, buying Srila Prabhupada’s books. Then suddenly over the sound system came

a taped Tribhuvanath *kirtan*. I stopped and looked around as the crowd was leaving, many of the people still singing Hare Krishna. Like Giridhari that morning, I became overwhelmed with emotion.

“Hundreds of thousands of African people must have attended such programs during Tribhuvanath’s time,” I thought. “Most ISKCON devotees probably aren’t aware of the great contribution he made here in Africa.”

Just at that moment a devotee passing by asked if I would be writing a diary chapter about my visit to Kenya.

“Yes, of course,” I said.

“About our temple?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “But mostly about Tribhuvanath Dasaa. Because of his efforts, these people and many more Africans like them have been given the chance to taste the nectar of chanting Krishna’s holy names. Such a Vaisnava hero should be given the recognition he deserves.”

Srila Prabhupada writes:

My dear Visakha,

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter from Bombay dated May 24, 1972, along with the very nice article, Prabhupada: India’s National Hero. I am very grateful to you for your kind words about me, but I do not think that I have done anything, but I am only delivering the best message as it is. Actually, anyone who is a sincere devotee of Krishna and who is rendering service by preaching His message is to be considered as hero. So you are all heroes of your country and your humanity. Hero means someone who others want to follow as example of the best type of person. So you all become like that, perfect examples of Krishna



consciousness heroes and heroines, and preach the message exactly as I have taught it to you very seriously and being fully convinced, and others will automatically come forward and join us. We shall all be like one great army of heroes for Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

[ Letter to Visakha Dasai, June 6, 1972 ]



# AN OLD FRIEND

| JANUARY 16 – FEBRUARY 16, 2007 |

I went to India for the second time in several months, hoping to find new performers for our annual festival tour in Poland. This coming summer will be our 18th year of festivals along the Baltic Sea coast, and because many people return, we need to keep a high standard of entertainment.

First I attended rehearsals for India's annual Folk Dance Festival in Delhi, where 45 colorful groups from around the country were getting ready to perform for the president of India.

Then I went south to Mumbai, where Suradasa, who is in charge of cultural affairs at our Juhu Beach temple, brought many classical singers, dancers, and artisans to meet me.

Now I had a long list of possible performers for our summer tour. I phoned Jayatam and Nandini. "I think the summer stage show this year will be the best ever," I told them.



“That’s good,” Nandini said, “because we’re already being flooded with calls about the summer programs.”

“Times have changed,” I thought. “I remember when we had to fight tooth and nail to get permission for our events.”

I thought about how the festivals had turned the tide in our favor. Indeed, Srila Prabhupada had said that we could conquer the world with culture:

“People are hankering after this culture, Krsna culture. So you should prepare yourself to present *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Then India will conquer all over the world by this Krsna culture. Rest assured.”

[ Lecture, Mumbai pandal program, March 31, 1971 ]

Next I flew to Mangalore in South India for the wedding of Drdha-vrata dasa, the son of my godbrother and godsister Dharmatma dasa and Dwijapriya dasi.

The ceremony was to take place the next day at a resort several hours away. A local ISKCON devotee, Sujal, picked me up.

“Have you been to this part of India before, Maharaja?” he asked as we began driving towards the coast.

I looked around. “Well,” I said, “I think so. It looks familiar. This region is called Parasurama-ksetra, isn’t it?”

“Correct,” Sujal replied. “Millions of years ago, after killing twenty-one generations of deviant warriors, Lord Parasurama asked Varuna to give a special piece of land at the bottom of the sea to the *brahmanas*. He attached the land to this mountainous coastline and invited the *brahmanas* to live here. He blessed them to enjoy life in harmony with everyone in these beautiful surroundings.

“The temperature here is pleasant throughout the year. It varies only eight degrees between summer and winter. The land is fertile and abundant with all kinds of herbs and spices. The local people say that one day a year, all the herbal medicines enter a special tree nearby. If someone tastes the sap of that tree on that auspicious day, he will have perfect health for the whole year.”

We drove through a big village. “This town is called Mulki,” Sujal said. “It’s a nice example of Parasurama’s benediction that people in this area would live together harmoniously. In Mulki, Muslims and Hindus are the best of friends.”

“Really?” I said.

“Yes,” replied Sujal. “Several hundred years ago, a Muslim merchant was taking his goods by ship down a nearby river. Suddenly the vessel became stuck on a sandbar. Days passed, and the merchant became more and more desperate. Suddenly, Mother Durga appeared before him and said that she was buried under the sandbar in her deity form. If the merchant would rescue her, she said, she would free his boat. He quickly dug the deity out from the sandbar and his boat mysteriously broke free.

“After selling his goods he came back to Mulki and built a large temple for the Durga deity, whom he had handed over to the local Hindu people. Since that time Hindus and Muslims have coexisted peacefully here. Sometimes they even attend religious ceremonies in each other’s homes.”

I looked out the window and saw Muslim girls dressed in black burkas, with only their eyes showing, walking down the street holding hands with Hindu girls dressed in saris.

“That’s something I’ve never seen before.” I said.

As we drove along, I studied the countryside and the small villages we passed through.

“It’s clean here,” I said. “You don’t see the garbage and open sewers we often find in north Indian villages. It’s a part of India many ISKCON devotees aren’t aware of.”

“And this area is rich in Puranic lore and pastimes,” Sujal said. “Nearby is a cave where Sita devi, while being carried away by Ravana, left a ring hoping Lord Ramacandra would find her. Also, the Mohini-*murti* incarnation left the world in this region. The exact spot is now a range of colorful rocks.

“In addition, your godbrother, Tattva-darsana dasa has a farm community near here. On top of a hill near property, the great Sankaracarya practiced austerities for many years and attained full mystic powers. Lord Rsabhadeva left this world in a valley at the base of that farm. And the sacred town of Udupi, where Madhvacaraya lived, is nearby.”

“Udupi?” I thought. I sat up straight. A flood of memories came to mind.

“Udupi?” I said. “We’re near Udupi? Sujal, now I remember. I came to this region twenty-seven years ago on pilgrimage.”

“Twenty-seven years ago!” Sujal said. “I wasn’t even born then.”

“It was 1979,” I said. “I had just taken *sannyasa* at the Mayapura festival in Bengal. I wanted to travel to holy places around India to get inspiration for the services ahead of me. I didn’t know much about India at the time, so I asked several Indian devotees where to go. One devotee suggested south India. He told me many great *acaryas* like Madhvacharya and Ramanujacharya came from the south. He suggested I begin by visiting Udupi because it’s the place where Madhvacharya lived and boldly preached Krsna consciousness, delivering many conditioned souls from illusion and ignorance. The next day I was on a train to Udupi. Will we be passing by Udupi?”

“Yes, we will,” Sujal said.

I looked out the window. “Then we must stop there,” I said. “I have to visit an old friend.”

“Of course,” Sujal said.

A few moments later Sujal turned to me. “If you don’t mind, Maharaja,” he said, “who’s the old friend you want to visit?”

“Udupi Krsna,” I said softly.

“The Deity of Madhvacarya?” said Sujal. “Forgive me, but isn’t it a little familiar to refer to a Deity as a friend? Generally we approach the Deity in a mood of awe and reverence.”

“That’s true,” I said, “but in *Nectar of Devotion*, Rupa Goswami says that a devotee should also think of the Deity as



*Udupi Krsna*

a friend. It's listed as one of the sixty-four items of devotional service."

I was tired from my long journey. I sat back and closed my eyes, trying to recall my first visit to Udupi. I remembered arriving there after many days on a train, going straight to the temple, walking inside, and quietly paying obeisances. The Deity stood on the altar with a staff for herding cows in one hand and a ball of butter in the other.

I remembered an elderly *pujari* who came up to me and kindly told me how the Deity had been carved by Visvakarma, the architect of the demigods, 5,000 years ago for Rukmini, Kṛṣṇa's first queen in Dwarka. In time the Deity was hidden in a lake formed by the gopis' tears of separation from Kṛṣṇa. The *pujari* told me how thousands of years later a sailor took a large block of clay from the lake to act as ballast on a boat. The Deity was hidden in the clay. One day as the ship was plying through the sea near Udupi, a storm appeared and the vessel ran into difficulty. Madhavācārya, who happened to be on the beach, waved his saffron cloth as a beacon for the boat.

In gratitude, the captain offered Madhavācārya whatever merchandise he desired from the ship. Madhavācārya requested the sacred block of clay being used as ballast. When the sailors tried to lift it, it broke open revealing the beautiful Kṛṣṇa Deity. Although the Deity was heavy, Madhavācārya, who was an incarnation of Vāyu, the wind god, carried Him to Udupi, where he installed Him in the temple.

Hearing the pastime of Udupi Kṛṣṇa from the *pujari* increased my appreciation for the Deity, and I remembered praying fervently to Him for the privilege of always being engaged in the *sankīrtan* mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. I remembered also praying for protection in the discharge of my

duties as a new sannyasi. I was twenty-nine years old and had been a devotee for only eight years. I knew that many stalwarts on the path of devotion had fallen down due to the allurements of women, wealth, and false prestige.

Suddenly I heard Sujal's voice. "Maharaja," he said, "we are entering Udupi."

"Oh, great!" I said and sat up.

As we drove through the streets I took out a pen and paper and started writing.

"Are you writing something for your diary?" Sujal said.

"No," I said, "I'm writing a report for Udupi Kṛṣṇa."

"A report to the Deity?" he said.

When we finally arrived at the temple, my heart was pounding. I jumped out of the car and made my way through the thick crowd of people to the exact spot in front of the Lord where I had stood twenty-seven years ago. I bowed down quickly, knowing I wouldn't have much time in front of the Deity. I stood up



*Udupi Kṛṣṇa's chariot*



and looked carefully through a small lattice window where pilgrims see the Deity.

“He’s so beautiful!” I exclaimed out loud.

Collecting myself, I stood up straight and began reading my report.

“My dear friend,” I began. “Millions of pilgrims come before You each year, so I don’t expect you to remember me. I was a young devotee when I first met You. I was a new sannyasi with an entire life of devotional service ahead of me. Now I’m in the autumn of my life, with just a few short years left to serve You in this world.

“I stand before You today somewhat embarrassed. I don’t feel I’ve made much progress in spiritual life since we first met. But I’m proud to say I’m still Your devotee, and I hope to be so until the end of time.

“I’m very grateful that You have protected me in my duties throughout the years, and I thank You again and again for blessing me with many wonderful opportunities of service to the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. I would consider myself most fortunate if You would continue engaging me in such service until my final breath.”

By this time the pilgrims in line behind me were becoming impatient and several told me to move along.

“I don’t want to take much of Your time, my Lord,” I continued. “There are other pilgrims waiting. But such moments as these, when a devotee can reveal his heart to You in such auspicious circumstances, are few and far between.

“Through eons of time I had forgotten You, but You have never forgotten me, not even for a moment. Your greatest act of kindness was to lead me to my spiritual master, my savior, who is kindly teaching me the art of loving You. Please help me to act in such a way that he may always be proud of me.”

By now the pilgrims were shoving me, but I held my ground.

“Finally, my Lord,” I said, “I pray that my service to You will gradually purify me of all selfish desires. It is my great hope that one day I can return to Your abode in the spiritual world and serve You in ecstatic love, in the association of Your most beloved servants. I offer You my most humble prostrations at Your lotus feet. All glories to Your beloved Madhavacarya! All glories to my beloved spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada! By his grace alone could I find You again in this far distant place.”

I put the paper in my kurta pocket and bowed down. Some pilgrims fell over me, but I took it as the Lord’s mercy.

As Sujal and I walked back to the car, I told him the visit felt like an important milestone in my life.

“I had forgotten about this special part of India,” I said. “And I’d almost forgotten an old friend. But as always, the Lord makes arrangements to give us *darsan* of His lotus feet again and again.”

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur writes:

Sakhyam, making friendship with the Lord, is the eighth limb of bhakti. As a friend of the Lord, the devotee is always attentive to take care of the Lord’s needs. Sakhyam refers to the attachment and friendship a devotee develops towards the Lord whilst worshiping the Deity.

[ *Jaiva Dharma*, by Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur, Chapter 9, Part 7 ]



# THE DUTY OF A MENDICANT

| FEBRUARY 17 - MARCH 17, 2007 |

I left India and returned to South Africa to rest for a few days in the Durban temple. Then it was time to head for New York and my annual preaching tour in the United States. I was eager to get moving, and I asked the devotees to drop me off at the airport in Johannesburg three hours early.

“What will you do with the extra time?” a devotee asked as we walked to the terminal.

“Memorize a verse, telephone some friends, maybe read a little and chant,” I said.

“Oh?” he said. “Couldn’t you have done that in the temple?”



I laughed. “Not really,” I said. “Believe it or not, the only time I have to myself is when I’m in an airport. So I like to come a little early and take advantage of it.”

When I arrived at passport control, the woman agent looked at me suspiciously. I assumed she had never seen a Hare Krsna devotee before.

“What was the purpose of your visit?” she said coldly.

“To visit our centers,” I replied with a smile.

Then she got on the phone. Although I couldn’t hear the conversation, it was obvious she was talking about me. When she finished the call, she stamped my passport and handed it back without looking up or saying a word.

I shrugged the incident off and headed towards the boarding area. My flight was still two hours away so I walked down a long, empty corridor and sat alone in a seat at the last gate. It was chilly, so I put on a sweater and laid a *cadar* over my dhoti. I pulled out my verse book and put it on the seat next to me and arranged some sandwiches and fruit on the seat on the other side. I then took out my cell phone and became absorbed in writing text messages.

I must have been texting for half an hour when I heard some laughter and looked up to see five young white men in their late teens approaching me. Before I had a chance to stand up they were directly in front of me.

One of them, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and looking slightly intoxicated, started talking. “You know,” he said, “I always wanted to find a Hare Krsna alone and beat the hell out of him.”

At first I thought he was making a sick joke, but when he began rubbing his knuckles I understood he was serious.

He took a step forward. "First I'm gonna smash in your teeth," he said.

One of the other boys looked around nervously. "Do it quick before somebody comes, Tony," he said.

"Shut up, David," another boy sneered. "Let him take his time."

I thought I could escape and started to stand up, but one of the boys shoved me back into my seat.

"You ain't goin' nowhere," said Tony. "After your teeth, I'm gonna flatten your nose and then bust up your eyes. You damn Hare Krsnas tick me off."

His friends encouraged him.

I tried to appear calm. "You won't get away with this," I said. "You're in an airport, in a secure area. You'll get caught. You'll go to jail."

"We'll see," said Tony, as he grabbed my sweater and pulled me forward. He cocked his arm to punch me. As I struggled, I saw out of the corner of my eye a policeman some fifty meters away, walking slowly in our direction, unaware that something was afoot.

"Officer!" I yelled. "Officer! Officer!"

"Tony, we gotta go!" said one of the boys.

Tony looked behind himself. When he saw the policeman, he let go of me and stepped back. "Thanks for the directions, sir," he said loudly. "Guess we got the wrong gate. We better hurry or we'll miss our flight."

Then he and his friends moved quickly back down the corridor, joking as they passed the policeman.

"What's the problem?" the policeman said as he reached me seconds later.

"Those guys were going to beat me up," I said.

He got on his walkie-talkie and reported the incident.

I looked down the corridor, but I could no longer see the boys.

"Will they get caught?" I asked.

"Of course," said the policeman. "But they probably won't be held, unless you want to press charges. That means you'll have to come with me and fill out papers and probably miss your flight."

I thought for a moment. "Forget it, sir," I said. "I'd rather catch my flight."

He must have seen that I was shaken. "I'll sit with you for a while," he said.

He made a second call to security. Then he sat down, and we talked for more than half an hour. It turned out he had met devotees before, while on duty in Johannesburg.

"Once you guys were singing in the city and some hecklers came," he said. "My men moved them along. I respect your group as God-fearing people, although I'm an Anglican myself."

As we talked, passengers started filling up the surrounding seats. "Boarding will begin in an hour," he said. "I have to leave now."

"Thanks for your help, officer," I said. "You came just in the nick of time."

"Somebody up there was looking after you," he said, motioning his head upwards. "And one more thing. You mentioned that you usually travel alone. I think you should travel with someone. Or at least don't travel in your robes. They can attract the wrong people."

"Thanks for the advice," I said.

I sat reflecting on the incident for some time. When the announcement came that the flight was boarding, I picked up my hand baggage and got in line. "Traveling alone has its risks," I thought. "But it's part of *sannyasa* dharma."

I recalled one of my favorite purports by Srila Prabhupada:

It is the duty of a mendicant to experience all varieties of God's creation by traveling alone through all forests, hills, towns, villages, etc, to gain faith in God and strength of mind as well as to enlighten the inhabitants with the message of God. A sannyasi is duty-bound to take all these risks without fear.

[ *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.6.13 purport ]

But I also considered the policeman's advice not to wear devotional clothes when traveling alone on international flights.

On the plane, I sat next to a well-dressed businessman. I dozed off only to be woken up an hour and a half later as the cabin crew was serving dinner. I politely refused. As the businessman next to me started his meal, he began asking me questions about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, eventually telling me how much he liked our movement.

I noticed that the man sitting across the aisle was listening in on our conversation. "That's nice," I thought. "Two people are getting the nectar today."

Later I started to read, but the policeman's words kept running through my mind: "At least don't travel in your robes. They can attract the wrong people."

"I suppose he has a point," I thought, remembering the agent who stamped my passport as I left South Africa. "At least it would make it easier clearing customs and immigration."

My mind wandered to a few unpleasant experiences I had had while entering the United States. Then I thought about

some non-devotional clothes in my hand luggage. They were a bit old and shabby, but I decided to change into them before landing.

Hours later, as we approached John F. Kennedy Airport, I went into the toilet and changed.

I'll never forget the surprised look on the businessman's face when I returned to my seat. "What the heck did you do that for?" he said.

I told him about the incident with the boys in Johannesburg.

"Doesn't matter," he said. "You should wear your robes."

The man across the aisle chuckled a bit. "If you're not going to wear your robes," he said, "then dress with a little more style."

I sat back and laughed to myself. "Seems I can't please everyone," I thought.

I remembered a story Srila Prabhupada once told: An old man and a young boy were traveling on a horse together. On the road, they passed through a village.

"Just see how cruel that man and boy are," a passerby remarked. "Both of them are riding on that poor horse."

So the old man got off and started walking beside the horse. Soon they came to the next village.

"Just see," said a passerby. "The strong young boy is riding the horse, and the poor old man has to walk."

So the boy jumped down, and the old man got back on the horse alone. Then they came to the next village.

"Look at this!" shouted a passerby. "That selfish old man is riding the horse, and the poor boy has to walk."

So the old man jumped down, and he and the boy both walked alongside the horse. Then they came to the next village.



“Just look at those foolish people!” said a woman. “Instead of riding the horse, they are both walking.”

When we landed in New York, I cleared immigration and customs without incident, and soon caught a connecting flight to Los Angeles.

After a week of preaching programs on the West Coast, I caught a flight to Mexico City for a visit to the temple. Maintaining my new policy, I dressed in non-devotional clothes and had no trouble entering Mexico. But neither did I raise any interest, and so I had no chance to share my good fortune with anyone as I did with the businessman on the flight to New York.

“For one ugly incident,” I thought, “I have sacrificed the nectar of preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness in my travels. I’ve had enough. On the way back to Los Angeles I’m going to wear my robes again.”

A week later I boarded a flight to Los Angeles. Immediately Kṛṣṇa reciprocated with my decision. As I settled into my seat, the man beside me started talking. “Are you a Buddhist?” he said.

“No, sir,” I replied, “I’m a Hare Kṛṣṇa.”

“A Hare Kṛṣṇa,” he said. “I thought you guys were extinct.”

I laughed. “No,” I said. “We haven’t become extinct. It’s just that we don’t always wear our robes.”

“Do you mind if I ask a few questions about your faith?” he said.

I could not resist a big smile. “No,” I said, “I don’t mind at all. Fire away.”

With great relish I answered his questions during the entire flight. I was happy to be back in action. But the real confirma-

tion that I'd made the right decision came when I landed in Los Angeles.

I cleared immigration and customs and was walking towards the exit when I was surprised to see a last check point. I assumed it was due to heightened security and stood in one of two lines. I waited patiently as a woman agent on my side checked passports, and a male agent checked passports in the other line just a few meters away.

Suddenly the male agent looked up and saw me. He grinned widely. "Hey!" he said loudly, "It's a Hare Krsna!"

People in both lines looked at me.

"A Hare Krsna!" he continued. "What a pleasant surprise!"

I smiled shyly as the crowd stared at me.

"I'll tell you folks," he said in the same loud voice, "these Hare Krsnas are peace-loving people."

He took someone's passport to check, but kept speaking loudly. "These are the guys that sing in the streets with their tambourines and cymbals."

He looked at the woman agent. "He wouldn't harm a fly," he said. "I promise you. One of my best friends was a CBG in the movement (he must have meant GBC) and was a fabulous guy."

The woman seemed as surprised by his behavior as the rest of us, but she smiled and motioned me forward. She checked my passport quickly. "Okay, sir," she said, "you can go through."

All eyes were upon me as I continued forward, turned right and walked past the male agent.

"Come over here," he said quietly. "You really are a Hare Krsna, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "I'm a genuine Hare Krsna."

"Then repeat the mantra," he said.

“With pleasure,” I replied. “Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.”

“That’s it,” he said with another big grin. “You’re in. Welcome back to the United States of America.”

Srila Prabhupada writes:

Sometimes the Krsna consciousness movement sends its representative sannyasis to foreign countries where the *danda* and *kamandalu* are not very much appreciated. We send our preachers in ordinary dress to introduce our books and philosophy. Our only concern is to attract people to Krsna consciousness. We may do this in the dress of sannyasis or in the regular dress of gentlemen. Our only concern is to spread interest in Krsna consciousness.

[ *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.13.9 ]



# A SECOND CHANCE

| MARCH 16 - APRIL 16, 2007 |

As a devotee grows older, he becomes more and more aware, by the grace of the Lord, that his life is coming to a close and his time to achieve perfection in Krsna consciousness is running out.

Sometimes the signs come in disconcerting ways. A few months ago several of my disciples approached me and asked if I would tell the history of each of the *salagrama-silas* on my altar.

“Perhaps another day,” I replied.

“But Guru Maharaja,” said a woman disciple, “you’re the only one who knows the unique story behind each *sila*. And you’re getting older ...”

She didn’t finish the sentence. There was no need. Old age implies that things are winding down and coming to an end.



Another sign is the gradual departure of friends and loved ones as we cross the threshold of fifty years, the beginning of old age according to Vedic culture. With the passage of time their departures are more frequent and less surprising. Jayadvaita Maharaja has written, “That’s how it is. You watch your friends go, one by one. Then those who are left watch you go.”

Of course, as devotees we have been studying and discussing these facts of life since the day we joined the movement. But somehow, they take on a different perspective as our own bodies age.

If we are prepared to leave, as we should be, we have nothing to fear. Kṛṣṇa assures us in *Bhagavad-gita*:

*dehi nityam avadhyo yam dehe sarvasya bharata  
tasmat sarvani bhutani na tvam socitum arhasi*

O descendent of Bharata, he who dwells in the body can never be slain. Therefore you need not grieve for any living being.

[ *Bhagavad-gita* 2.30 ]

But the difference between theoretical knowledge and realization is vast. In order to bridge that gap the Lord sometimes accelerates a devotee’s progress by putting him through an ordeal, causing the devotee to become more serious in his spiritual life. By the Lord’s grace, I had such an experience upon my return to Durban, South Africa at the beginning of April.

I had been complaining of pains in my upper back for some time, so a doctor and devotee friend of mine, Sunil Mohan dasa, had arranged an appointment for me with an osteopath. As I sat patiently on the examination table, the doctor ran his hand down my spine from behind. Suddenly, he stopped and gasped.

“Sunil,” he said, trying to mask his concern with a calm voice, “please come here.”

Sunil went around the table, and the two of them spoke quietly, but their hushed conversation let me know that there was a problem.

“Did you find something?” I finally said.

“Maybe,” Sunil replied. They then stepped into the next room.

As I strained to hear their conversation, I suddenly heard the word “melanoma.”

I broke into a cold sweat. I knew that melanoma is one of the most dangerous and aggressive forms of skin cancer. Last year my godbrother HH Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja passed away from it. If caught in the initial stages it can be cured, but if left undetected, it leaves little chance for survival.

“Excuse me doctors,” I said loudly, “did I hear you say melanoma?”

There was silence for a moment, and then Sunil came back into the room. “Yes, Maharaja,” he said. “There’s a dark, raised mole on your back with irregular borders. It’s not a good sign. But don’t worry. We can’t conclude anything until we send it in for a lab test.”

In the next room I could hear the osteopath talking on the phone to a dermatologist. “Come quickly,” he said. “It looks serious.”

In five minutes the specialist arrived. “It’s here,” said the osteopath as he showed the dermatologist the mole.

“Yes, I see,” said the dermatologist in a grave voice. He then injected me with a local anesthetic and removed the mole. He finished the job with four stitches and then held up the mole for the others to see.

All three remained silent. My apprehension increased.

“Let’s not come to any conclusions until we have the lab results,” Sunil said. “It may well turn out to be benign.”

“And if not?” I asked.

He paused. “In that case we’d have to begin chemotherapy or radiation immediately,” he said soberly. “But we’ll have to wait a couple days for the result. The lab is closed now and won’t open until Monday.”

On the way back to the temple I was immersed in thought. Suddenly everything in my life paled in comparison with the stark reality in front of me.

“Could this be the beginning of the end?” I thought. I was momentarily stunned.

Then I caught myself. “This is what all the training’s for,” I told myself. “It shouldn’t come as a surprise.”

But it was indeed a surprise, despite all the classes I’d heard on leaving this world and the many that I had given as well.

I continued reflecting for a long time. “Of course, we have to wait for the lab results as Sunil said,” I thought, “but because they all showed so much concern, I’d better prepare myself for the worst.”

When I arrived at the temple, some devotees were waiting to see me outside my room. I didn’t feel like meeting with anyone, so I excused myself, went into the room, and locked the door.

“I wish I’d done more for my spiritual master,” I blurted out as I sat on my bed. “There were days I wasted so much time. And why didn’t I ever go deep into my *sadhana*, like many of my godbrothers?”

I picked up my beads and started chanting with determination. Then I paused. “Well,” I said to myself, “are you finally going to start chanting with resolve?”

I looked down. “And?” I said softly. “And where will I go if I die? Back to Godhead?”

I glanced at my Radha-Krsna Deities on the altar. I got off the bed and sat in front of them.

“My Lord,” I prayed, “if it turns out I have a terminal disease and I have to take birth again, please let it be in the home of your devotee. And bless me that I can continue on the path of strict renunciation while always engaged in your loving service.”

Suddenly there was a knock on the door. It was Swarup Damodar, president of the Durban temple. He asked me if I wanted something to eat, but I had no appetite.

That night I tossed and turned. At one point I woke up thinking I had dreamed the events of the previous day. Then I realized it wasn’t a dream. I could not go back to sleep, so I got up and decided I would begin preparing a letter for my disciples and friends.

But first I wanted to write a letter to the GBC asking permission to accept initiation as a *babaji* and retire to Vrindavan to leave my body. It was not unprecedented. In 1975, Srila Prabhupada gave *babaji* initiation to my godbrother, Audolomi dasa, who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

I also wanted to leave this world with no material possessions or designations. In this age the order of *sannyasa* involves dovetailing much of the material energy in preaching. It also carries with it prestige and honor. Although these assets are useful for service, they always pose a danger for a transcendentalist. When I die, I want to live out the last few months with



nothing but the holy name. A *babaji* owns only the bare necessities of life, and his final service is chanting the holy names.

As Srila Prabhupada said at Audolomi's *babaji* initiation:

Sannyasa has got four stages: *kuticaka*, *bahudaka*, *parivrajakacarya*, and *paramahansa*. *Parivrajakacarya*, he travels all over the world. And after that, when he is fully mature, he can chant in one place Hare Krsna. He has no more business. So this is the last stage of mature sannyasa. But because you are thinking that you may not live many years, so you simply sit down, go to Mayapur. You have no other business. Simply go on chanting Hare Krsna mantra, and whatever little *prasadam* available, you take. And the rest of your life, simply engage in chanting. (Your name is) Audolomi dasa Babaji...So this is the first time in our institution: a *babaji*.

[ Lecture, Chicago, July 11, 1975 ]

After a few paragraphs, I decided to stop writing until Monday, when it would be confirmed whether I had melanoma or not. To continue with the letters would seem like a confirmation of the disease.

The next day I kept myself busy. I found that if I was idle even for a moment, my mind became disturbed speculating on the laboratory results.

That night, I again tossed and turned in my sleep. At 1:00 AM I got up and started chanting *japa*.

"This is what brought me to Krsna consciousness," I thought. "This is what has maintained me all these years, and this is what will deliver me."

I thought about my instructions to my disciple Vraja Lila dasi in Vrindavan as she gradually succumbed to leukemia. “Get into the fast lane,” I told her. Those words now echoed in my mind.

Sunday morning I kept busy again, but towards midday I called Sunil Mohan.

“Sunil,” I said, “I know the lab doesn’t open until tomorrow, but is there any way we can get the test done earlier? It’s very difficult waiting like this.” He paused for a moment. “Let me see, Maharaja,” he said. “I’ll get right back to you.”

Ten minutes later he called back. “Okay, Maharaja,” he said. “I’ve asked one of the girls from the lab to go in and work on it. We’ll have the results by this afternoon.”

“Thank you,” I said.

In the afternoon I went for a walk in a local park, once again pondering the prospect of death.

“But what if the results show I don’t have the disease?” I suddenly thought, allowing a glimmer of hope I hadn’t considered. I stopped walking.

“If that were the case,” I said to myself, “I would wake up every day grateful for another chance to serve my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada. And I’d redouble my efforts to assist him in spreading the glories of the holy names all over the world.

“And I’d take advantage of every spare moment to go deeper into chanting the holy names myself. And I’d read more. Every day, I’d drink the nectar of the *Bhagavatam* and all the books left by our previous *acaryas*.”

I paused. “And I’d also try to become a lover of Krsna before I die,” I said.

Then I remembered the doctors' reaction upon discovering the mole. "Better not get my hopes too high," I concluded with a touch of hopelessness.

I continued walking. Fifteen minutes later my cell phone rang. From the number on the screen I could see it was Sunil Mohan. I hesitated to answer. Whatever was the report, I knew my life would never be the same again. I let the phone ring a few more times, and then I answered.

"Hello, Maharaja, this is Sunil Mohan."

"Hare Krsna, Sunil."

"Maharaja, I have results of the lab test on that mole," he said.

Then there was a long pause. Resigning myself to the worst, I took a deep breath and waited.

"Excuse me," he said, "I just dropped the paper and had to pick it up. Maharaja, it's okay. There's no melanoma. It was just an ordinary mole that somehow became agitated. There's no problem whatsoever."

I was speechless.

"Hello?" Sunil said. "Maharaja, did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I did," I said. "Thank you."

"I'm sorry if we caused you any worry," he continued, "but we couldn't take any chances."

"Yes," I said, "I understand. You did the right thing."

"Okay, Maharaja. See you tomorrow."

"Hare Krsna," I said.

I put my cell phone in my pocket and went to sit under a tree. I joined my palms and began to pray. "Thank you, Lord," I said. "Thank you for giving me a second chance."

I shook my head. "It's amazing," I continued. "There was never any real danger at all. Yet somehow I feel that You've given me another chance."

I looked up. "Sometimes it's hard to understand Your plan," I said.

I reflected for a moment. "My Lord," I said, "I know that one day a lab report will come back with news of my demise or that one day a fatal accident will befall me. Therefore, I beg You, help me remember all the valuable lessons I've learned during the past two days."

When I arrived back at the temple, the devotees were lined up waiting to see me.

"It's nice to see you happy, Maharaja," a devotee remarked. "You looked a little down the past couple of days."

"Did I?" I said. "Well I'm all right now."

"How's that?" he asked.

"I got a second chance," I replied with a smile.

Srila Prabhupada said:

So those who have taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it is a chance. You had previously some advantage of executing this Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Somehow or other, you could not. So Kṛṣṇa has given another chance. Don't miss this chance. Make it complete. Make it complete and go to Vaikuntha or Kṛṣṇaloka. We should always pray to Kṛṣṇa that, "Kṛṣṇa, You have given this chance. Please have your grace upon me (so) I may not miss it. By māyā's influence, I may not miss it. You have given me so great chance." This should be our business.

[ Lecture, Tokyo, April 27, 1972 ]

## 5

# THE SUNSHINE OF HIS MERCY

| APRIL 17 - JULY 17, 2007 |

I preached in the United States through the first week in June. Then I went to stay with Giriraja Swami in California to rest and prepare myself for the summer festivals in Poland. Every day I chanted and read and also exercised. After months of intense traveling around the world, I had to put myself in shape for the forty-eight rigorous festivals ahead.

During my exercise routines I would meditate on the upcoming tour, visualizing the ISKCON Manipur dance troupe we had invited from India performing on our stage. I also envisioned our new theater production, complete with two animals that fight with Kṛṣṇa and Balarama: a seven-foot gorilla named Dvidida and a ten-foot elephant named Kuvalayapida. I could almost see our guests' faces light up with amazement.



*Audience at Festival*

But one day I received a call from Nandini dasi, and I realized I wasn't the only one meditating on our summer festival tour. So were our ever-present enemies.

"Yesterday," she said, "I received a call from the headmaster of the school we rent each summer as our base on the coast. He said a government official called him a few days ago and offered a large sum of money for renovations on the school – on the condition that the headmaster not rent the school to us this summer. He refused the offer, saying that he had given his word to us and was not going back on his promise."

I thought about how each year, as soon as we go into action, our opposition rears its ugly head. I remembered a verse from Canyaka's Pandit's *Niti Sastra*:

The serpent, the king, the tiger, the stinging wasp,  
the small child, the dog owned by other people and the  
fool: these seven ought not to be awakened from sleep.

[ *Niti Sastra*, Chapter 9, Verse 7 ]

Two days later the plot thickened. Jayatam phoned to say he'd just received a call from the headmaster of the school of Kostrzyn, which we rent for our devotees each year during the Woodstock festival in August.

"The government also offered him a substantial amount of money for reparations on the school," Jayatam said, "and insisted the work take place during the month of August. As a result, he said he wouldn't be able to rent the school to us during the Woodstock festival. It's obviously part of a greater strategy."

"In time of war," I said under my breath, "the first casualty is truth."

[ Boake Carter ]

A few days later I flew back to Warsaw where we met and prepared a strategy. Nandini began the meeting by telling us she was also having serious difficulty getting permission for our festival in Kolobrzeg. It is the largest and most prestigious of the towns along the coast, and last year the Indian Ambassador was our special guest at the festival there. At the meeting I suggested that Nandini and Jayatam speak personally with anyone who was involved, friend or foe.

Nandini immediately called the mayor in Kostrzyn. After arranging a meeting she and Jayatam drove 400 kilometers to meet with him. Afterwards she phoned me.

"As soon as we entered his office he told us not to worry about renting the school," she said. "He told us he would arrange everything. Then he began asking about our philosophy



*Elephant from theater performace*

and lifestyle. He visited our site at Woodstock last year and was very interested. We spoke for over three hours.”

For the first time in ten days we breathed easy.

But the problem with getting permission for the festival in Kolobrzeg remained. We learned from the town secretary that the city council had met recently and decided to charge us a large fee for putting the event on. Again we decided to employ a personal approach by having Nandini call the newly elected mayor to discuss the situation.

“Don’t worry,” she said just before calling. “I’m sure he’ll be inclined to help us. I met him before he was mayor.”

“We are not a commercial enterprise,” she said in the beginning of the conversation. “We are providing cultural entertain-



ment free of cost. We're bringing a colorful, festive mood to your city. You have no right to charge us.

"All our people are volunteers. We don't pay them. They sacrifice their summer vacations just to share the beautiful spiritual culture of India with the people of your town and the many tourists who come."

After fifteen minutes he accepted her arguments and said he would speak again to the city council.

He paused. "Your voice sounds familiar," he said. "Have we met before?"

"Yes, we have," Nandini replied.

The mayor thought for a moment. "Yes," he said. "I remember now. You visited my home three years ago, when I was the headmaster of the school in town."

"That's right," Nandini said.

"I came to your festival one evening," the mayor continued, "and wanted to see your Ayurvedic consultant. I was interested in learning how to live a healthier lifestyle.

"But it was very late and you were just about to close the festival down. I met you and asked if you could visit my home with the Ayurvedic consultant. You agreed and came to my house with that person at midnight, on your way home after the festival. You spent three hours explaining to me how to live a healthy and happy life.

"I'm very grateful for what you told me. I'll get back to you tomorrow about your proposal."

The next morning he phoned at 9:00 AM.

"You have permission for your festival," he said. "You don't have to pay a thing, and we're going to give you the main square in town."

When Nandini informed me, I said, "Everything seems auspicious now."

But there was more to come. That night, the first at our school base on the coast, Nandini received an urgent call at 2:00 AM from Ajit dasa, the devotee in charge of the eighteen Manipuri dancers we were bringing from India. Turkish Airlines in New Delhi was refusing to let them board because they couldn't read the Polish invitation letters the devotees were carrying.

"But you have Polish visas," Nandini said.

"They don't seem to care," Ajit replied. "They want a copy of the invitation in English sent by fax in ten minutes. The flight is already boarding."

Without the Manipur troupe we would lose half of our stage show, so Nandini quickly translated the invitation into English and frantically searched for a fax machine in the school. At the last minute she found one and sent the invitation off. It arrived moments before the boarding for the flight closed.

Ten hours later she received a call from an immigration officer at the Warsaw airport.

"Only because we know about your festivals," he said, "are we going to let these people from Manipur in."

So with mercy from above and some last-minute managerial skills we were finally ready for the festivals to begin. Two hundred and eighty devotees from eighteen countries had assembled at the school during the week and were working hard in preparation for the first festival in Dzwirzyno.

But all our skills combined together couldn't prepare us for the onslaught that Mother Nature had in store for us.

Dark clouds loomed on the horizon as our *sankirtan* party got into the bus for the first *harinama* in Dzwirzyno. By the time we reached the town, ominous clouds covered the entire sky, but fortunately, only rumbled.

The next day we held the festival, and as always, thousands of people came. The clouds remained at bay, but we all knew it was only a question of time before they opened up.

On the first day of the next festival, in Niechorze, the clouds let loose. The deluge lasted five hours, and flooded much of the festival site. The sun came out just one hour before our program was to start. We quickly called the fire department, and they pumped the water out just in time for the festival to begin.

The fire chief came up to me. "You can expect rain for the entire month of July," he said.

"The entire month?" I said, amazed.

"Hardly a day will go by when it doesn't rain," he replied. "I've lived here all my life, and I know the weather patterns."

As I sat, dejected, Jayatam came to me and pointed to the house closest to the festival grounds.

"Do you remember the man that lives there?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," I replied, "He was antagonistic towards us for many years."

"That's right," said Jayatam. "Several times he tried to cancel our festivals. Then one day he had a change of heart. Well, I just met him a few minutes ago. He congratulated us for being back in town. Then he asked something that really amazed me."

"What's that?" I said.

"He said his 14-year-old daughter has recently become vegetarian," Jayatam replied. "He's worried about her getting enough nourishment, so he asked if Nandini and I could visit their home and teach her the art of vegetarian cooking."

It rained intermittently throughout the festival, but the people stayed, taking shelter under their umbrellas.

When I woke up on the morning of the second day of the festival, I saw the rain was even more intense. During *Bhagavatam* class Jayatām got a call from the town secretary.

“People have been calling since 7:00 AM asking if the festival is on today,” she said. “What do I tell them?”

Jayatām turned to me and asked for my decision.

“Let’s go to the festival site and see what’s happening,” I said.

Upon arriving at the festival site we saw it was impossible for the event to go on. The rain was pouring and once again the festival site was flooding. For only the third time in nineteen years we canceled a festival because of rain.

The following day we went on *harinama* to advertise the next festival in Kolobrzeg. The sun was barely visible through the clouds, but thousands of people, determined not to let the bad weather ruin their vacation, were lying on the beach. Sri Prahlaḍa dasa, with us for the tour, led his first *kīrtan* of the summer. Our large *kīrtan* party chanted for hours and distributed thousands of invitations.

When we stopped to take a break, most of the devotees sat in the sand and quietly chanted the noontime Gayatri mantra, while gazing peacefully at the sea. A crowd of people quickly formed around us.

It was an odd sight for them. One moment we were chanting and dancing along the beach in great enthusiasm, and the next we were sitting quietly without moving, looking at the sea. Most people stood politely, even reverentially, until the devotees finished their Gayatri, and then they asked us to start singing again.

Just before we stood up to go, Amṛitananda dasa pointed to a newspaper someone was holding. “It says that it’s snowing in the mountains in southern Poland,” he said.

“Snowing in July?” I said.

“Strange, but true,” he replied.

That evening it rained during the festival at Kolobrzeg, but many thousands of people came. They sat mesmerized under their umbrellas as the Manipur dancers did the Rasa-lila dance, performed martial arts, and played drums in their special fashion.

As several of us drove back to our base that night our van was pulled over by the police. When one of the officers checked the vehicle papers, he discovered the annual registration tax had not been paid.

“You’ll have to call for someone to come and pick all of you up,” he said sternly. “We’re going to impound this vehicle.”

“Impound the van?” Amritananda said. “Please don’t do that! We need it for our festivals. We have a festival every day



*Manipur Dance*

throughout the summer along the coast. Thousands of people are attending.”

“What festival?” the policeman asked.

“The Festival of India,” Amritananda replied. “We are members of the Hare Krsna Movement.”

“Oh, the Festival of India!” the policeman said excitedly. “I was at your festival in Dzwirzyno a few days ago with my family. It was wonderful. My little daughter wore a sari from the fashion booth the entire time. We really enjoyed the theater, especially the big gorilla, and we ate twice in the restaurant.”

He paused for a moment. “All right,” he said, “I’ll let you go. Your festivals are too important. But promise me you’ll pay the registration tax before the end of the week.”

“Yes, officer,” Amritananda replied. “Hare Krsna!”

“Hare Krsna,” said the police officer as we drove off.



*The gorilla!*

Just before we arrived back at our base it started to pour rain again.

“Looks like the fire chief’s prediction is coming true,” I said to Amritananda. “It may well turn out to be the wettest summer in years.

“Nevertheless,” I continued. “We have to persevere. We’ve had enough glimpses of Lord Caitanya’s mercy not to become discouraged.”

Amritananda looked up at the sky. “Somehow,” he said, “those clouds seem to be a more formidable enemy than the people who were trying to prevent us from getting the schools for our bases.”

“True” I said. “We’ll just have to show the Supreme Lord that our desire to distribute His mercy is stronger than the impious deeds of those who’ve caused the excessive rain to fall. Surely, if all of our devotees pray together the sunshine of His mercy will prevail.”

Locan dasa Thakur has written:

As a beautiful sunset filled the horizon and daytime came to an end, rain clouds suddenly filled the sky. As the rain clouds rumbled deeply the Vaisnavas became anxious. Realizing a disturbance had come, they became unhappy. “How can we escape this disturbance?” they thought. At that time Lord Caitanya began to play *karatalas* and loudly chant the holy names. In their hearts the demigods felt that their lives had become successful. Craning their necks, they eagerly gazed at Lord Gaura from the sky. Then the rain clouds fled, the sky became clear, and the Vaisnavas all became joyful.

[ *Sri Caitanya Mangala*, by Locan dasa Thakur, Volume 2, verses 198–204 ]



# A FLOOD OF HAPPINESS AND JOY

| JULY 18 - 28, 2007 |

As the fire chief in Niechorze had predicted, it rained endlessly as we continued our festivals along the Baltic Sea coast in July. The Polish media attributed the unprecedented bad weather to global warming. Pious local farmers concluded it was because God was displeased with the government's compromise on market prices with the European Union. One new devotee (exhausted after many days of long Harinamas) went so far as to suggest we might be doing too many Harinama yajnas because yajnas cause rain to fall.

Whatever the reason, it didn't keep people away from our events. When Polish national television sent a film crew to the coast to report on the unusually wet summer, they visited the opening day of our festival in Pobierowo. They planned to come





for only twenty minutes, but intrigued by what they saw, ended up staying almost four hours.

“All the other events along the coast pale in comparison to yours,” said the woman reporter. “Your event is so big, so well-organized, and so entertaining that besides including it in our report we’re planning a documentary on your festivals.”

After interviewing several devotees, the film crew went into the crowd to interview guests. I was a little worried they might pick the odd person who would say the wrong thing, but Krsna sent a nice couple for the main interview.

“We visited this festival several days ago in Kolobrzeg,” said the wife with a smile.

“And we enjoyed it so much,” said her husband, “that we called our boss in Warsaw and got permission to extend our vacation four days longer in order to come here in Pobierowo.”

As the television crew was leaving, the producer spoke to Jayatama dasa, “Don’t worry about the rain,” he said. “You have more people at your festival than all the other events we’ve covered this summer put together.”

In the town of Miedzydroje we presented our festival in an amphitheater near the beach. Because of limited space we were able to put up only a few tents, and unsurprisingly it rained on and off throughout. During our regular festivals, guests can take shelter in the many tents around our sites, but in Miedzydroje they had to leave the amphitheater to find cover. Determined to enjoy the show, however, they would return to their seats as soon as the rain stopped.

I met one family on their way back into the amphitheater after a rain shower.

“We heard about this festival from our friends who came back from vacation last week,” said the man. “We drove 400

kilometers yesterday to come, so we're making sure we see the whole show."

As our crew prepared to leave one morning to set up the festival in Mrzezyno, Nandini dasi received a call from the captain of the port. "Sorry, but you are not welcome this year," he said.

"But we signed a contract with the town office six months ago," said Nandini.

As she telephoned the town office Nandini turned to me and said, "He's probably expecting a bribe."

By Krsna's arrangement she got in touch with the head of Poland's coastal ports. "I know this festival," he said. "I went with my family in Kolobrzeg two weeks ago. I will let my subordinate know that you have my permission to hold it without any interference."



*Festival set up along the port*



*Harinama along the sidewalks between rain showers*

With his blessings our men left but were soon confronted by our biggest opponent: rain. But this time it didn't simply rain: it poured. Somehow the men managed to set up, but by the time I arrived in town with a bus full of devotees for *harinama*, some of the streets had become flooded.

During a short break in the storm we jumped out of the bus and did *harinama* along the sidewalks. We had managed to distribute only a few thousand invitations when the rain started again. We raced back to the bus and sat inside hoping for another break.

"How will anyone know about the festival if we can't do *harinama*?" I said, feeling exasperated.

"Don't worry, Guru Maharaja," said a devotee sitting nearby. "I was distributing books here last week, and everyone I talked

to was planning to come to the festival today. I was amazed. Some said they had planned their vacations to coincide with the event. Most of them knew about it from the radio and Internet. Even if we can't do *harinama*, we'll get a big crowd."

While we waited in the bus I had a devotee call the weather bureau. The report was worse than disappointing: "Continual rain through the rest of the day and into the night, possibly clearing late tomorrow afternoon."

As it was obvious the rain wasn't going to stop we proceeded to the festival site. My heart sank when I saw much of the area under water. "Looks like we'll have to cancel another festival," said Nandini who arrived at the same time.

"Don't cancel yet," I told her. "Let's wait until the last possible moment."

"But Guru Maharaja," she said, "it's pouring, the festival site is flooded, and most of the devotees are soaking wet. The festival is supposed to start in one hour. What hope is there?"

"I have a plan," I said thinking fast. "Let's send the devotees back to the base in the buses and have them change into dry clothes. In the meantime, if the rain stops we'll call the fire department and have them pump the water out of the festival site like they did in Niechorze. Then the Manipur dancers can perform until our devotees get back."

"It will take at least an hour and a half for the buses to go and get back," Nandini countered. "And it will take time to pump the water out of the site. And that's only if it stops raining."

"It's a long shot," I said. "But we have nothing to lose."

We quickly got the devotees into the bus and sent them back to change clothes.

The few of us remaining sat in the van looking out at the sky as the clouds continued rumbling and the rain pouring. Then suddenly, forty-five minutes later, a ray of light burst through the clouds in the distance. It was the first sunshine we'd seen for days. It was so sudden that Amritananda dasa jumped up. "Look!" he shouted. "Sunshine!"

A minute later it disappeared, but for us it was a sign from heaven and gave us hope the festival might indeed happen.

To our amazement a strong wind began twenty minutes later, and in no time at all, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Just as the wind died, the fire department arrived with six large machines and began pumping water out of the festival area. Within an hour the site was dry. Throughout the entire time we all sat riveted to our seats.



*Fireman pumping water out of the festival site*

As the fire department began putting their equipment away, I glanced towards the entrance to the port. I was stunned to see hundreds of people walking quickly in our direction.

“People are coming for the festival!” Amritananda called out.

“Turn on the generator!” I yelled to the sound technician. “Get the sound system and lights up and running! The show’s on!”

I turned to our stage manager, Vraja Kishore dasa. “Tell the Manipur dancers to get dressed fast.” I said. “They have ten minutes.”

As I ran around the festival site helping to organize everything, I looked at my watch. The festival was starting two hours late, but at least it was going to happen.

Within minutes, hundreds of people were sitting on benches in front of the stage as the Manipur troupe began the show with a dazzling drum sequence heralding the women’s performance of the Rasa-lila dance.

Just then the devotees returned from the base. I’ll never forget the look on their faces as they stared out of the bus at the scene before them. The entire area was bathed in sunlight. Thousands of people were streaming into the festival site. Every tent was filled to capacity. The restaurant had a line twenty meters long, and the cooking-demonstration tent had a capacity crowd of 200. The yoga tent had thirty people sitting in the lotus position, their eyes closed as they listened to a devotee giving them instructions. As I walked towards the buses, people filed past me, many holding Srila Prabhupada’s books, which they had purchased at the book tables.

An elderly woman approached me. “My little granddaughter is in Germany and can’t come to the festival today,” she

said. “She was here three years ago and won a sari in the dance competition at the end of the festival. She wears it every morning as she dances around the house before school, singing Hare Krsna.”

She gave me a piece of paper. “In particular,” she said, “my granddaughter wanted to say hello to Gokularani, Rajesvari-seva, and Mathuresvari. Can you pass them this message?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I replied.

“Now I’m going to the stage show to take some pictures and send them to her,” she said as she left.

As I kept walking I met Nandini who was speaking to a well-dressed man.

“This is the head of the coastal ports,” she said. “He decided to come and check whether everything was all right.”

“And to see the festival,” he said with a smile.

“His best friend is in India at the moment,” Nandini said, “and this friend is encouraging him to go there. But our friend here just sent him a text message saying ‘India, in all its glory, is here in Mrzezyno. No need to go anywhere else.’”

Our security company estimated the crowd at more than 5,000, and most people stayed until the end.

“Who’s going to believe all this when I write about it in the diary?” I said to Amritananda as we drove back to the base by the light of a full moon under a canopy of stars. “A deluge of rain suddenly turned into a flood of happiness and joy.”

“I believe it because I was there,” he said and started to smile. “And if someone wants to challenge it, we have 5,000 witnesses.”

*akasmad evaitad bhuvanam abhitah plavitam abhun  
maha premambhodheh kim api rasa vanyabhir akhilam  
akasmac cadrstasruta cara vikarair alam abhuc  
camatkarah krsne kanaka rucirange vatarati*

The whole world is now suddenly flooded by the nectarean waters of the ocean of pure love for Krsna. Now there is suddenly a great wonder of symptoms of ecstatic love never seen or heard before. All this has suddenly appeared now that Lord Krsna has descended in a form as splendid as molten gold!

[ *Sri Caitanya-candramrta*, Srila Prabodhananda Sarasvati,  
Chapter 10, Verse 115 ]





# ONE LOVE

| JULY 29 - AUGUST 8, 2007 |

I grew up in the United States in the 1960s and '70s. As with many other young Americans of my generation, my world view was significantly influenced by the music of Bob Marley. His songs about revolution, social change, world peace, and racial equality inspired me. At one point a few friends and I considered becoming Rastafarians, but soon afterwards I came to Krsna consciousness, where I found further enlightenment and a lifestyle that I felt more conducive to attaining the goal of life.

One never forgets the steps that led him to his chosen path. Through the years I would sometimes find myself quoting phrases from Marley's songs in my lectures about Krsna consciousness. Once, while distributing Srila Prabhupada's books in Durban, South Africa, I was trying to convince a young man with dreadlocks about the futility of material existence.



I was quoting *Bhagavad-gita*, but to no avail. However, when I quoted a stanza from Marley's song "Exodus," he smiled and understood the point immediately. The next Sunday I was surprised to see him dancing in the *kirtan* at the Sunday Feast.

Open your eyes and look within Are you satisfied  
with the life you're living? We know where we're go-  
ing, We know where we're from. We're leaving Babylon,  
We're going to our Fatherland.

[ "Exodus" - Bob Marley ]

Last March, my connection to Marley's music was revived. I visited the Laguna Beach temple in California and met my god-brother Devananda dasa at a festival program. He mentioned that he had recently recorded a CD of reggae music with two musicians who used to play with Marley: Earl "Chinna" Smith and Inna "Kiddus I" Deyard. Both of them are icons in the Jamaican music industry. Chinna alone played on almost fifty percent of the Grammy-award-winning reggae recordings.

I immediately had an idea.

"Do you think they would be interested in playing on our stage at the Woodstock Festival in Poland in August?" I asked Devananda. "We get thousands of kids each night at our concerts."

My question took him by surprise. He paused, then smiled. "Why not?" he said. "I'll give them a call in Kingston and see."

"I'll ask the Woodstock organizers if they can play on their main stage too," I said.

"That might clinch it," Devananda said with an even bigger smile.



*Kiddus and Chinna*

Two weeks later he contacted me and said that Chinna and Kiddus were interested. We sent them invitation letters for their Polish visas, but three days before Woodstock, Devananda called in a panic and said they hadn't secured the visas or even reserved a flight to Poland.

"They kept telling me everything was cool," he said, "but when I told them Woodstock was just days away, they realized their mistake."

Nandini dasi called the Polish consul in Kingston and asked for help.

The consul was interested. "We had a call from Chinna and Kiddus a few months ago inquiring about visas," she said. "We told them what to do, but we never heard from them again. I'm not surprised. Life is slow down here. Jamaicans are real easygoing people."

After hearing that the two musicians would be playing at Woodstock, she agreed to issue their visas. Somehow we arranged for their seats on a flight to Europe the next day. They arrived the first day of the festival, guitars in hand, at Krsna's Village of Peace on the Woodstock site just as we were beginning to distribute *prasadam* to the kids.

When Chinna saw hundreds of kids standing in four long lines, waiting for the *prasadam*, he was amazed. But when the kids saw him with his long dreadlocks, down to his waist, they were even more amazed. "Jurek is advertising them as the main group," I heard a boy say. "They're going to play on Saturday at 10 PM."

I walked over to where Chinna and Kiddus were taking *prasadam* and introduced myself.

"I used to eat at your temple in Los Angeles in the late '60s," Kiddus said. "They were some of the best meals I ever had. We Rastas are vegetarian too."

"I know," I said. "I used to listen to Bob Marley, and I know he was a vegetarian."

"Is there anything else we have in common?" said Chinna.

"One love," I said with a smile, quoting one of Marley's biggest hits.

Chinna grinned.

"By that I mean we're all spirit souls, part of the family of Jah, or Krsna," I said.

"That'd be right," said Chinna.

"But what we really have in common is that we both express ourselves through music," I continued. "In our tradition we sing the names of God and play musical instruments just like you do. Our main song is the Hare Krsna mantra."

"I saw your people chanting in the crowd as we came in," said Chinna. "Everyone looked so happy. Can you teach me the song?"

"Sure," I said.

Chinna took out a book and opened it to a blank page. I looked closely and saw it was the sheet music of John Coltrane.

"This is my Rasta Bible," he said. "I've had it for years and take it everywhere I go. Write the mantra in big letters here."

After I wrote the mantra in the book, Chinna, Kiddus, and I sang it together for a few minutes.

"That's real nice," Chinna said as we finished. "Why don't you come down to Jamaica and teach it to my friends? We'll chant, eat this food, and you can share your philosophy with all the Rastas."

"Sure," I replied. "How does February sound?"

"It's a deal," said Chinna.

I remembered the words of the consul in Jamaica: "Real easygoing people."

I excused myself and went back to the area where the devotees were serving *prasadam*.

That afternoon I spoke again with Chinna about the chanting of Hare Krsna and how it elevates one spiritually. "It helps us to see that we're all equal on the spiritual platform," I said. "Because we're all created by God, essentially we're all brothers and sisters. If we identify with the body, then we see only the differences and sometimes quarrel and even fight over those differences. The *kirtan* you saw earlier is not just good music. It's the peace formula for this age."

"It will be good if you can talk like that in Kingston," Chinna said. "Since Bob Marley left, there's been so much quarrel and disagreement in the Rasta community, even among his friends."

"Chinna," I said, "why don't you come and chant with us later in the afternoon? We'll be taking our large Ratha-yatra cart out and having *kirtan* for several hours."

He picked up the Coltrane book and opened it to the page where I had written the mantra. He studied it for a few moments. "We're meant to do a sound check on the main Woodstock stage later on," he said. "If we finish in time, I'll join you."

Two hours later we were pulling the Ratha-yatra cart along a road that cut straight through the Woodstock site. There were thousands of kids walking along the road while a hundred devotees were chanting and dancing joyfully in the parade. We had just stopped for a moment to throw fruit from the cart to the crowd when I noticed Chinna in the passenger seat of a passing car.

"Chinna!" I shouted. "Come on out and chant with us!"

Chinna said something to the driver, and the car screeched to a halt. All the kids looked as he stepped out, his long dreadlocks covering his chest.

“It’s Chinna Smith,” said a kid near me. “He’s in tight with the Hare Krsnas.”

As Chinna walked over I handed him the microphone. “You lead,” I said with a smile.

Chinna thought for a moment, refreshing his memory with the words of the mantra, and then started to sing and dance. Immediately he was surrounded by kids chanting and dancing with him. He went on for more than an hour and then handed the microphone back to me.

“It’s like you said,” he told me. “Great fun.”

The next day when we opened our village, hundreds of kids flowed in and quickly filled up the tents displaying exhibits of Vedic culture. Many were regular visitors from previous years.

“When do the *kirtans* begin in the Temple tent?” a boy asked me.

“Who’s giving the yoga classes this year?” said another.

A boy took out a weathered *Bhagavad-gita* from his bag. “I have been reading it all year,” he said. “Now I have lots of questions.”

I directed him to the Questions and Answers tent.

At one point in the afternoon there were so many people on our site I could see security was getting nervous.

“There must be 3,000 kids here at the moment,” said one of the guards, “including inside your big tent.”

“It’s OK,” I said. “Don’t worry. After all, it’s Krsna’s Village of Peace.”

I spoke too soon.

Five minutes later a group of muscular skinheads, their chests bared, came charging into our site. They picked up one of our women, pulled up her shirt and began passing her back and forth. Because of the dense crowd, it took security a few moments to realize what was happening. By the time they re-

acted, the skinheads had dropped the devotee and were running towards the Temple tent forty meters away.

As three of them charged in screaming, "Smash the altar!" one of our tour devotees stepped forward to confront them. Though they were bigger than he, he quickly floored the first intruder with a kick to the head. The other two men jumped on top of him and soon all four of them were rolling out of the tent punching and kicking.

Moments later, six big, burly Woodstock security men arrived, but even they were hardly a match for the skinheads. As an ugly brawl moved further into the crowd, one of the security men managed to knock a skinhead unconscious and the others ran off. The injured man was quickly handcuffed and taken away to the police station.

As I passed the guard to whom I had made my comment, he wiped some blood from his nose and smiled sarcastically. "Krsna's Village of Peace?" he said.

It was the first act of violence we'd had in the village in years, but everything calmed down as people became absorbed in all the activities. As the conch blew announcing the day's Ratha-yatra, many devotees assembled and within minutes the chariot was rolling through the crowds outside our village.

When we returned six hours later, Nandini dasi came up to me.

"Jurek has agreed that Chinna and Kiddus can play on our stage tonight," she said. "They wanted a full band to back them up, so our boys are practicing with them right now. Tribuvenesvara is on keyboard, Bhakti Priya on bass, Tirtha-kirti on guitar, Bhakta Colin on saxophone and Bhakta Andre on drums. It sounds really good."

"Let's spread the word," I said.



That night as the group played, our tent was packed with kids. Their music was mellow and Kiddus' sweet voice and words of peace and love melted the hearts of everyone. Then just as the band finished and left the stage, Chinna came back on with an acoustic guitar.

"I want to sing a song about my best friend," he said with a smile into the microphone, while pulling up a chair. Many of the kids who were leaving stayed. After strumming a few chords, he began, "Mary Wanna, I love my Mary Wanna. You know it's all I have."

At first I couldn't catch the words, but when he sang them a second time, I got it: marijuana. I cringed. There in Krsna's Village of Peace, where we were preaching a drug-free society, Chinna was singing about marijuana.

"What should we do?" said the devotee stage manager.



*Kids in front of main stage at Woodstock Festival*

“There’s nothing we can do,” I replied. “We’ll just have to let him finish.”

When he did, the kids applauded as he left the stage.

Afterwards a devotee came up to me and said, “Maharaja, I think you’re giving Chinna and Kiddus too much prominence in our village. A lot of these kids may think we follow the same lifestyle.”

“Maybe a few will have that misconception,” I replied. “But most know the difference.”

“What good will come from it?” he said, shaking his head as he turned and walked away.

“Something will come from it,” I said. “Chinna and Kiddus are showing interest in Krsna consciousness.”

On the next and last day of the festival, our village continued to be the place to hang out. While the main Woodstock grounds began to fill with garbage, our site was impeccable. Many kids stayed all day with us, taking yoga lessons, browsing through Srila Prabhupada’s books, participating in the *bhajans* in the temple tent, or watching part of the eleven-hour stage program.

The lines for *prasadam* got longer and longer. “We’ll easily do more than 100,000 plates,” said Rasikendra dasa with a smile as I passed the tent.

As I walked around that evening, I felt a sense of lamentation. It would soon be over. It was such huge preaching. Literally tens of thousands of kids had come through our village. It was satisfying to the heart. The last exciting moment for us would be watching Chinna, Kiddus, and our boys on the big stage as the main attraction of the whole event.

“We have a surprise for you and all the people,” Chinna said to me with a grin as they left at 9 PM for the main stage.

“All the best, Chinna,” I said. “There are 200,000 kids waiting to hear your stuff.”

“Jah!” he replied.

I certainly didn’t expect the magnitude of the surprise that Chinna gave us that night. As he played his riffs on his guitar and Kiddus sang his songs, the large crowd moved in time to the mellow root-rock reggae. These were two of the original reggae musicians, and you could hear it in their music. The kids loved it. They played for forty-five minutes, and when they finished their final song the kids shouted for more. The tumultuous roar caused the stage manager to signal Chinna to do an encore.

Huge screens had been put up on either side of the stage, allowing the audience to see every move of the performers. After Chinna got the signal he turned to Tribuvenesvara and nodded his head. Tribuvenesvara began playing his keyboard. Then suddenly he began singing the Hare Krsna mantra to a beautiful reggae melody. His melodious voice flowed through the massive speakers into the crowd. Chinna came in with a beautiful riff on his guitar and Bhakti Priya, Tirtha-kirti, Colin and Andre joined in as well. After a few moments Kiddus started singing along with Tribuvenesvara.

It was a magical moment. As the *kirtan* grew, all the stage hands and sound technicians started dancing with their arms in the air. Members of the media also swayed back and forth, and Jurek himself was dancing.

The crowd loved it. Thousands of kids danced to the music and many of them chanted. No doubt, it was one of the biggest *kirtans* in modern history and went on for quite some time. When the *kirtan* finally finished many in the audience stood stunned, having experienced the nectar of the holy names.



*Kiddus on our stage at Krsna's Village of Peace*

Late that night as we boarded our buses to go back to our base, I passed the devotee who had questioned our involvement with Chinna and Kiddus.

“Well,” I said, “was it worth it?”

“Yes, Maharaja,” he replied. “You were right. I was down in the crowd. Those kids were in ecstasy singing the holy names. Many held hands and danced in circles. It’s a sight I’ll never forget.”

One Love! One Heart!  
Let’s get together and feel all right  
Hear the children crying (One Love!)  
Hear the children crying (One Heart!)  
Saying, give thanks and praise to the Lord  
and I will feel all right

[ “One Love” - Bob Marley ]

## 8

SELF-EVIDENT  
TRUTHS

| AUGUST 9 - 20, 2007 |

After Woodstock, the festival group returned to our base on the Baltic Sea to continue the programs in the coastal towns. There were still two weeks of summer left and we planned to do fourteen festivals in rapid succession. After six weeks of rain, the sunshine had finally arrived, and tens of thousands of people were coming up to the coast to take advantage of the good weather.

Everything seemed auspicious for preaching. No reports were coming in of attempts to cancel our events or to evict us from our base, as at the beginning of the summer. I joked with the devotees that with the better weather, even our opposition had gone on vacation. We took full advantage of the situation, and by the Lord's grace enjoyed smooth sailing to the end.

As we chanted along the crowded beach in Neichorze advertising the festival there, a devotee distributing invitations met a nine-year-old girl. "I know Krsna," said the girl. "He's the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

"How do you know Krsna?" the devotee asked.

"My mommy reads the *Krsna* Book to me every night before I fall asleep," she replied.

"Have you ever visited one of our temples?" the devotee said.

"Temples?" said the little girl.

"Where did your mother get the book?" the devotee asked.

"She bought it on the beach last year, from someone like you," replied the girl.

Then her face lit up. "Last night we read how Aghasura ate up all of Krsna's friends," she said. "Then Krsna jumped into the stomach of the monster and killed him."

As we chanted along the beach people smiled and waved. I thought about how different it was from ten years ago when we had so much unfavorable media coverage. The anti-cult campaign has all but died out, due in part, I concluded, to the favorable impression people receive at our festivals.

Each truth passes through three stages before it is recognized. In the first it is ridiculed; in the second it is opposed; in the third it is regarded as self-evident.

[ Arthur Schopenhauer ]

As we had experienced on numerous occasions, thousands of people showed up at the festival that afternoon, the result of only one *harinama*. Though the devotees were exhausted from Woodstock, they still put on a great show.



*Harinama along the beach*

As the festival ended, I overheard a middle-aged man on his cell phone. “Mother,” he shouted, “I’ve been trying to get you to come to one of these festivals for years. I don’t care if you have to drive for five hours to get here. Today you missed the best one they ever had.”

The next day as 150 of us chanted and distributed invitations on the beach in Rewel, we were surprised to see our old friend the seal who visits us at least two or three times each summer. As we chanted along the shore it swam along only two meters away, attracting a lot of attention. Suddenly, two lifeguards, apparently unaware of the innocent nature of the animal, jumped into the water and began beating it with paddles. The seal quickly swam away.

That night at the festival in Rewel I visited the tent of Prahlad Nrsimha dasa, our festival astrologer. He is expert in reading charts and convinces practically everyone who consults him to purchase a *Bhagavad-gita* and a set of *japa* beads as the best means to deal with all of life's reverses.

"Two children came to my tent when the festival opened," he said. "They begged me to see their grandmother. They said



*Audience at our festival*



she had been waiting in line at each festival here for the past two years, but had never had the opportunity to meet me.”

“I had them run home and get her,” he continued. “When she arrived I began reading her chart, but she just laughed and said she wasn’t interested. She said all the time she was waiting in line she was observing how happy the devotees were chanting Hare Krsna. She only wanted to know how to chant herself and go back to the spiritual world. She left with beads, chanting the maha-mantra.”

After leaving the Astrology tent I visited the fashion booth, where women can choose a sari to wear for the evening and have one of our girls help her put it on. Almost all the 300 saris on display had been taken.

A seven-year-old girl was standing outside dressed in a beautiful red and green sari. She had just returned from the gift shop with a set of beads and a beadbag. “She insisted on getting the beads,” her mother told me. “She said it was part of the uniform.”

She then turned to the girl. “The beads are not simply for dress, darling,” she said. “They’re meant for praying. If you want to keep them you’re going to have to learn the Krsna prayer and chant it on the beads. Do you understand?”

The girl dutifully nodded. “Yes, Mommy,” she said. “I’ll learn the prayer.”

Moments later a woman came up to me, pulling her son by the arm behind her.

“My son is too self-conscious about the mole on his cheek,” she said. “We argue about it constantly. Please convince him he shouldn’t worry about it.”

Taken by surprise I hesitated for a moment. Then I looked at the boy. “Our understanding,” I said, “is that we are not these

bodies. We are the spirit souls within the body. Compared with the soul, which is truly beautiful, everyone's body is imperfect. So do not be so concerned about your outward appearance."

The mother shook the boy. "You see," she said. "The man says you're not that body. You are a soul. So stop being so upset about that stupid mole." With that she turned and took him away.

When I went into the Book tent, where our presiding Deities, Sri Sri Gandharvika-Giridhari, stood majestically on an altar, I saw some of our maintenance crew building a small fence in front of the altar.

"Why are they doing that?" I asked Rasamayi dasi.

She started laughing. "Guru Maharaja," she said, "everyone wants to take a picture in front of Radha and Krsna. Sometimes there are so many of them they start to argue who goes first. The fence is to protect the Lord."

The next day as we advertised the festival along the beach in Pobierowo, to our great delight the seal showed up again. All the towns along the coast are close together and apparently it swims from one to the other. When we saw the seal, we moved our chanting party closer to the water. As always, the seal swam along, stopping when we did and moving with us as we proceeded. Soon people on the beach noticed it and more than a hundred of them began following us.

Ahead, many people stared at the crowd. Unaware of the seal, they thought the crowd was excited by the singing and dancing. I turned to Sri Prahlad. "This seal is an animal," I said, "but it's doing devotional service. Because it's following us, these people are getting the chance to hear the holy names."

Sri Prahlad laughed and quoted Srila Prabhupada: "This maha-mantra springs automatically from the spiritual plat-



*"Our Seal"*

form, and as such anyone can take part in this transcendental sound vibration without any previous qualification and dance in ecstasy. We have seen it practically – even a child can take part in the chanting, or even a dog can take part in it.”

On the evening of the last festival in Ustronie Morskie, I walked around the event for the final time. I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach. I couldn’t imagine life after the festivals. My feelings of separation intensified when I walked in to Sri Prahlad’s seminar, “The Art of Happiness,” and heard him ask the audience, “What were the five happiest moments in your life?”

An older woman raised her hand. “Young man,” she said, “the five happiest moments in my life were the five times I have attended this festival.”

Another woman raised her hand, “This is my first time at your festival,” she said. “But I can understand what she means. The happiness is evident in your faces.”

I left to go to the stage for the final *kirtan*. It was 10 PM, and more than 1,000 people were still present. As I walked up the stairs to the stage, I thought about how it would be another nine months before we would be back on the beaches chanting, dancing, and holding festivals for thousands of people daily.

As I sat down before the harmonium to begin singing, I looked out at the huge crowd stretching back a hundred meters. Pausing for a moment, I closed my eyes and prayed to the Lord for the mercy to share the nectar of His holy names with such people for as many years, or as many lifetimes, as He saw fit. I could think of no better fortune, for I know such festivals give the greatest pleasure to my spiritual master.

Srila Prabhupada writes:

Regarding your proposed festivals, yes, that is a good idea. Please do it very nicely. These public festivals have proven very effective in spreading knowledge about Krsna consciousness to all the citizens. In fact, I have directed the GBC to organize such festivals and traveling *sankirtan* throughout their zones. The festival we are holding at present in Delhi has been extremely successful, and by Krsna’s grace everyone is appreciating this movement by seeing the beautiful Deity worship, by hearing the melodious kirtan, and by seeing the bright faces of my students.

[ Letter to Sri Galim dasa, November 20, 1971 ]



# PREPARED FOR PEACE - READY FOR WAR

| AUGUST 21 - SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 |

After a series of programs in the Republic of Ireland, I drove north with several other devotees to Belfast. On the way I turned to Praghosa dasa, the local GBC representative, and congratulated him on the Ratha-yatra we had held the previous day in Dublin.

“I was amazed how the crowds lined the streets to watch the cart pass by,” I said. “And so many people came for the festival in the park afterwards.”

“The Irish are pious,” Praghosa replied, “and we were lucky to have good weather. It was Dublin at its best. There’s a saying:



“Leprechauns, castles, good luck and laughter, Lullabies, dreams and love ever after, Poems and songs with pipes and drums. A thousand welcomes in Ireland.”

“But we’ll see the opposite in Northern Ireland,” he continued. “It’s only a two-hour drive, but the difference between the north and south is like day and night.”

“I know a little of the history,” I said, “but for the most part I’m ignorant.”

“It’s a complex political and social issue,” he said. “It goes back more than 700 years when the British first invaded Ireland. They had control for centuries, but in 1921 they ceded sovereignty to twenty-six counties in the southern part of the island while retaining sixteen counties in the northern part. Officially, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, but although the British have ruled there for hundreds of years, the Irish still consider it their property.

“The difference is even more pronounced because the British are primarily Protestant and the Irish, Catholic. There has been a bitter struggle going on for centuries. Since the early ’70s, thousands of lives have been lost.

“However, six months ago a deal was agreed on between Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, and the Democratic Unionist Party, the leading Protestant group, to forge a power-sharing administration.

“The most amazing thing is that for the past twenty-five years we’ve had a temple in Belfast, and the preaching is very good there because everyone has been affected by the conflict.”

“How do the people perceive us?” I asked.

“We don’t take sides so they’re basically neutral towards us,” Praghosa replied. “On one occasion as I was leaving our Govinda’s restaurant I was confronted by a group of men.

When they asked about my religious affiliation, I explained I was a Hare Krishna monk. They were puzzled. They looked at each other, and then one man said to me, ‘Are you a Protestant Hare Krishna or a Catholic Hare Krishna?’

“The wrong answer could have meant a beating, so I thought carefully for a moment before explaining I was a Hare Krishna Hare Krishna. They just scratched their heads and walked away.

“But it hasn’t always been that easy. In the temple devotees are warned to stay away from the windows because they are often broken by people throwing stones and shouting political slogans. Once, someone shot an arrow through the window into the wall. At that time one of our devotees had connections with the IRA and had a meeting with the local leaders. For some time the violence stopped, but then started up again.”

“The IRA?” I asked. “What do you mean he had connections with the IRA?”

“He used to be with the group before joining us,” Praghosa replied. “He was once arrested by the British Army and spent two years in prison.”

As our discussion continued, we entered Belfast. The first thing that caught my attention was the many murals painted on walls. I looked closely as we sped past one which read, “Brits beware. Danger zone. RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] killers out.”

“Obviously this is a Catholic area,” Praghosa said. “You can see the Irish flag flying just about everywhere here.”

As we continued driving I saw a huge wall running directly through a poor area and away into the distance. Praghosa explained that many such structures, known as Peace Lines, which can be up to one kilometer long and are about six meters

high, had been erected during the past thirty years to keep the warring factions apart.

“Protestants are on one side and Catholics on the other,” he said. “Without the walls keeping them apart, they’d kill each other. The truce hasn’t diminished the hatred that’s been here for decades.”

As we turned a corner another mural appeared: “Our revenge will be the laughter of our children,” and nearby: “Prepared for Peace – Ready for War.”

“It’s amazing that devotees have been preaching in this environment for so long,” I said.

“They adjusted,” said Praghosa. “They adopt the accent of the neighborhood in which they’re distributing books: a British accent in Protestant areas, an Irish accent in Catholic areas. And they’re protected by the Lord. Janananda dasa came here in 1975 with a small group of devotees. They set up a book table in a park and sat down to have a *kirtan*. Ten minutes later a crowd formed and started throwing stones at them. They jumped up and ran away, leaving everything behind.

“When Janananda came back to Belfast the next year they had *kirtan* in front of Woolworth’s. Because many people stopped and listened they decided to come back the next day. But when they arrived, Woolworth’s was no longer there. It had been destroyed by a bomb overnight, an almost daily event in that era.”

As we drove further into town more murals appeared.

“We’re entering a Protestant area now,” Praghosa said.

Looking ahead I saw a mural of several men, obviously killed in a confrontation. “Lest we forget,” it read.



About twenty meters further another mural read: “Red Hand Commandos. It’s not for glory or riches we fight, but for our people.”

When we stopped at a red light, a huge mural loomed just off to the right. “Welcome to the Loyalist Heartland of Ulster,” it read. “No surrender.”

“What really makes devotees determined to preach in Belfast is they feel they have the solution to the problems,” Praghosa said.

“And what is that?” I asked.

“That essentially we’re all part of one spiritual family, the family of God,” he replied. “The concept of friend and enemy is an illusion. The sectarian violence is due to a bodily concept of life: I’m either Irish or English. But we’re not these temporary bodies or any of the designations we give them.

“For real peace to come to this land people have to stop seeing the differences and understand what they have in common. In the spiritual world there are no Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Muslims, or Jews. Everyone simply identifies himself as a devotee of the Lord.”

We rounded a corner and stopped in front of a large old building. I noticed an inscription on the building next door: Orange Hall — 1690.

“The Orange Hall is where the Protestants have met for centuries,” Praghosa said. “Years ago we couldn’t have driven near this place. This was the killing fields of Belfast. Much blood was spilled on this street. But recently the Indian community bought this building next door to the Orange Hall.

“The Indians bought into the neighborhood?” I said.

“In recent years,” said Praghosh, “foreign nationals have flooded into Britain. Ironically, it has helped the situation here immensely.”

“How is that?” I asked.

“Most of the foreigners think the differences that separate the two communities aren’t really life-or-death issues,” he said. “It’s rubbing off a little on the local population. For so many years they’ve been isolated. So times are changing and devotees are taking advantage to preach the message of Lord Caitanya with even more enthusiasm than before. Our Ratha-yatra cart will be pulled down this street today and afterwards we’ll have a big festival adjacent to the Orange Hall.”

Ten minutes later we arrived at the starting point of the parade. I was surprised to see only ten or fifteen devotees present making the final preparations.

“There are only a handful of devotees here,” I said to Praghosa.

“Despite the relative receptivity of the people,” he said, “not many devotees want to live in what seems like a war zone.”

Ten more devotees arrived late, and by the time we started pulling the cart down a side road and on to the main street it started to rain. I was shocked to see only a few people on the road.

“Where is everyone?” I asked Praghosa.

“It’s Sunday,” he said, “the only day the city officials would give us. And it’s raining. But there will be more weekend shoppers on the streets as we get closer to the city center.”

Twenty minutes later and 400 meters down the street, more people were out and about.

“This is the center,” Praghosa said.



*Ratha-yatra cart in Belfast*

I was surprised. It looked more like a town than a major city, and it appeared to be set in the '60s or '70s. I noticed many "To Let" signs on stores, offices, and apartments.

"Because of the history, the city hasn't developed like other European cities," said Praghosa, "but that may change if the power-sharing arrangement holds."

But it wasn't only the buildings that appeared unusual, it was also the people. Unlike Dublin, where crowds gathered on the sidewalks to smile and wave as we passed by, people were hardly taking notice. They appeared suspicious and wary. Some stared at us with no emotion.

Praghosa turned to me. "They've been through a lot," he said.

I turned my attention to the chanting and dancing, hoping like all the devotees present that the Ratha-yatra parade might capture the attention of someone's heart.

As our colorful procession made its way through the dismal atmosphere, a few people began to react. Some stopped to talk to devotees who were handing out invitations to the hall program. At one point I stepped out of the parade myself and walked along the sidewalk. After five minutes a young man in his twenties came up to me.

"What's this all about?" he said curiously.

"It's one of the oldest spiritual festivals in the world," I replied.

"More wars have been fought over religion in this world than anything else," he said. "A good example is right here in Belfast."

"That's true," I replied. "But the misuse of something doesn't mean the original thing is wrong. Real religion is about love of God, not politics and sectarian violence."

He thought for a moment then nodded his head. “There’s some truth in that,” he said.

“Come to our program at the end of the parade,” I said. “It’s near the Orange Hall on—”

“Everyone in Belfast knows where the Orange Hall is,” he said, cutting me off.

“It starts at 5:00 PM,” I called out as he walked away.

I didn’t think I’d see the young man again, but that afternoon, as I was about to go on stage for my lecture, I was surprised to see him walk into the hall and take a seat. He was literally the only guest, because everyone else in the audience was either a devotee or a congregation member.

As I began speaking I focused my attention on our guest. It’s a technique I sometimes use in public speaking. Because audiences are often diversified with those who have little interest, those who are merely curious, and genuine seekers of the truth, I tend to look for a single seeker and direct my talk towards him or her.

“It’s only one person,” I thought, “but maybe I can plant a seed of Krishna consciousness in his heart that will later mature into pure devotion.”

As I spoke the knowledge I’d repeated at countless programs through the years, I could see the young man was interested. He sat riveted to his seat, much like I had been the first time I heard Krishna-conscious philosophy. I kept the lecture basic. I could see some devotees and congregational members getting restless with the simplicity of the talk. Just as I’d spoken it a hundred times, they’d heard it a hundred times, but on that occasion I felt the most important person there was our guest.

I went through all the basic philosophy and even explained something about Lord Jagannath and Deity worship, all the

while carefully observing his reaction. As I brought the talk to a conclusion after one hour, I could see him nodding his head in approval at my final points.

When I had finished, I stood up as the crowd applauded. The young man also stood for a brief moment, and then looking at his watch began to make his way through the crowd to the exit. I wanted to speak to him, but he was obviously in a hurry.

But just as he was about to leave he turned and smiled, giving me a thumbs-up. It wasn't a big thing – a simple smile and a hand gesture – but it was enough to give me faith that if the



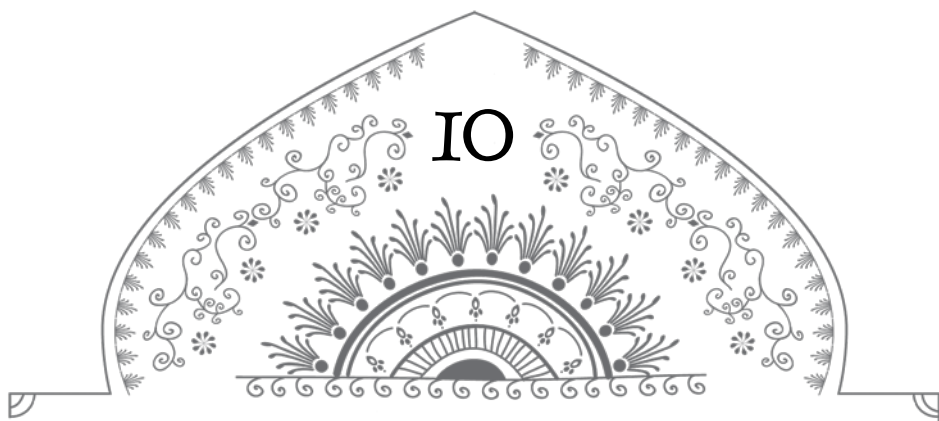
*Ratha-yatra Belfast*

new administration is successful and devotees continue in their determination to share the message of Krishna consciousness with the people of Belfast, we could help in bringing lasting peace and happiness to Northern Ireland.

*svasty astu visvasya khalah prasidatam  
dhyayantu bhutani sivam mitho dhiya  
manas ca bhadram bhajatad adhoksaje  
avesyatam no matir apy ahaituki*

May there be good fortune throughout the universe, and may all envious persons be pacified. May all living entities become calm by practicing *bhakti-yoga*, for by accepting devotional service they will think of each other's welfare. Therefore let us all engage in the service of the supreme transcendence, Lord Sri Krishna, and always remain absorbed in thought of Him.

[ *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.18.9 ]



# VYASA-PUJA OFFERING

| SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 |

My dearest Srila Prabhupada,

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

Today I sit to compose my Vyasa-puja offering to you just minutes before I will be called on to speak. Ordinarily a disciple writes his or her offering days, weeks or even months before the appearance day of the spiritual master, but this year service to your lotus feet went on day and night, without respite. It is your mercy that you keep me so engaged. Please accept such service





rendered twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, twelve months of the year as my actual offering to you.

There is much I have to share since I last addressed you at your Vyasa-puja. What is most prominent in my mind is the Ratha-yatra parade we held just yesterday in Belfast. In that unfortunate place, rife with sectarian violence, I understood your words in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* that on this planet one can see heaven and hell right before one's eyes.

Yesterday I saw an entire city covered over with the hellish mentality of hatred and revenge born of inter-cine warfare. Although a political process has been in motion for years and a fragile power-sharing agreement recently signed, the air is still thick with misgivings – all due to a bodily concept of life. You wrote a stanza about this very phenomenon in a Vyasa-puja offering to your own spiritual master many years ago:

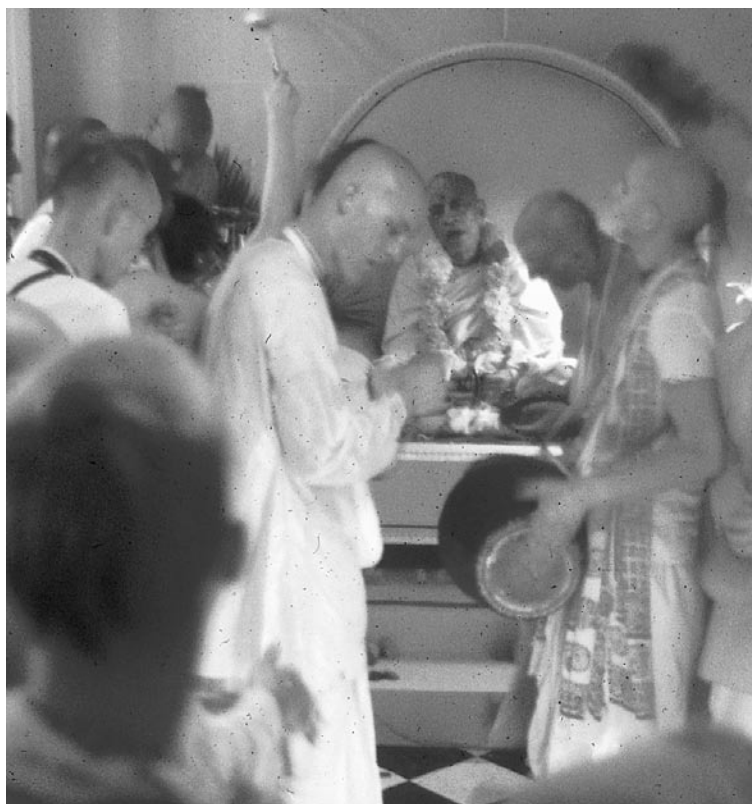
“Struggle for existence the human race, the only hope Your Divine Grace.”

How true those words are of you, too, my glorious master! Like your own guru maharaja, you have the panacea for all the world's problems. As people struggle in the darkness of ignorance in places like Belfast, you bring the light of transcendental knowledge, freeing them from bodily identification. What's more, you reveal their true heritage as blissful servants of the Supreme Lord.

By your grace, the people of Belfast were able to witness real joy when the chariot of Lord Jagannatha rolled down the streets of that dismal city. I could see it on some

of their faces. It is the Lord's success, Srila Prabhupada, and it is your's also because you are His representative carrying on His mission in this material world. Even the heavenly pleasures you referred to are hell without the nectar of devotional service you so kindly give us.

These are historic times, my dear master, as you push forward the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. These are, in essence, the modern-day pastimes of Mahaprabhu. How fortunate I feel to be able to assist you in some way. Who am I to be part of this sacred



*With Srila Prabhupada*

movement, full of saints and sages living pure lives and proclaiming the highest truths! Not long ago I was also on the street, full of sadness and despair, suffering the results of my misdeeds which were so numerous there was no hope for my deliverance in thousands of births.

Then suddenly, without notice, you appeared in my life. I did not know you were coming. I did not know who you were – but through time I have come to understand your supremely exalted position as a pure devotee of the Lord, an intimate servant of Radha and Kṛṣṇa. By inconceivable mercy I am one of your servants. If someone were to ask me, “Sir, please tell us who you are,” I would say with pride, “I am the humble servant of His Divine Grace, Srīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada.”

Yet I know that one cannot have the title of “your servant” without acting and behaving properly. I hope I can always show my respect and love for everything you have given me by upholding my sacred vows to chant sixteen rounds a day and follow the regulative principles.

Srīla Prabhupada, please allow me to serve you in the same way that you are serving your guru maharaja – by preaching the glories of the holy names far and wide all over this world, all over the universe. Though it is often a difficult service – preaching in faraway places, sometimes without proper facilities and often in the face of fierce opposition – it is my life and soul. Through such service I can demonstrate my love for you. My prayer is that after a lifetime of such service I will come to you

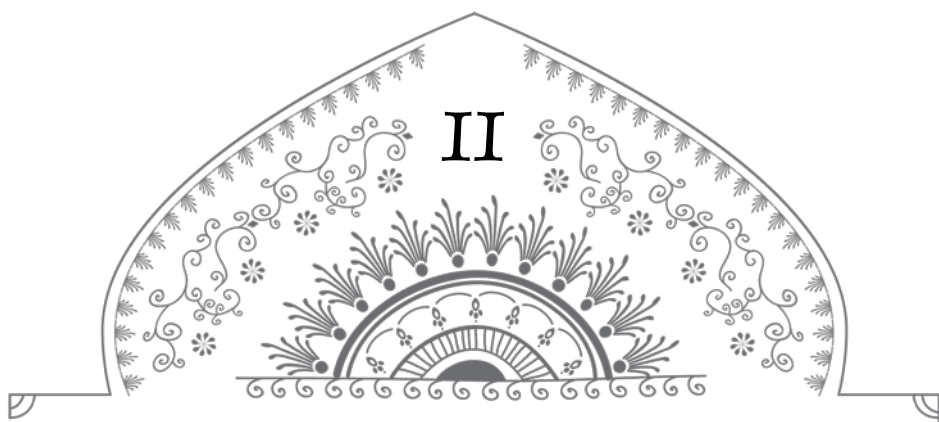
and you will say, “Well done, my son!” Only then will I consider my life perfect.

O Srila Prabhupada, these are happy days using my energy and strength in your service. In the beginning I gave you my youth. In middle age I worked hard for your pleasure. Now in the few years that remain of my life I am dedicating whatever is left to you. I would do all again and again, happily, birth after birth; such is the pleasure and satisfaction a disciple enjoys in surrendering to the mission of his spiritual master.

But I must admit, Srila Prabhupada, I fear old age which is creeping upon me slowly – not for the fact that this body is becoming useless and unattractive, but because it means soon I will become inactive, stationary, waiting for death. Perhaps I will be fortunate enough to leave this world before that time, fully engaged in your service on the battlefield of preaching, as it’s said. I would consider that a fitting end to a life of active service. You set such a glorious example, and my duty is to follow forever in your footsteps.

Your servant,

Indradyumna Swami



# FAREWELL

| OCTOBER 15, 2007 |

Dear Nirguna Prabhu,

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

I am following the news of your departure from this world due to cancer through the Dandavats website, as well as through devotees who are coming to Vrindavan from Mayapura Dhama. The website has a telephone number and an invitation to call you and say farewell. However, it is too painful for me to say goodbye that way. I prefer to write. In this way it's easier for me to reveal my thoughts and express the way I feel.

Like all devotees, I'm saddened by your imminent departure. Although you and I have known each other



for only a few years, I feel we have developed a strong bond of affection. I remember when I visited Prabhupada Village in North Carolina a few years ago you gave me a gift of several thousand dollars. It was a significant donation from a simple householder like you, and I was very touched. You spoke highly of my services and I was humbled. I remember inviting you to visit our festival tour in Poland. Like many, you expressed an eagerness to attend; my experience has been, however, that few actually do. So I was delightfully surprised when a few months later you wrote to say you were actually coming that summer.

Curious, I began asking various devotees more about you. I am happy to report that each and every devotee I contacted in America had only praise for your many years of service to our beloved spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada. Time and again I heard you glorified as a long-standing book distributor, humble devotee, loyal ISKCON follower, and, most significantly, a Prabhupada Man. I became elated that you would join us on the tour. And join us you did! As soon as you came you were giving classes, going on harinama, preaching in the Questions and Answers tent, and helping in any way requested of you. Many tour devotees remarked how enthusiastic you were. It was our good fortune that you visited several times over the years. On behalf of all the Polish festival tour devotees, I thank you very much.

As I hear about you going through this final challenge, I can only admire the example you are setting. Your courage and your faith in Krsna at this momen-

tous hour is outstanding. I noticed the same in our god-brother Sridhar Maharaja before his departure. It gives me confidence that I, too, can follow in the footsteps of such godbrothers and be fearless at the time of death. I believe such fearlessness is due to detachment from all the temporary things of this world and a genuine love for the spiritual master and Krsna. Such realizations come only after a lifetime of sincere and dedicated service.

I remember also seeing the same courage and faith in my disciple Vraja Lila dasi when she left her body a few years ago. Her words to me, just days before she passed away, remain in my heart like a beacon of light illuminating the path from this world to the next. I offer them to you as a meditation in your final hours:

*My dearest Spiritual Master,*

*I bow down to your lotus feet. All glories to you.*

*Everything is going away from my hands; every material hope which I had. But I am still a child in spiritual life. I wish I had a little love or spiritual bhava within my heart. But I have deep, firm faith in you. I am happy because of this faith, and I'll be keeping it as a great treasure. It gives me another kind of faith to be back in the spiritual world and attain the service of the lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha-Syamasundara. And this kind of faith is faith in real things which, I am sure, are existing and are just waiting for me at that side of the door. I am indebted to you so much that you are guiding me in my spiritual life, although I feel so much separation from you.*

*Your servant, Vraja Lila dasi*

My dear Nirguna prabhu, we have only our guru maharaja, Srila Prabhupada, to thank for guiding all of us safely back to the spiritual world. And for the service you have rendered in this lifetime you can be assured of eternal service to his lotus feet in that transcendental abode. Therefore, you have nothing to lament as you prepare to leave your diseased and pain-ridden body. It is for those of us who will remain to lament our prolonged existence in this miserable world. But while we are here, let us try to follow your wonderful example in preaching the glories of the Lord until the end. Please tolerate any pain and inconvenience you will endure in these final days. It is something we must all experience, without exception. Know for sure that Srila Prabhupada is waiting for you. He once wrote me, “Yes, I am also missing my guru maharaja, but I always feel that he is watching over and protecting me.”

Thank you for your brief association in this lifetime. I only wish I had had the honor to meet you earlier. I hope to be blessed with the good fortune of serving with you in a future lifetime. Or perhaps, by the causeless mercy of Srila Prabhupada, we may meet again soon in the spiritual sky – where all walking is dancing, all talking is singing, and there’s a festival every day.

I love you and will miss you dearly.

Your servant,

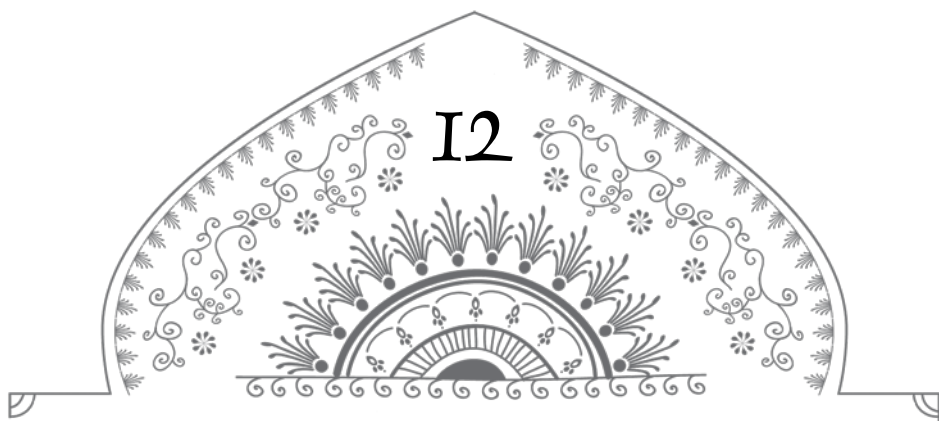
Indradyumna Swami



FAREWELL



*Nirguna Prabhu*



# FEELINGS OF SEPARATION

| NOVEMBER 14, 2007 |

Dear Srila Prabhupada,

Please accept my most humble obeisances in the dust of your lotus feet. My dear lord and master, today is the anniversary of your disappearance from this world and from our external vision. As I look around the grounds of your beloved Mayapura Candrodaya Mandir, I see that many preparations have been made to honor this most sacred of days. Flags and festoons are flying, the main altar is decorated gorgeously, and the cooks are all busy preparing a sumptuous feast. There is a feeling of excitement in the air as devotees gather to offer you their heartfelt feelings of gratitude and love.



FEELINGS OF SEPARATION



*Walk with Srila Prabhupada*

I sometimes try to envision how the residents of the spiritual world must have celebrated the day you rejoined them. What festivities did they perform to welcome you, the Lord's chosen son, back to that transcendental abode? In my mind's eye I can see the cowherd men riding on their bullock carts with families in tow, eager to arrive at the rendezvous point in time to receive you back from your victorious mission of delivering hundreds and thousands of conditioned souls from this miserable world of birth and death.

The cowherd boys' chests must have swelled with pride as the older *gopas* related how you had successfully fulfilled Lord Krishna's request to lift the burden of this world by disseminating transcendental knowledge in the form of your glorious books. And who can imagine how the cowherd girls, dressed in their very best, gleefully welcomed you back into their own entourage and shared with you in secret Syamasundar's pastimes in your absence? Surely they didn't fail to mention the tears He Himself shed in separation from you during the many long years you spent in this world delivering the message of Godhead.

And did anyone take notice of your own disciples who had departed this world in the early years of your movement and who by your grace alone returned to the spiritual world in time to receive you home as well? Oh, Srila Prabhupada, it must have been a most joyous affair when the residents of Goloka welcomed you home.

And so today, following in their illustrious footsteps, we also celebrate your return to the arms of your beloved Lord in the groves of Sri Vrindavan Dhama.

But my dearest lord and master, somehow I feel aloof from all this celebration today. Instead of happiness and joy, I feel a sense of melancholy and despair. I applaud the speakers who eulogize your glories, and I sing and dance in the ecstatic kirtans, but it's more a show of social convention than anything else, for I feel like retiring to a lonely corner of the *dhama* to lament in separation from you, my beloved spiritual master and eternal guide. In material life, when a loved one departs, time heals the wound as one's memory fades and new relationships take prominence. But the opposite seems true in spiritual life, for I miss you more and more as each year passes.

My dearest master, I'll never forget that fateful day, November 14, 1977, when the Lord took you back to the spiritual world making all of us, your loving disciples, effectively spiritual orphans. As news of your departure spread far and wide we sat in disbelief for a brief moment and prepared to grieve for what we thought would be eternity. The deep separation we experienced seemed more than any of us could bear, for all of us loved you more than anyone has ever been loved before. How could it be otherwise? You were our savior. Convinced of the timeless wisdom of the scriptures that you had spoken so eloquently, we had taken up the process of Krsna consciousness in earnest, renouncing the so-called pleasures of this world on a moment's notice. Much to the surprise of family and friends we eagerly embraced a life of what appeared to be penance and austerity but which, when mixed with the sweetness of service to your lotus feet, quickly turned into a life of ecstatic love and joy.

As I look back and reflect on your departure, I realize now that nothing could have ever prepared us for that most catastrophic event in the life of any disciple, not even the countless classes and instructions you yourself had given on the ephemeral nature of material life and the inevitability of cruel death. And so we grieved, as you yourself had done on the day of your own spiritual master's departure. You wrote:

“On that day, O my Master, I made a cry of grief; I was not able to tolerate the absence of you, my guru.”

[ Vyasa Puja Offering 1961, *Vaisistyastakam*,  
First Vaisistya, Number 1 ]

But you did not want us to remain perpetually in such a pitiful state, O most merciful master, for in reality you had initiated us into eternal life, where there is no concept of birth and death, only perpetual service to guru and Gauranga in this world or the next. Thus we began searching for you in ways other than your physical presence. As we turned to your books, we were reminded that by serving your *vani*, or instructions, we would continue to have your merciful association. This you had written in the dedication of your translation of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*:

“He lives forever by his divine instructions and the follower lives with him.”

It was clear that by following your instructions we would always have your association. We also realized that by following your orders to perfection we might one day earn the privilege of associating personally with you once again. I indeed feel privileged to have had that per-

sonal association during your earthly pastimes. I knew it was a rare and priceless treasure. I sometimes wondered how we fallen conditioned souls had achieved even a moment of your association, for your association is sought by the greatest of sages and demigods. No doubt even the Lord Himself is pleased to be in your company, for you offer Him the purest form of unalloyed devotional service. So like many of my godbrothers and godsisters, I resolved to serve the instruction – the service – that was most dear to you: spreading the teachings of Lord Caitanya, the Yuga Avatara, far and wide.

*yare dekha tare kaha krsna upadesa  
amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa*

“Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Sri Krsna as they are given in *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.”

[ *Caitanya Caritamrita*, Madhya Lila 7.128 ]

As all devotees know, such preaching is a great challenge in the material world. The living entities fall from the kingdom of God into this material world for the express purpose of forgetting God and enjoying a useless life of gratification of the material senses. It is no easy task to remind them of their real identity in the spiritual world. But that is exactly what we have to do in order to receive your grace and eventually your association again in that same spiritual sky. To the degree that we fulfill your order to deliver as many conditioned souls as we can in our lifetime we will get the chance to

associate with you again. If we fall short of sharing with the conditioned souls of this world the good fortune you bestowed upon us, we cannot expect your personal service any time in the near future. The Lord Himself said to Narada Muni:

*hantasmin janmani bhavan  
ma mam drastum iharhati  
avipakva kasayanam  
durdarso 'ham kuyoginam*

“O Narada, I regret that during this lifetime you will not be able to see Me anymore. Those who are incomplete in service and who are not completely free from all material taints can hardly see Me.”

[ *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.6.21 ]

O my master, lord of my life, please bless me with the purity, strength, wisdom, and resolve to continue preaching your message until the end of my life. You have given me real life, this life of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, so in effect I am yours to do with as you please. My prayer is that you continue to use my aging body for delivering your message to the conditioned souls, my mind for always meditating on how to execute such noble deeds, and my words for bringing hundreds of thousands of lost souls to your lotus feet.

Srila Prabhupada, it is my great hope, my cherished desire, that I can qualify myself through service to be with you again one day in the not-too-distant future. The possibility will soon arise because after all I am in the closing chapters of my life. I pray that when that fi-



nal moment arrives I may be pure in heart and qualified to serve your desires in the spiritual world, far beyond this world of birth and death. There, in that transcendental abode, I will never experience the anguish of being separated from you again. Rather, I will help you eternally in your service to the Lord, until the end of time and forever after.

I am missing you on this sacred day, my beloved lord and master.

Your servant, Indradyumna Swami



# JUST WANDER

| NOVEMBER 15 - DECEMBER 1, 2007 |

By the time our *parikrama* group of 250 devotees arrived in Jagannatha Puri, there was only one week left of the auspicious month of Kartika. We had spent the first three weeks visiting holy places in Vrindavan and Mayapura.

It had been intense, traveling in India with so many devotees. Facilities were not always the best, and large crowds in the holy places had made it difficult to move around. Nevertheless, we had enjoyed it immensely, as we had spent many days hearing the Lord's pastimes and having extended *bhajans* in each and every sacred place.

All of us were eager to visit Jagannatha Puri as it is one of the holiest places in India and, being on the shore of the Indian Ocean, a very relaxing place. Upon arriving, a devotee asked shyly if he could swim in the sea.



“Oh yes,” I replied, “bathing in this ocean is a transcendental experience. Before placing the great saint Haridasa Thakur in samadhi, Lord Caitanya bathed him in these waters.”

*haridase samudra jale snana karaila  
prabhu kahe, samudra ei maha tirtha ha-ila*

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu bathed the body of Haridasa Thakura in the sea and then declared, “From this day on, this sea has become a great pilgrimage site.”

[ *Caitanya Caritamrita*, Antya 11.64 ]

The day after our arrival, I spoke to our guide, Madhavananda dasa, a disciple of Gaura Govinda Maharaja. “Let’s go on *parikrama* early in the morning,” I said, “so we can see as many holy places as possible before it gets too hot.”

“Where would you like to go in particular?” he asked.

I thought for a moment. “Let’s just wander around,” I said.

Traveling in auto rickshaws, we arrived at a temple unknown to most ISKCON devotees. “This is the temple of Radha Kanta,” said Madhavananda. “The Deity here is one of six originally installed by the great saint Srila Narottam dasa Thakur at the first Gaura Purnima festival in Bengal 400 years ago.”

I had visited the temple years ago in a search for those famous Deities, but the rest of the devotees were unaware of its existence. When we entered we all paid our obeisances and went forward to the altar to take *darsan* of the Deity.

As we stood before the Deity I spoke to the devotees: “This beautiful Deity of Radha Kanta, the Deity of Vraja Mohan in Vrindavan and a Deity of Lord Caitanya in Bengal are the only Deities I’ve been able to trace out of the original six installed

by Narottam dasa Thakur. I've been searching for almost 20 years."

As we sat down to have *bhajan*, one of the local priests, who had overheard me, came and began whispering in my ear. "The chief priest here, who oversees the worship of Radha Kanta, may be able to tell you where the other three Deities are," he said. "He's an old sadhu in his 80s and very learned in the Vaisnava tradition."

"Please!" I said excitedly. "Can you arrange for me to meet him?"

"Let me see," said the priest.

As we began the *bhajan* I looked at Radha Kanta and prayed He would reveal where the other Deities were being worshiped. Twenty minutes later, as we continued to chant, the priest returned. "Maharaja has agreed to meet you in ten minutes," he said.

He pointed to a small room near the altar. "Just over there," he said.

A few minutes later I moved quickly towards the room. Fifteen or twenty devotees followed me.

Suddenly the old sadhu appeared at the door. He was a rather large man with a serious expression, wearing only a loin-cloth. He saw that we wouldn't all fit in his room, so he asked for a chair and sat down with us.

We bowed and offered our respect. "Maharaja," I said, "we are all devout followers of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and thus His devotee Srila Narottam dasa Thakur is very dear to our hearts. We wanted to thank you and your disciples for taking such nice care of his Deity, Radha Kanta."

He looked at us curiously, as if he had never seen Western devotees before.

“What is it that you admire in Sri Thakur Mahasaya (Narottam dasa Thakur)?” he said.

“His deep devotion to the Lord,” I replied, “as expressed in his works *Prema Bhakti Candrika* and *Prarthana* and the fact that he was a stalwart preacher of the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.”

The old sadhu smiled and nodded his head in approval.

“We are doing our best to take care of Radha Kanta,” he said. “The important thing is devotion. Some facility is here, but it means nothing unless we offer it in devotion.”

“And there is a wonderful pastime that took place here” he continued with a smile. The devotees moved in closer.

“Five hundred years ago Lord Nityananda visited this very place, which was only jungle at the time. He was joined by a group of children, and they had a wonderful *kirtan* that went on for many hours. Later when Lord Caitanya came here he declared that there are two places in Jagannatha Puri where love of Godhead is easily available: the temple of Tota Gopinath and this spot, where Lord Nityananda danced in ecstasy with the children.

“Some years later when Narottam dasa Thakur came here on pilgrimage, one of his disciples, Seva dasa, asked if he could remain and perform *bhajan*. Some time later Narottam ordered that Radha Kanta be sent here to be worshiped by Seva dasa.”

The sadhu fell silent. I felt it was the right time to ask my question.

“Maharaja,” I said, “After the departure of Lord Caitanya, Radha Kanta was installed by Narottam dasa Thakur at the famous Keturi festival in Bengal, along with five other Deities. One was a golden Deity of Lord Caitanya, who is now being worshiped in a village north of Kolkata. Among the other

four Deities of Krsna, one, Vraja Mohan is presently being worshiped in Vrindavan. Do you know where the other three Deities are?”

The sadhu looked surprised. “You know these things?” he said.

“I’ve been trying to find these Deities for twenty years,” I replied. Then I chanted one of my favorite mantras, with the names of all six Deities.

*gauranga vallabhi kanta  
sri krsna vraja mohan  
radha raman he radhe  
radha kanta namo stu te*

The sadhu’s eyes opened wide. “I know where They are,” he said softly.

I couldn’t believe my ears.

“Maharaja!” I said, “Please tell us where They can be found.”

He began slowly. “As you stated,” he said, “Gauranga is being worshiped in Bengal at the ancestral home of Ganga Narayana Chakravarti, the chief disciple of Narottam dasa Thakur. Vallabhi Kanta is being served in a temple in Dwarka, though I’m not sure of His exact whereabouts. Sri Krsna was worshiped by a king in East Bengal for some time and later given to a brahmin family. It would take more research to find where He is now.

“You mentioned that Vraja Mohan is worshiped in Vrindavan. I’ve heard that Radha Raman is also being served somewhere there as well.

“And of course Radha Kanta is here,” he said. “You may be surprised to learn that out of the six Deities that Narottam

installed, Radha Kanta was personally worshiped by him for the remainder of his life.”

I sat there stunned. In one minute, twenty years of research had borne fruit.

After relishing the moment, we all thanked the sadhu profusely, paid our obeisances, and left.

We walked out of the temple and started down the street. “Maharaja,” Madhavananda said, “I have another amazing place to take the devotees.”

I shook my head. “What could be more amazing than what we just experienced?” I said.

Madhavananda smiled. “A long-lost temple,” he said. “It was discovered not long ago right in the heart of Jagannatha Puri.”

“A lost temple?” I said. “How could a temple be lost in the middle of Jagannatha Puri?”

As we walked along, Madhavananda told the story to me.

“Five hundred years ago,” he began, “when Lord Caitanya was living in Puri, He stayed at the house of his devotee Kasi Misra. That house, which is still standing, later became the famous Gambira Temple, where Kasi Misra’s personal Deities of Radha Kanta were worshiped. Because of the strictness of the culture at the time, women were not allowed to render personal service to temple Deities. But Kasi Misra’s wife had a strong desire to serve the Lord in His Deity form, so her husband arranged a beautiful set of Radha Krsna Deities for her to worship in her very own personal temple, which he had built. Throughout most of her life she served those Deities with great devotion. Unfortunately, as centuries passed, that small temple was abandoned and fell into disrepair.”

“How could a sacred temple be abandoned?” I said.



*The face of the deity of Radharani, from the temple of the deities of Radha and Krsna worshipped by the wife of Kasi Misra.*

Madhavananda shook his head. “Kali Yuga,” he said.

“Two years ago,” he continued, “a *pujari* at Gambira Temple had a dream in which the Deities of Kasi Misra’s wife appeared to him.

“‘We are standing under water,’ They said. ‘We are surrounded by garbage and filth, behind a wall near Gambira Temple. Please come and rescue us.’

“The *pujari* awoke with a start. He gathered some friends and tools, and they ran to the place indicated by the Deities. It was a place where people had been throwing their garbage over a wall into a neglected jungle area for years.

“They climbed up the wall and over a huge pile of refuse, and they spotted an area thick with trees and vines. They chopped



away and discovered the ruins of a small temple. When they forced open the door, a flood of water poured out. When they walked in, they were stunned to see large Deities of Radha and Krsna standing on the altar. It took weeks to restore the Deities to Their original beauty. After the area was cleaned nicely and the temple rebuilt, the worship of Radha and Krsna began again.”

“That’s another amazing story,” I said. “I thought things like that only happened in previous ages. I can’t wait to see those Deities. And I’d really love to meet that *pujari*.”

Just as I spoke we reached the old temple on the edge of a sprawling neighborhood. I walked in, quickly paid my obeisances to the Deities, and stood before Them reverentially, appreciating Their beauty and Their pastime of revealing Themselves to the world again.

As the devotees sat down to hear Madhavananda relate the pastime, I walked behind the temple with Gaura Hari dasa to chant Gayatri mantra in a quiet place. We were accompanied by a young man, a resident of Puri, who was helping us with translations that day. Just as we had finished Gayatri, I saw an old man come out of a room in a small building adjacent to the temple. I was immediately attracted by his saintly appearance, and I spontaneously offered obeisances to him. I got up and started walking towards him.

“Who is this blissful sadhu?” I said to our translator. “He’s obviously old, but appears youthful by his effulgent countenance.”

The translator stood with palms joined, looking at the sadhu. “This is the *pujari* who had the dream about the Deities in this temple,” he said. “Out of love for Them he now resides nearby.”

I couldn't believe our good fortune. Bowing before the sadhu, I asked him to put his hands on my head and bless me. Like all Vaisnavas, he was of a merciful nature. Smiling broadly, he put his two hands firmly on my head and said loudly:

*harer nama harer nama harer nama eva kevalam  
kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatih anyatha*

In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the only means of deliverance is the chanting of the holy names of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way.

[ *Brhad-naradiya Purana* 3.8.126 ]

I thanked him again and again. For the second time that morning I found myself expressing deep gratitude to a saintly person. We paid our obeisances again and returned to our group of devotees.

As the devotees sat spellbound hearing Madhavananda's narration, I turned to Gaura Hari. "Since we've already heard the story," I said, "let's take our translator and wander around the neighborhood to see what we can see."

We walked outside and turned down a narrow street. Our translator told us we were in an old part of town, where the brahmanas from the main temple lived with their families. As we walked along, I was awestruck by the antiquity of the surroundings.

As we rounded a corner, we saw an old woman sitting on the porch of her house eating *prasadam* from a small clay bowl on the ground. She was taking each bite slowly and with deep respect. "That's a great photo," I said to Gaura Hari as I took out my camera and photographed her.

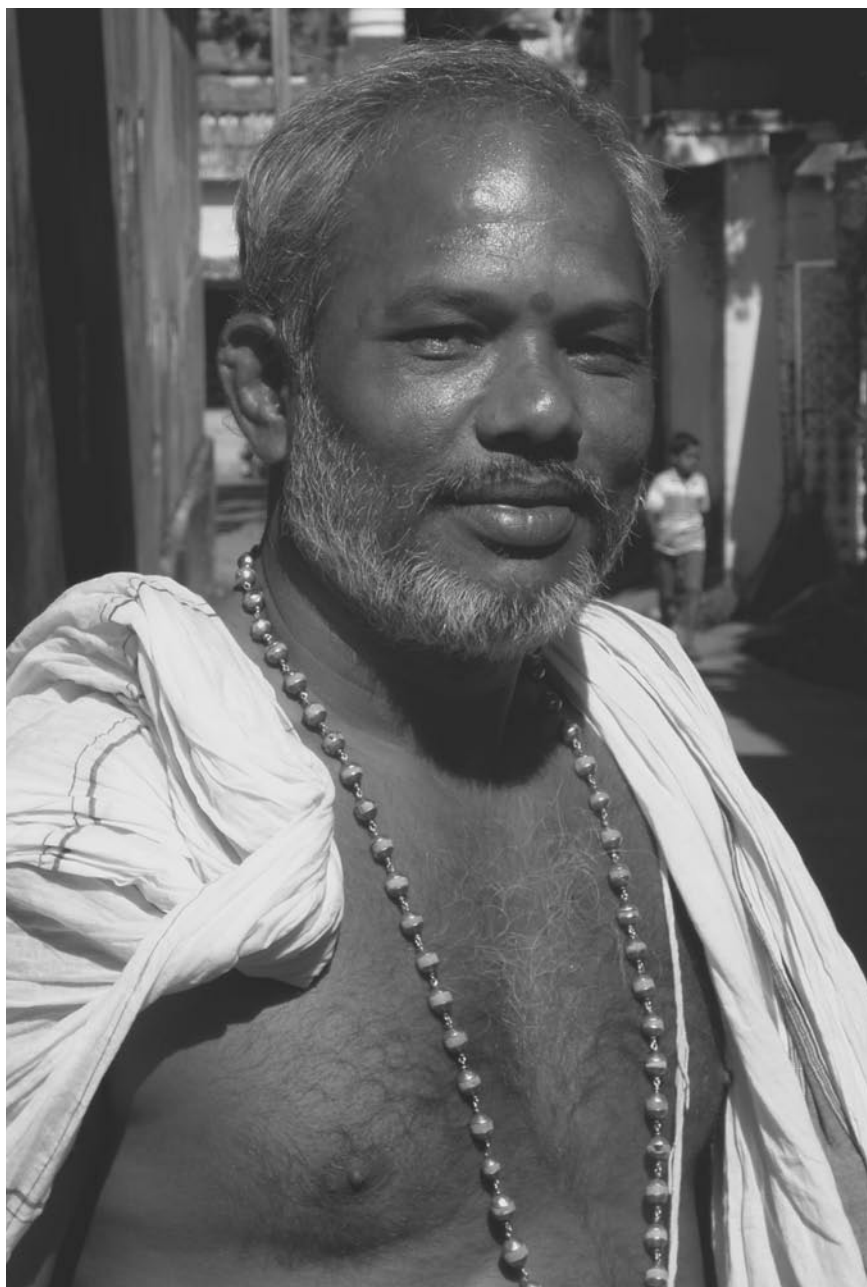


*The old lady sitting on the porch respecting Lord Jagannatha's prasadam.*

Just then a man who appeared to be in his late 60's came out of the house. Seeing us he immediately smiled. He was dressed in a dhoti, with a small *cadar* over his neck and his brahmana thread draped over his shoulder. "That's my mother," he said. "She's honoring Lord Jagannatha's *prasadam*."

"He's one of the chief priests in the temple," our translator said softly. "Every day he receives some *prasadam* that has been offered to Lord Jagannatha on a special golden plate. The *prasadam* is prepared separately and by the best cooks in the temple."

The priest came over to speak to us. "Are you Vaisnavas?" he said.



*Her son, the pujari ( himself in his 60's ) who gave some of that prasadam.*

“Yes, Maharaja,” I replied. “By the mercy of our spiritual masters, we are servants of the Lord. We have come to Jagannatha Puri on *parikrama* with a large group of devotees from the West.”

He stood for a moment observing us and then quietly turned and walked up onto the porch where his mother was taking *prasadam*. He reached down, respectfully took some of the *prasadam* in his hand, and walked back to where we were standing. Then he reached out and put some of the *prasadam* in our hands.

Taken aback by his generosity, we stood there not knowing what to do next.

He smiled again. “Take *prasadam*,” he said.

Looking at his mother, who continued to relish the *prasadam* on her plate, I put Lord Jagannatha’s *prasadam* in my mouth with as much devotion as I could muster.

“I’ve never tasted anything like this in my entire life,” I said to Gaura Hari. “It’s heavenly.”

As the *brahmana* went back to his duties, we found ourselves bowing down and once again thanking a sadhu for his kindness upon us.

“This is the mercy of this holy *dhama*,” I said to Gaura Hari as we walked back to meet our party. “The sadhus who live here kindly share their good fortune with others. That is why we must visit such holy places as many times as we can during our lifetime.”

“I agree,” Gaura Hari said enthusiastically.

“Experiences like we’re having today in Jagannatha Puri,” I said, “give me faith that one day I might even attain the rarest treasure of love of God.”

As we walked down the road, I remembered a beautiful verse:

*idam sena bhagyam bhavati sulabham yena yuvayos  
chatapy asya premnah sphurati na hi suptav api mama  
padarthe smin yusmad vrajam anunivasena janitas  
tathapy asa bandhab parivrdha varau mam dradhayati*

“The splendor of pure love, which makes the good fortune of direct service to You easy to obtain, is not mine, even in dreams. Still, O king and queen, simply living in your Vraja gives me great hope.”

[ *Utkalika-vallari*, verse 64 ]

We met up with our *parikrama* group and started back in the direction where we were staying. When we reached Satpa Rsi Road, not far from our destination, I took the devotees to the temple of Jagadananda Pandit, another important associate of Lord Caitanya.

In the temple I spoke to the devotees: “Jagadananda Pandit wrote a book called *Prema Vivarta*, in which he analyzes the subject matter of divine love in great detail. Kviraja Goswami says in *Caitanya Caritamrita*:

*jagadanandera ‘prema-vivarta’ sune yei jana  
premera ‘svarupa’ jane, paya prema dhana*

“Anyone who hears about the loving exchanges between Jagadananda Pandita and Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, or who reads Jagadananda’s book *Prema Vivarta*, can understand what love is. Moreover, he achieves ecstatic love of Krsna.”

“It’s something we hope to achieve in the future,” I said with a smile, “after we’re successful in conquering over our material desires. Now let’s proceed back to our ashram.”

I kept it short. I could see the devotees were getting tired. As we were leaving the temple I looked across the road and saw the famous temple of Brahmananda Bharati Maharaja, another great associate of Lord Caitanya. The temple was undergoing renovation and I was curious to see the work, so I took the hand of my disciple Narottam dasa Thakur dasa, and we ducked under the scaffolding and went inside.

The temple is 500 years old and looks every bit of its antiquity. There were no windows or lighting inside, but with the sun filtering through the entrance we could see very beautiful Deities of Radha and Kṛṣṇa on the altar.

“These were the personal Deities of Brahmananda Bharati Maharaja,” said a *pujari* coming in from behind us. “With the help of several ISKCON devotees we are renovating the temple to its original glory. Let me show you the *salagram-silas* that have been worshiped here since the time of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.”

He went onto the altar, picked up a wooden box full of *silas*, and brought them forward, right before our eyes.

“They’re very beautiful,” I said.

Suddenly I noticed a small black stone with a beautiful white line circling around it several times. “That’s a Siva lingam, Lord Siva himself,” I whispered to Narottam dasa. “Previously sadhus worshiped Siva in that form. Nowadays you only see such lingams in temples. They are very rare.”

I paused for a moment. “I’ve always longed to have one,” I said, “to complete the worship on my altar.”

“But why would we, as devotees of Kṛṣṇa, worship Lord Siva?” Narottam asked.

“*Sastra* says he’s the greatest Vaisnava,” I replied. “And only by the mercy of Vaisnavas can we serve the Supreme Lord.” I quoted *Bhakti Ratnakara*:

*srimad gopisvaram vande  
sankaram karuna mayam  
sarva klesa haram devam  
vrindaranya rati pradam*

I offer my respectful obeisances to Gopiswara, who is Lord Siva himself. He is very merciful, removes all troubles, and grants spiritual love in Vrindavan.

[ *Bhakti Ratnakara* 5.3741 ]

I looked longingly at the sila. “But I won’t ask for it,” I thought. “Maybe another time. The *pujari* probably wouldn’t give him to me anyway.”

I thanked the *pujari* for the special *darsan* and turned to Narottam. “Let’s go,” I said.

The front entrance was closed so I walked carefully through the darkness towards the door. When I found the handle I turned it and walked out into the bright sunshine.

I gathered the devotees and spoke for some time about Brahmananda Bharati Maharaja and then announced that we would continue back to our asrama. Suddenly I realized Narottam wasn’t there.

“Where’s Narottam?” I asked the devotees. Just at that moment he appeared.

“Sorry I’m late, Guru Maharaja,” he said.

He paused. “But I don’t think you’ll mind,” he continued, “because I have something very special for you.”

He put the beautiful Siva lingam in my hand.

“Narottam!” I said. “How did you get him?”

“It was simple,” he replied. “I told the *pujari* that it was you and some of your disciples who have been the main contribu-



tors in renovating that temple over the years. When he heard that he gave the *sila* with gratitude and love.”

That night at the ashram I remembered something said by Srila Prabhupada’s disciple Madhavananda dasa in an interview with Yadubara dasa. He was talking about Srila Prabhupada’s 1971 *parikrama* of Vrindavan with his Western disciples:

“When we arrived in Vrindavan, I remember walking into Prabhupada’s room and offering my obeisances. I said, ‘Srila Prabhupada, what should we do now?’

“He looked down at me and said, ‘Just wander.’”



# NO WORRIES MATE

| DECEMBER 2 - 25, 2007 |

After a month-long *parikrama* of Vrindavan, Mayapura and Jagannatha Puri, I was sad to be leaving India. I boarded my flight to Sydney, Australia on December 2 with memories of the places I had visited still fresh in my mind. The trip had made a deep impression in my spiritual life. I understood clearly why Srila Prabhupada had wanted his disciples to visit India regularly in order to take shelter of the holy places.

Following in the footsteps of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, we have constructed temples in both Vrindavan and Mayapur, Navadvipa, just to give shelter to the foreign devotees coming from Europe and America. . . . It is the purpose of the International Society for Krsna Consciousness to give them shelter and train them in devotional service.

[ *Caitanya Caritamrita*, Madhya Lila, Chapter 25, verse 183, purport ]



I had contemplated extending my visit to India for another few weeks, but as much as I hankered to stay, I knew my purpose in visiting the holy places had been served. Srila Prabhupada once wrote a disciple:

Vrindavan is an inspiration only. Our real fieldwork is all over the world.

[ Mahanidhi Swami, *Prabhupada at Radha-Damodara*, Chapter 7 ]

As the flight took off, I began meditating on my visit to Australia. Sixteen devotees from the summer festival program in Poland would be joining me for a festival tour. They were the core of our stage program in Poland and I had picked them for their talent in Bharat-natyam dance, *bhajans*, yoga, martial arts and theater.

The day after I arrived in Australia, we all assembled for our first practice. Having arrived on flights from as far away as Poland, Estonia, Ukraine and Russia, the jetlagged devotees took some time to get their performances together. By the next day, however, our three-hour show was ready.

In the afternoon we went out on *harinama* to advertise the first festival. I had hoped for a bigger *harinama* party, but the local Sydney temple could spare only a few devotees because they had just started their December *sankirtan* marathon.

None of the foreign devotees had ever visited Australia before and were unsure what to expect. But we soon experienced the congeniality of the Australian people as we started chanting and handing out invitations. Almost everyone accepted our invitations with a smile and often with words of appreciation. This proved difficult for the Russian devotees, some of whom had taken courses in English before coming to Australia. After giving out invitations for just ten minutes, one Russian devotee

came up to me and said, "Guru Maharaja, what does 'good on ya' mean?"

I laughed and said, "That's slang for something like 'well done.'"

Five minutes later another Russian devotee approached me and asked in broken English, "What do they mean when they say 'She'll be right mate?'"

I had to consult a local devotee who was chanting with us. "It's an affirmative expression," he said with a smile, "like saying that everything will be alright."

At the end of the *kirtan*, a Ukrainian devotee came up to me holding a Ukrainian-English dictionary. "I can't find the word, 'noworries,'" she said with a confused look on her face.

"It's two words," I said. "When they say, 'No worries mate,' it means just that: there's nothing to worry about."

The next day we did *harinama* again. That evening we had our first program in Newtown, a suburb of Sydney. I was apprehensive that we wouldn't get a good turnout on such short notice, but the hall quickly filled to its capacity of 300 people.

"They're mostly New Age, alternative types," one local devotee told me.

The audience loved our show and applauded loudly after each performance. There were many nice comments from the crowd as they left, including that the show was professional. For me this was the most significant comment, because I have been striving for years to bring our festival programs to a professional level. The content is devotional, which is the most important thing, but to attract the general public it must be presented in a well-organized and attractive manner. Only then can we actually conquer the world with culture. Srila Prabhupada once said:

So it is our mission. It is India's culture. People are hankering after this culture, Krsna culture. So you should prepare yourself to present *Bhagavad-gita* as it is. Then India will conquer all over the world by this Krsna culture. Rest assured.

[ Lecture, Bombay, March 31, 1971 ]

During the next ten days we held two other successful festivals in areas similar to the first, attracting crowds of mainly young people searching for spiritual life. Happy with the results, I inquired about the next program from Vara-nayaka dasa, Sydney's temple president.

"We've scheduled the next program in Mona Vale, a conservative town north of Sydney," he said. "We want to reach out and contact different types of people with your festival program."

"Have we ever done a program there before?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," he replied. "There may have been some book distribution there through the years."

"What about *harinama*?" I said.

"Maybe thirty years ago," he said with a laugh.

Great expense and effort had gone into planning and preparing our Australian tour and I was hesitant about doing a program in a conservative area. "Surely we won't get the same response that we've had in the Sydney suburbs," I thought.

The next day we all drove to Avalon, a town close to Mona Vale. Because neither town is very large, we wanted to get out as many invitations in the area as possible.

With me was Santi Parayana dasa, who had lived in the Sydney region for years. "Avalon is even more conservative than Mona Vale," he said. "Some of the wealthiest people in Australia live there."

Minutes later we drove into the quaint town. It had rows of attractive shops, outdoor cafes and well-groomed gardens. Exclusive houses dotted the nearby hillside.

As we got out of the vans and assembled for *harinama*, some people stopped and stared at us.

“Do they know us here?” I asked Santi Parayana.

“Doesn’t look like it,” he replied.

I saw that the devotees were a little nervous and self-conscious, so as we stepped on to the sidewalk I encouraged them to smile.

Soon the potency of the holy names took over and the devotees became confident as we happily chanted and danced down the street. Like our stage show, our *harinama* was well planned and attractive. I had insisted that all the devotees were dressed impeccably: the men wore nice, well-pressed dhotis, and the women had decorated their faces with beautiful *gopi* dots. Their saris swayed as they danced choreographed steps in unison.

The *kirtan* party proceeded blissfully through the streets, and the devotees interacted with the people by smiling and waving. They sang melodiously to the accompaniment of our drums, cymbals and small accordion.

Contrary to what I expected, it soon became obvious that people loved our chanting party as much as they had in Sydney. Seeing the people waving and smiling back at us, one of the Russian devotees commented, “No worries, Guru Maharaja.”

“She’ll be right mate,” another devotee quipped in a thick Russian accent.

As we turned the first corner, a well-dressed man walked quickly towards the chanting party. “Oh no,” I thought, “it’s probably a city official coming to stop us.”

“Just keep moving,” I said to the devotees.

The man caught up to us. "Are you from the Hare Krsna Movement?" he asked me.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Then this is for you," he said, putting \$150 in my hand.

I was stunned. "Thank you, sir," I said.

"But spend it only on the movement," he said with a smile as he walked off.

The sidewalk widened as we proceeded, and we stopped to chant for a few minutes in front of a cafe. One of the customers got up from his table and came outside. His eyes were wide open in disbelief.

"I can't believe it," he said loudly. "I simply cannot believe it."

I moved closer to where he was standing. "Can't believe what, sir?" I asked

"I can't believe you guys are here," he replied, shaking his head.

"We're advertising our festival in Mona Vale," I said.

"I just moved here from Sydney yesterday," he said. "I used to eat at your restaurant in the city regularly. I was actually sitting here regretting how I wouldn't see you guys any more and all of sudden you walk by singing. It's uncanny."

I handed him an invitation to the program in Mona Vale. "We'd say that it's Krsna's arrangement," I said with a smile. "Come along for the festival tomorrow night."

We continued chanting as we made our way along the street and stopped again on the corner of an intersection. We soon attracted a small crowd which stood watching and appreciating the *kirtan*. Suddenly I saw two older women looking at us suspiciously.

One of them came forward and said loudly, “Are you real Hare Krsnas?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, raising my voice over the *kirtan*. “We’re real Hare Krsnas.”

She looked back at her friend and nodded, confirming we were the real thing. Both women continued watching the *kirtan*, waving and smiling at the devotee women whenever they could get their attention.

As our procession continued, I took a pile of invitations and started distributing them. I handed one to an elderly gentleman who smiled and said, “We’ve been waiting thirty years for you people to come back.”

Noticing a friend nearby, he pointed to us and said, “Hey, Billy, have a gander. Check this out!”

His friend had obviously never seen us before. “Who are they?” he asked.

“The Hares,” the man said.

Hearing his reply, I laughed and thought, “They even have a slang word for us.”

“Good blokes,” the first man said as they walked away.

It wasn’t long before we reached the end of the shopping area. By this time our chanting had reached a peak and devotees were dancing and spinning around in bliss. We were just about to turn around when we noticed a park about thirty meters away where a large number of school children and adults were having a picnic.

Hearing the *kirtan*, the children spontaneously jumped up and raced towards us. Within moments we were surrounded by about a hundred children who started to dance enthusiastically with us. Some of them joined hands to form circles. They pulled the devotees into the middle of the circles, danc-





*Girls dancing with devotees*

ing around them. Others formed a line with their hands on each others' backs, laughing and giggling as they danced to the beat of the *mrdangas*. As the pace of the kirtan increased, some children grabbed their friends and began to dance wildly. Whirling them around, they screamed at the top of their lungs, "Hare Krsna!" Caught up in the excitement one girl yelled out, "Chocolate is yummy!" I laughed seeing her friends frown at her, indicating the outburst was out of place.

I looked over at the parents and teachers and was surprised to see them thoroughly enjoying the event, waving to and encouraging the kids. I was even more amazed when a couple passed by with their two children and asked me, "May we leave our kids with you for twenty minutes while we finish our shopping?"



*Students dancing in lines*

“Well ... sure,” I replied. Pointing to the dancing children, I said, “They can dance in the third circle of children over there.”

Other passers by stopped to watch, many of them clapping to encourage the children. Stepping to the side for a moment, I watched in amazement as the scene continued to unfold.

“This sort of bliss is possible only by the mercy of Lord Caitanya,” I thought, recalling a verse I’d recently memorized:

*yada tada madhava yatra yatra  
gayanti ye ye tava nama-lilah  
tatraiva karnayuta-dharyamanas  
tas te sudha nityam aham dhayani*

O Madhava, whenever and wherever someone chants  
Your names and describes Your pastimes, may I be pres-  
ent with millions of ears to drink that nectar.

[ Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur, *Anuraga-valli*, verse 4, ]



*Kids with the instruments*

After forty-five minutes many of the children had wandered off, leaving twenty-three of the most enthusiastic to chant and dance with us. Seeing a few devotees slowing down, some of the children ran forward. They took our drums and *kartalas* away from us and started to play them themselves. Two girls grabbed a photo of the Panca Tattva with the maha-mantra on it that a devotee was holding. Then they took the microphone from the lead singer and began chanting Hare Krsna. We stood back and looked on incredulously as they continued the *kirtan* for another 20 minutes.



*Students with the picture of Panca Tattva*

Finally, I decided to end the *kirtan*. We had to move on and advertise the festival in Mona Vale. But the children would hear nothing of it. Immersed in the nectar of chanting they wouldn't quit. Eventually, I had to pull the plug on the amplifier.

The children swarmed around us asking for signatures and email addresses. When a devotee brought out some small packaged nuts that we had been distributing earlier, the children rushed forward to grab them. As they sat on the edge of the lawn eating, one of the parents came up to me.

"We tell them never to take food from strangers," he said. "But look how they're eating those nuts! You stole their hearts and made this the best school picnic they've ever had. The teachers and parents would like to invite you back for next year's picnic. Would that be possible?"



*Girls leading the kirtan*

“I’m sure it can be arranged, sir,” I said, still amazed by all that had taken place. “We’ll try our best.”

The next evening, the hall in Mona Vale was completely packed with more than 350 guests. Many of them were from Avalon – and many were children. During the *kirtan* at the end of the festival it was the kids who chanted the loudest, as they danced to their hearts’ content.

Chant whenever it is possible ... While you are walking, you can chant Hare Krsna. Practically we see, when we pass on the street, some of the children, seeing us, say ‘Hare Krsna. Hare Krsna.’ Even the children, they can also chant. It is so nice thing.

[ Srila Prabhupada lecture, Montreal, August 19, 1968 ]



# TROOPERS

| DECEMBER 26, 2007 - JANUARY 10, 2008 |

Our festival programs continued successfully in the Sydney area. After performing there for two weeks, we flew to Melbourne for a three-day program in the prestigious, centrally located town hall auditorium. When we arrived to begin setting up early one morning the devotees were awestruck by the ornate architecture, spacious rooms, high ceilings and crystal chandeliers.

“We’ve never performed in a place like this,” one devotee exclaimed.

“It was completed in 1870,” said a friendly custodian who had overheard the comment. “We hold 3,500 special events a year here, including conferences, weddings and corporate launches. What sort of event will you be holding?”

“It will portray India’s spiritual culture,” I said. “We’ll be presenting dance, music, theater, yoga, martial arts and philosophy.”



“Oh yes,” he said. “A lot of people have been phoning in to ask about your event.”

That night the hall’s 400 seats were filled long before the festival began. We had to turn people away at the door.

“I can’t think of anything more unfortunate than having to turn people away from a show like this,” I said sadly to Gaura Hari dasa. “It can take lifetimes to come in contact with Krsna consciousness.”

Inspired by the impressive surroundings and enthusiastic crowd the devotees performed exceptionally well, as evidenced by the loud applause they received after each performance. But from time to time we could hear a small group of people laughing and joking. It wasn’t enough to cause a major disturbance, but I could see some devotees were distracted during their performances. During my lecture I lost my train of thought twice when the group started laughing. Because the hall was large and dimly lit during the show, it was difficult to pinpoint from where the disruption was coming. After some time, however, the disruptions stopped.

When the stage show finished people got up and left slowly. Many bought books and a number stayed around to ask questions. After everyone had left, Bhakta dasa, who helped organize the event, came up and said to me:

“Did you hear that rowdy group of people during the show?”

“I sure did,” I replied.

Bhakta started laughing.

“What’s so funny?” I said.

“It was a group of people who brought one of their friends as a joke. It was her birthday and they didn’t tell her where they were taking her.

“During the first half of the show they all laughed and made fun of everything. But as the performance went on they became more and more interested. After a while they just fell in love with us and thoroughly enjoyed everything. The lady whose birthday it was told me it was the best birthday she ever had.”

After Melbourne we returned to Sydney for several days of *harinama* leading up to New Year’s Eve. But the weather was terrible. It rained every day. When it came time to leave for the east the devotees were relieved. They’d heard about the semi-tropical weather in Queensland and northern New South Wales.

“We’ll have some great festivals up there,” I told them. “It’s summertime and hundreds of thousands of people will be on vacation.”

On the way to the airport I asked the driver to turn on the radio so I could listen to the national weather report. I was shocked when I learned that a cyclone was passing near Queensland causing unprecedented rain and wind for the time of year.

Sure enough, as our flight from Sydney proceeded northeast we were soon greeted by ominous dark clouds. Strong winds shook the plane violently as we landed in Coolangatta. The rain poured as we drove from the airport to our new base, the New Govardhana community.

“How will we do *harinama* in this rain and advertise our festivals?” I asked the devotee who had come to pick us up.

“The rain isn’t the biggest worry,” he said. “The most serious problem is the risk of flooding. We’ve had a drought here for several years. With rain like this, there’s a good chance the riv-



ers and streams will flood. If that happens, you won't be going anywhere."

To get to New Govardhana, we had to cross a bridge over a small river. When we arrived I was shocked to see the fast-flowing river only a few centimeters below the bridge.

As our group of seventeen devotees settled into their accommodation that evening, the rain continued incessantly. Because of the force of the storm I woke up three times during the night.

Despite the inconvenience caused by the weather, we were determined to push ahead with our first festival in Byron Bay. After breakfast we got into a hired bus and drove down to the river. The water was already flowing freely over the bridge.

"We can cross over now," said the driver. "But I don't know if we'll be able to cross back again when we return."



*Submerged bridge at New Govardhana*

“Don’t worry,” said a local devotee. “Usually the bridge just floods for an hour or two.”

The driver looked at me as we poised on the edge of the river. “What do you want to do?” he asked.

I thought for a moment. “Let’s take a chance and go to Byron Bay,” I said finally. “The festival is too important.”

The rain got still heavier as we headed towards the beach resort. “If this keeps up we won’t be able to give out a single invitation,” said Gaura Hari. “And no publicity means no guests.”

Suddenly, the driver’s cell phone rang. His eyes widened as he listened. He then hung up and turned to face us.

“That was my friend in Murwillumbah. He says the State Emergency Services (SES) has issued a typhoon warning. They’ve asked all hotels in the region to vacate in preparation for flood relief victims.”

“Flood relief victims,” I said incredulously, “in Australia?”

“My friend told them that you are planning to hold a festival in Byron Bay,” the bus driver continued, “and that you’re on the way to advertise it. The SES said you should turn around immediately and go back to your community. The advice is to pack up your stuff and get out of the area fast.”

The driver was about to turn around when I said, “Wait.”

He stopped turning and continued to drive slowly in the direction of Byron Bay, waiting for my decision. I thought about the consequences of cancelling the festival. “We’ve come all the way from Europe at great expense,” I thought. “It was hard enough turning people away at the Melbourne festival. How can we cancel an entire show? We’ll just have to make adjustments if the weather gets worse. And who knows? The weather forecasters are often mistaken.” The driver said impatiently, “So shall I turn around?”



*Canoeing across the flood waters*

“No,” I replied. “Take us to Byron Bay. We’ll do a quick *harinama* and then drive back to the farm and reassess the situation.”

When we reached Byron Bay the rain had still not let up. I looked out the bus window and saw that despite the bad weather a few people were still shopping and taking shelter under the eaves protruding from the roof of the shops whenever there was a downpour.

“OK everybody, out of the bus,” I yelled. “We’ll chant under the eaves and distribute invitations from there.”

Devotees quickly gathered the drums, *karatalas*, banners and invitations. Jumping out into the rain, they made their way

to the protected areas on the sidewalk. The short journey from the bus to the covered area left them completely soaked.

“Bad move,” I said to myself.

We chanted for twenty minutes, but fearing that everyone would get sick I ordered the devotees back in the bus.

“How many invitations did we do?” I asked Santi Parayana dasa.

“About 300,” he replied.

“Gosh, in Poland we distribute 10,000 a day,” I said. “I’ll be surprised if anyone comes tomorrow.”

On the way back to New Govardhana, a devotee received a call from the SES that the bridge to our property was submerged under two meters of water.

“How will we get on to the property?” said Gaura Hari.

“The bridge has flooded many times,” replied a local devotee. “In the past, we would go to our neighbor, James, and ask him if we could cross through his property to our land. The problem is that he’s a bit temperamental. He has often refused us. Maybe our temple president, Ajita dasa, can convince him to let us cross over this one time.”

“Give Ajita a call,” I said.

Half an hour later Ajita called back.

“James said we can cross over his land, but not with the bus. He said only one car can cross; the rest of the devotees have to walk.”

We packed as many women as possible into one of the cars accompanying us, and the rest of us rolled up our dhotis and saris and sloshed through the mud and driving rain for more than an hour to get to the farm. By the time we arrived we were completely soaked and utterly exhausted.

"Well, we made it," said Santi Parayana as he sneezed. "The problem is, how to get out tomorrow for the festival."

"What festival?" another devotee quipped. "We gave out only a couple of invitations."

"Maybe tomorrow will be better weather!" Santi Parayana shot back.

"OK you guys. Don't argue," I said. "You're tired and hungry. Let's have some *prasadam* and take rest. We'll decide what to do tomorrow."

The next morning I woke up early and immediately went down to the river. Although it was still dark I could see the waters were still rising.

"This looks serious," I thought. "At this rate the river may even flood James 's land. We should get out of here as quickly as possible if there's any hope of doing the festival."

I called Ajita. "I have to get my people out of here immediately. Can you ask James if we can cross his land again?"

"I'll take him some hot *prasadam*," said Ajita. "And I'll offer to put some gravel down on his road after the storm. That should work. How many people do we need to move out?"

"Seventeen," I replied. "The bus will be waiting for us on the other side of the river."

An hour later Ajita showed up in a four-wheel drive jeep.

"I told James about your program and he gave in," he said. "He's agreed for us to take four jeeps across his property this morning. And we can drive them back through tonight when the festival is finished."

Although we'd found a solution to one difficulty, we still faced the problem of how to advertise the festival. It was raining even harder than the previous day. We drove through



*The local petrol station flooded*

James's property in the jeeps, boarded the bus and headed for Byron Bay, driving at a snails pace through the storm.

After all we'd been through a couple of devotees became despondent.

"What kind of summer is this?" one of them said exasperated. "The winter weather back in Ukraine is better than this!"

When we arrived in Byron Bay, we let out the devotees who were going to set up the hall. The rest of us waited in the bus for the rain to ease. We waited and waited.

After an hour, I had fallen asleep. One devotee nudged me, "Maharaja! Maharaja! The rain has stopped."

Taking a cloth, I wiped the bus window and looked outside. No rain.

"OK, troopers," I yelled. "Move out!"

"Sounds like the army," laughed one devotee.

"It is," I said. "It's Lord Caitanya's army."

Within moments, we were moving down the street chanting and dancing with abandon, taking advantage of every dry moment. We all knew it was only a short respite in the storm, so we gave it all we had. The people of the town also took advantage of the break in the weather and came out in huge numbers. The deserted streets were suddenly full of people.

I don't think any *sankirtan* party in the history of ISKCON distributed so many invitations in such a short time. In exactly sixty minutes we covered the entire downtown area twice. And just as we gave out the last invitation, as if on cue the thunder clapped and the lightening streaked across the sky. As the rain came pouring down, everyone – shoppers and devotees alike – ran for cover. A few minutes later we were back in our bus soaking wet, but ecstatic.

“Well done prabhus!” I said.

When we arrived at the festival hall, I held a short meeting.

“I know you're tired and wet,” I said to the devotees. “But I want you to tolerate the discomfort and fix your mind on the program tonight. We may get five people or fifty people. It doesn't matter. Whatever fortunate souls come through those doors, we want to give them the best presentation of Krsna consciousness we can.”

In retrospect, I think the Lord wanted to reciprocate with the austerities those devotees underwent. That night 460 guests flooded into the hall when we opened the doors as the festival began.

“Good Lord,” I said as they rushed for the best seats. “So many people have come!”

It was one of our best shows ever. Afterwards, people thanked us profusely as they stepped back into the pouring rain.

But the happiest of all were the devotees.

“It was worth every minute in the rain,” said Santi Parayana with a smile.

On the way home, I asked a devotee to call the SES. “Ask them what the situation is around our farm,” I said. “We need to know where we can meet the vehicles that are supposed to take us back on to our property.”

The devotee made the call, and then grimly announced, “Bad news Maharaja. The river has risen even further. Emergency services are evacuating people from their homes. Roads have been turned into lakes and some bridges have been washed away. It’s impossible to get within five kilometers of the farm.”

“It sounds serious,” I said. “But let’s try to get as close to the farm as we can.”

We were able to drive to Murwillumbah, the town closest to the farm, but no further.

“Where are we going to stay tonight?” asked Santi Parayana. “We can’t all sleep in the bus.”

“Tirtharaj dasa has gone to inquire from one of the motels if there are any rooms free,” I said.

“But all the hotels and motels have been vacated for flood relief victims,” said Santi Parayana.

I paused for a moment. “Correct,” I said. “That means you and me. We’re now officially flood relief victims.”

Santi Parayana fell silent.

Ten minutes later Tirtharaj came back with good news.

“The motel can take all of us, but we’ll have to cram in eight people per room. There are a lot of other people staying in this motel.”

“We could try the next town over,” I said.



“No chance,” said Tirtharaj. “The river has overflowed its banks and there’s no way in or out of this town, at least not for now.”

That night the rain pounded down so hard I couldn’t sleep again. Wanting to see if the severe weather conditions were in the news, I plugged in my computer to the broadband connection next to my bed. I was shocked by what I read on the BBC website:

“Thousands of people have been stranded by some of the worst flooding eastern Australia has seen in twenty years. Entire towns in Queensland and northern New South Wales have been cut off, while rising flood waters have forced hundreds to leave their homes.

“In some areas, food and other essential supplies have been brought in by helicopter for trapped residents. People in isolated areas could remain cut off for up to a week.”

A map showed that the hardest hit area was around Murwillumbah.

Early the next morning, the radio news report told us that the federal government had declared the entire region a natural disaster area. And more bad weather was on the way.

Despite their grim predicament, the devotees were in a light mood. We had beaten all odds and had a successful festival. Although we were in a disaster zone, it felt more like an adventure to write home about.

Then we got a call from Ajita, who sounded grave.

“Maharaja,” he said, “New Govardhana was hit hard by the flooding last night. Twelve of our cows were swept away by flash floods and we lost four acres of crops and much of our fencing. It’s a real disaster.”



*Bringing our things from the farm*

When I told the devotees about the cows, everyone became silent. One of the ladies started to cry.

Gaura Hari attempted to get everyone back on track. “We’ve got another festival two hours from here the day after tomorrow,” he said. “Somehow we have to get our things from the farm and move on.”

The devotees looked at him in disbelief.

“That’s impossible” said one devotee. “All roads into the town are flooded.”

“We should use our brains,” he said. “There’s a solution to every problem.”

“I just heard an update on the local news,” said another devotee. “They say the flood will recede for a couple of hours at low tide around 5PM. It may be possible to drive out of town at that time via the northern exit.

"If we can somehow get our things brought here from the farm by 5PM, we might be able to drive north to Brisbane, where the weather is OK. From there we could go and do the next festival."

I called Ajit and asked if he could pack up our things, put them in the jeeps and drive through the floodwaters to our hotel.

"If the water's not too high," he replied.

By that time it was 9AM, and everyone was hungry. One of the men offered to go to the nearby convenience store and buy some fruit and nuts.

Suddenly Tirtharaj's cell phone rang. It was a local Indian family who lived not far from the motel. They were inviting us for lunch. A big cheer came up from the devotees.

While we were taking *prasadam* a few hours later, Ajita arrived at the house with the jeeps.

"I've got bad news," he said. "All the belongings of the men, including their computers, ipods, cameras and money were found under water. The house where they were staying on the farm flooded."

The men sat there in silence, contemplating their loss.

"Finish *prasadam* quickly," I said to break the mood "and get back in the bus. We've got about forty-five minutes to get out of town while the flood waters recede a bit."

There was no need to say more. Within ten minutes everyone was in the bus, ready to go.

All of them slept the three hours to Brisbane. I didn't bother waking them, knowing they needed the rest. The next day they'd be back on the street for three hours of *harinama*, and the day after that there would be another festival.

"They really are troopers," I thought, looking at them proudly as they slept. "They're as good as any soldiers I've ever met. And



*All the men's belongings were under water*

one day they'll be rewarded for all the sacrifices they're making to spread the *sankirtan* movement of Lord Caitanya. They'll be blessed with love of God. Of that there is no doubt."

So try to spread this Krsna consciousness movement. This is your *sadhana*, execution of austerity, penance. You have to meet so many opposing elements. That is *tapasya*. You are tolerating so much botheration and so much inconvenience, personal discomfort; everything sacrificed. But it will not go in vain. Rest assured. It will not go in vain. Krsna will, I mean to say, reward you sufficiently. You go on executing this Krsna consciousness.

[ Srila Prabhupada lecture, Los Angeles, November 15, 1968 ]

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

INDRADYUMNA SWAMI is a traveling preacher in the International Society for Krsna Consciousness. He joined the movement in 1971 in Detroit, Michigan, and soon after went to Europe to help establish Krsna conscious centers in France, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. In 1979 he accepted the *sannyasa* order of life (a renounced monk) and in 1986 began preaching in Eastern Europe and Russia. He continues to oversee the development of the movement there, as well as give guidance to his disciples. For the past seventeen years he has also organized a large festival program in Poland that introduces Vedic culture to hundreds of thousands of people. Traveling extensively in many parts of the world, he happily shares his experiences and realizations with others in the form of this diary.

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