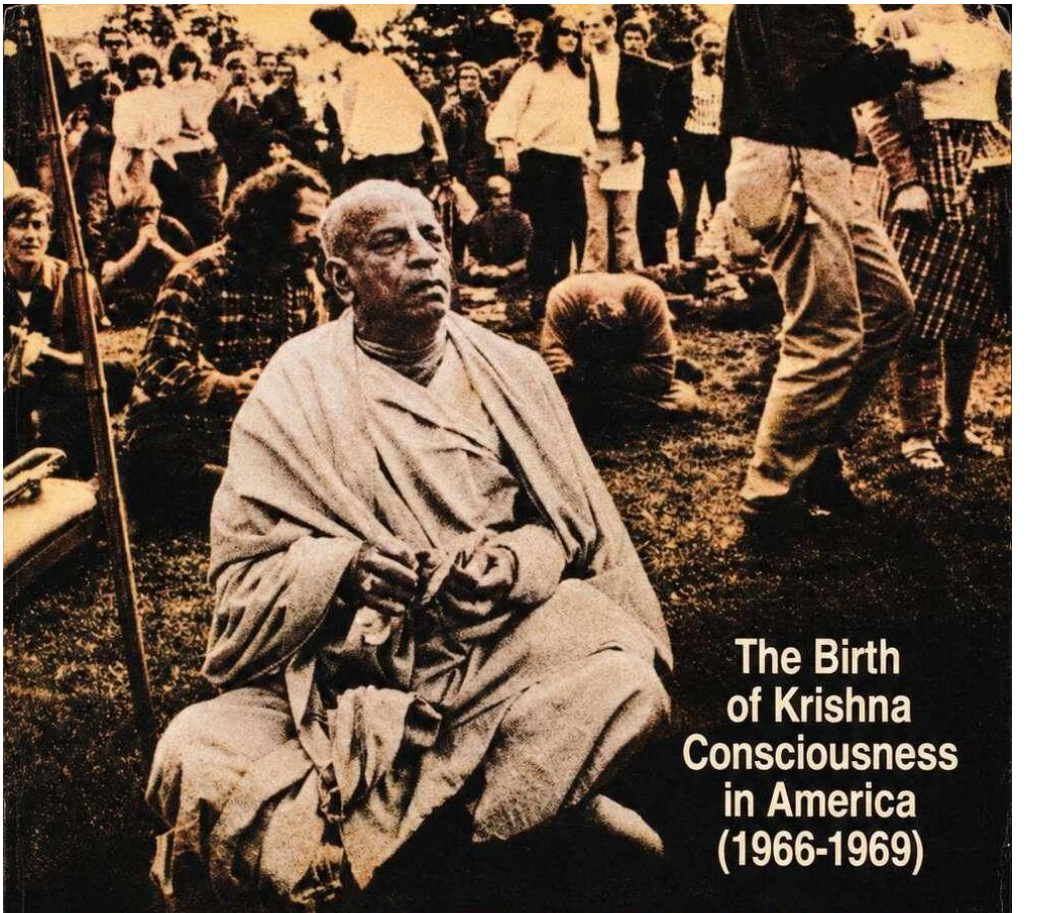


The Birth of Krishna Consciousness in America (1966-1969)

THE HARE KRISHNA EXPLOSION

Hayagriva dasa

THE HARE KRISHNA

EXPLOSION

The Birth of Krishna
Consciousness in America 1966-1969

Hayagriva dasa

PALACE PRESS

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 4
Note 9
Preface 11
PART 1. New-York 13
Chapter 1. Visitor From Calcutta 14
Chapter 2. Transcendental Invitations 35
Chapter 3. Who is Crazy? 63
Chapter 4. Second Avenue Fire Sacrifice 107
Chapter 5. The Hare Krishna Explosion 125
Chapter 6. Back to Godhead 186
PART 2. San-Francisco 225
Chapter 7. Swami in Hippyland 226
Chapter 8. Flowers for Lord Jagannatha 260
Chapter 9. Mad After Krishna 295
Chapter 10. Soul Struck 328
Chapter 11. San Francisco Rathayatra 343
Chapter 12. Passage to India 360
PART 3. New Vrindaban 378
Chapter 13. Enter, Srila Prabhupada 379
Chapter 14. New Vrindaban, West Virginia 397
Chapter 15. Seven Temples on Seven Hills 411
Chapter 16. Krishna, The Flower-bearing Spring 435
Chapter 17. The Guru and the Poet 457
Chapter 18. Paramhansa in the Hills 494
THE AUTHOR 546

FOREWORD

Hayagriva Dasa was Prabhupada's first professor-disciple.

Prabhupada used to call him "Professor Howard Wheeler" even after Hayagriva received his spiritual name. Prabhupada was also very pleased to utilize Hayagriva's literary abilities for spreading Krishna consciousness. It seemed that just when Prabhupada needed him, Krishna supplied a devotee like Hayagriva to begin the editing of Prabhupada's voluminous Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam manuscripts. And it was Hayagriva whom Prabhupada made the first co-editor of Back To Godhead magazine in 1966.

At first, I envied Hayagriva's literary talents, but Hayagriva gave me a good lesson, for which I am always grateful. Although I was involved in writing even before I met Srila Prabhupada, when I became his disciple, I thought that all writing should be given up. I thought that writing was a manifestation of false ego. I remember one day telling this to Hayagriva Prabhu in the storefront. He just laughed in his loud voice and said that as far as he was concerned, he was going to write for Krishna! At first, I walked away with my own opinion-1 would renounce writing-but Hayagriva's statement began to make good sense. Now I know that if we have some inclination to serve, whether by writing, or by some other useful talent, it should never be renounced but used in the service of Krishna.

To become successful in pure devotional service is a difficult job, as we are all experiencing. Over the years, Hayagriva has experienced his own difficulties, but he has always remained faithful to Prabhupada, and I am very happy to see his book, The Hare Krishna Explosion, coming out from New Vrindaban, where Hayagriva is enthusiastically serving Prabhupada, and assisting his lifelong dear friend, Srila Bhaktipada.

This book contains the same exciting literary talent which I saw in Hayagriva from the beginning, in his first Back To Godhead essays and poems. In this book, Hayagriva has captured the exciting spirit of the wonderful, innocent days of the Krishna consciousness movement as it expanded personally from His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the source of all good things in the Krishna consciousness movement. Hayagriva's book focuses on the person Srila Prabhupada, and on direct experiences with him, by an honest, adoring disciple. The details of 26 Second Avenue in 1966, particularly of the first initiation, are known only to a few persons. There are no letters, and we· have to rely on a few people's memory. Hayagriva's memory is especially sharp, and also he is very literary.

Sometimes, when he says something, it seems so perfect, the phrasing so exact, that I cannot for the life of me think of a better way to say it. The personality of Srila Prabhupada is certainly evoked in these pages. The style-present tense, written in the first person, series of literary scenes separated by asterisks, lightning-quick characterizations, sentence fragments, etc. -is very readable and quite in the modern idiom. I think that The Hare Krishna Explosion will be able to convince neutral readers to become attracted to Prabhupada and to see the wonderful genuine human beginnings of this great spiritual movement.

Certainly Srila Prabhupada is great enough to have many books written about him, just as Lord Chaitanya's followers wrote many about Him. As one critic of biography said, the reason for writing biography is that one cannot bear to see the memory of a great person forgotten. The attitude Hayagriva has taken is truly a Vaishnava one. He is not writing from a commercial point of view, otherwise it would have been done differently. The motive is devotion. Devotees, as well as the growing numbers of persons becoming interested in Krishna consciousness, will derive genuine benefit from this book, and will become more affectionately attached to Prabhupada and ISKCON.

The Hare Krishna Explosion is distinct from the Srila Prabhupada-

lilamrta, and has its own unique place in the growing literature about Prabhupada by Prabhupada's disciples. Srila Prabhupada was always pleased to see Hayagriva at work, editing and writing, and so he will also be pleased to see this book. I hope he will bless Hayagriva Prabhu to write more and more Krishna conscious literatures.

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami
ISKCON Puerto Rico
October, 1984

The Birth of Krishna Consciousness in America 1966 – 1969

By Hayagriva das

tad viddhi pranipatena
pariprashnena sevaya
upadekshyanti te jnanam
jnaninas tattva-darshinah

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. (*Bhagavad-gita*)

Note

The first draft of *The Hare Krishna Explosion* was written in July, 1969, just after Srila Prabhupada's first visit to New Vrindaban. At that time, I realized that the details of the beginnings of the Krishna Consciousness Movement had best be recorded while events were still fresh. Working from notebooks, diaries and memory, I compiled the first draft within a month. Then the manuscript remained packed away, until Srila Prabhupada left this mortal world in November, 1977. During those interim years, both the manuscript and my mind had accumulated some dust, but convinced of the value of anything dealing with Srila Prabhupada, I began again, and completed the second draft in 1979. For the next five years, as the Hare Krishna Movement continued to expand, I kept polishing and expanding the manuscript. Clearly, the Hare Krishna explosion was not about to fizzle. "Just as Krishna is always expanding," Srila Prabhupada had said, "anything related to Krishna is also expanding." In 1966, unknown to us, Prabhupada had truly launched a dynamic world religion.

Now, on the eve of the Twentieth Anniversary of Prabhupada's International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the appearance of Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, *The Hare Krishna Explosion*—by the grace of Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga—is finally ready. In this endeavor, the Palace Press staff at New Vrindaban has been of inestimable help: Sriman Sundarakara dasa, production manager; Srimati Ragamathani dasi, composing; and Srimati Tulasi-devi dasi, layout. Without their selfless assistance, the dust would still be accumulating.

Hayagriva Dasa
Shila Ropananam Ceremony
Radha Vrinadban Chandra's
Great Temple of Understanding
New Vrindaban May 31, 1985



Preface

Although at first we called him "Swamiji," we eventually changed to the more respectful "Prabhupada," a Sanskrit word meaning "one who takes shelter at the lotus feet of Krishna."

"This is the proper form of addressing the spiritual master," he humbly suggested one day.

Somehow the strange word rang true, and from then on it was always "Prabhupada," a word that conjured for us the omnipotent Lord Sri Krishna Himself.

"*Guru* and Krishna are like two rails of the same track," he said, "always side by side. By the grace of Krishna, you get *guru*. And by the grace of *guru*, you get Krishna."

Who was this great master called Srila Prabhupada, and what was he like? To answer this is to answer the question Arjuna asked Lord Krishna millenia ago:

sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā
samādhi-sthasya keśava
sthita-dhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta
kim āsīta vrajeta kim

"What are the symptoms of one whose consciousness is merged in Transcendence? How does he speak, and what is his language? How does he sit, and how does he walk?"

Prabhupada's real identity defied analysis. I was surprised to learn that he had once been a pharmacist with a wife and children. Because worldy motives and passion never touched him, it was difficult to imagine him as a householder, as anything but the saffron-clad spiritual master, the *paramhansa* floating over the world like a swan over water.

"If you are drowning in the middle of the ocean," he said, "and someone throws you a rope, you do not stop to enquire, 'Oh dear sir, why are you throwing me this rope? What is your name? What country are you from? Why are you here?' No. The drowning man *grabs* the rope for dear life."

Since we were all drowning, few of us asked those questions. We grabbed the rope any way we could, assured of some ultimate victory in Vikuntha, a faraway spiritual universe.

In the closing words of *Bhagavad-gita*:

yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanur-dharaḥ
tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama

"And wherever there is Krishna, the master of all mystics, and whever there is Arjuna, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power and morality."

And wherever there is Srila Prabhupada, there will certainly be Lord Krishna.

PART 1.
New-York

Chapter 1. Visitor From Calcutta

I first see him just after crossing the Bowery at Houston Street. As he passes before the iron-mesh fence of a playground, I distinctly glimpse the aura of saintliness. I watch him through the rushing traffic and stumbling derelicts.

He strolls almost jauntily down the sidewalk. He is an old man whom age has never touched. Aloof from the people and bustle about him, he walks proudly, independently, his hand in a cloth beadbag. He wears the saffron robes of a sannyasi, and on his feet are quaint, pointed white shoes.

Only seven months ago, I had seen many saffron-robed monks and holymen walking the dirt roads of Hardwar and Rishikesh, and stopping beside the Ganges to bathe. For me, that had been a futile journey to the mystic East in search of the all-knowing *guru*.

But now—what's this?

I look again at the pointed white shoes. Did this man follow me all the way from North India? Or did he just suddenly descend from the clouds onto Manhattan sidewalks? I decide I must speak to him.

As I start across the steet, trucks rumbling toward Holland Tunnel block him from my view. I look again to make sure that he's still there. Yes, he even appears to be aware of me. He has all the bearing of a great actor in a famous movie. I can't think of what to say, but I approach him anyway.

We both stop at once. His sudden smile is moonlight in the gray July smog. "Are you from India?" I ask stupidly.

"Oh yes," he says, his eyes bright and expressive. Crosstown buses roar past, billowing exhaust like clouds of incense. I sense that his tranquility is fixed in something far beyond the traffic roar. "And you?" he asks.

"I'm American," I say, "but I just got back from Calcutta."

"*Accha*! Calcutta!" Another smile. "I am coming from Calcutta. And you were liking India?"

"Yes, well, it's… very different."

"And Vrindaban? You have been to Vrindaban?"

"No," I say. "Where's that?"

"Near Mathura," he says.

"I'm afraid not," I say, not knowing either place. "I got sick and had to leave."

A poor excuse, but I can think of nothing else. His large brown eyes sparkle. How old is he? His head is shaved, save for a few white hairs in back, and his complexion, golden Bengali, seems radiant against saffron robes. His presence evokes quiet *ashrams* nestled near the Himalayas, cows, bells, temples, and holy rivers.

"But I like India," I add. "I'm interested in Hindu philosophy. Someday I'll go back."

"You are living near here?" he asks.

"Two blocks down." I point across Bowery. "Over on Mott Street."

"Then we are neighbors," he says. "I want to give some classes on *Bhagavad-gita*. I have this one place. I wonder if it is suitable. Maybe you can come and see?"

"Of course," I say, and we turn and walk the half block to Second Avenue.

We stop before a small storefront between First and Second Streets, next door to a Mobil filling station, and across the street from the Red Star Bar and Gonzalez Funeral Home. Occupying half the ground floor of a four-story apartment building, the storefront had evidently served as a curio shop, for the words "Matchless Gifts" were painted over the front door.

Matchless Gifts.



I notice an announcement in the window: "Lectures on *Bhagavad-gita*. Monday, Wednesday, Friday 7-9 p.m. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami."

So, he's a *swami*!

"This is a good area?" he asks.

"Oh yes," I say. "It surely is." Suddenly I feel sorry for the grandfatherly gentleman so far from home, so helpless in such an alien metropolis. "I would like to hear your lectures," I say.

"Then you must come," he says. Another moonlight smile. "I have friends, too," I add, "who might be interested."

"Yes. Very good. You must bring them."

"I will," I promise. "Monday evening."

* * *

When I return to my dark, cockroach-ridden apartment on Mott Street, I tell everyone about the new *swami*. We are all in our twenties—Keith, Wally, George, Wayne, Patricia, Harvey, and I. Keith and Wally are the most interested. Keith Ham, a friend from undergraduate days, is working at Columbia University on his doctorate in American religious history. Wally Sheffey, a recording engineer from Chicago, is a student of Buddhism. In the course of a Mott Street evening, a conversation might revolve around ego-loss, death, Buddha, peyote, LSD, St. John, reincarnation, Bach, astral travel, Plato, and Lao Tzu. So the arrival of a new *swami* sparks immediate interest.

"Where's he from?"

"Calcutta."

"Maybe he followed us back," Keith suggests. "To a Second Avenue storefront?"

"Just two blocks away. He wonders if it's a good neighborhood."

"The Bowery?!"

"What's he teaching?"

"*Bhagavad-gita*."

"Now that should be interesting. Is he a *guru*, or *avatar*, or what?"

"*Swami, guru*—who knows?"

"Well, let's go Monday and find out.""Just what we need," Wally says. "Another *guru*."

"Maybe he was sending out all those strange vibes in India," Keith says. "Maybe,"

I say. "Anyway, let's try him."

* * *

I have read that meeting a *guru* is not an ordinary occurrence and never accidental. Life's paths lead to that junction only after many births. Thrown by our *karma* into a world war, my generation went off to kindergarten as the Bomb fell on Hiroshima and inaugurated the atomic age. After the war, nothing seemed impossible for Americans, and most of us began college in the fifties with great material expectations.

Complacent as they were, the fifties were not without rebellion. When I entered the University of North Carolina in 1958, there were beatniks on campus—only a handful to be sure, but they were noticed.

Free from parents, we delighted in adolescent rebellion, encouraged by some professors who considered the God of Christianity dead. When one professor asked all atheists to raise their hands, mine went up with many others. My favorite courses dealt with philosophy in literature, and my childhood heroes, the American transcendentalists and the Catholic saints, were superseded by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

As the sixties began, and my friends and I were entering our twenties, many of us gravitated to Manhattan, where, the media informed us, everything exciting was happening. But cynicism and rebellion could not satisfy for long. The Cuban Missile Crisis and Kennedy assassination underscored the turbulence of the day and the need for something more than nihilism and atheism to pull us through. By 1964, as I completed graduate work in English at New York University, my interest in American transcendentalism revived. The joyous affirmations of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dickinson, and Crane filled a religious vacuum. Aldous Huxley drew cultural comparisons in The Perennial Philosophy and questioned reality with his mescaline experiences in The Doors of Perception. Students began talking of ego-death, expanded consciousness, eternity, infinity, heaven and hell, and even God. Camus and Sartre were discarded as dead-enders. After all, maybe the mystics, poets, saints and dreamers were on the right track. American involvement in Vietnam increased, and with it our restlessness and need for spiritual answers.

My friends, graduate students mostly, were undergoing some intense value changes. The world seemed to volatile for us to follow in the footsteps of our parents by dedicating ourselves to lifetime careers, or investing in families and expensive homes. Wanting to get at the meaning of things, we began searching, reading mystic poets and investigating scriptures. We studied the Buddhist Sutras, Plato, Zen, St. Augustine, the Hindus. We were on the trail of something, but what? Whenever we tried to explain it, we would have to resort to hackneyed definitions. Something earth-shattering was happening, surely. Was this the Aquarian Age emerging? Or did every generation experience the same thing in a different way?

"Nothing becomes God as much as stillness," Keith wrote on the Mott Street wall, quoting Meister Eckhardt.

"That which you see before you is the one mind," Wally reminded everyone, quoting Huang Po. "If the sun and moon should doubt, they'd immediately go out," I said, quoting Blake.

Clearly, what we needed was a *guru*.

With some reservations, I began teaching English in the fall of 1964 at Ohio State University. Coincidentally, I shared an office with Mohan Lal Sharma from the Punjab. He lent me translations of *Bhagavad-gita and Shankara's Vivekachudamani, telling me, "You must visit India. It is the cradle of all religion and transcendentalism. There you will find your answers." Inspired by the books, I decided to go.*

I completed the year's contract just to earn money for passage. Keith, on leave from Columbia University, also had a little money saved. In October, 1965, we left Newport News on the *S.S. Jaladhuta*, an Indian freighter bound for Bombay, a month's voyage. When we landed and took our first look at Bombay, Eastern philosophy began to make sense: all life is suffering and must be transcended. But how?

We journeyed north by train and bus to the Himalayas, to Hardwar and Rishikesh, searching for holymen who knew enough English to give us the Word.

Unforgettable images! The clear-running Ganges, flowing aqua-green from the mountains; the monks chanting at the *dharmshala* where we stayed for two weeks; the *sannyasi* dying along the roadside, his saffron cloth pulled over his face, his limbs but leprous stubs, a swarm of flies buzzing about him as he chanted in a thin, frail voice; the quiet hills and ancient temples of Rishikesh; the old rickshaw man, straining to cycle us up a hill and cheerfully accepting his rupee tip.

But Keith and I couldn't find any holymen who were both impressive and versed in English. Those who knew English seemed more immersed in temple administration than philosophy or meditation, and the itinerant *sadhus* with flowing beards seemed remote and uncommunicative.

We returned to Delhi, then went to Calcutta, spent a month in Bengal, and, disappointed, finally took another freighter back to New York.

And a psychedelic New York welcomed us back. LSD had hit the street and excited the media; everybody, it seemed, was dropping acid, taking trips, astral travelling, and reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. LSD cults were springing up in the Village and Lower East Side. Dropout students and professors were travelling to ancient sun cultures and living with natives, Shivaites and Huichols, taking hallucinogens, consulting roadmen, *shamans*, *yogis* and *gurus*.

And now, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami suddenly appears in our backyard, as if the whole chaotic stage had been deliberately, specifically set for him.

* * *

In the display window of the Matchless Gifts storefront is a painting of five men with long hair, all dancing with their arms raised, as if about to levitate. They are dancing in a temple—in India, the architecture tells us—and the haloes about their heads suggest that they are saints or *avatars*. Their round, lotus-eyed, cherubic faces seem frozen in celestial bliss.

"This is it," I tell Keith and Wally, and we enter.

The storefront itself is only a fifteen by forty foot unfurnished room. Someone had placed straw mats on the floor for sitting. At the far end are two windows, a closed bathroom door, and a badly chipped sink. A bare lightbulb hangs from a cord in the middle of the room, another at the entrance. They are the only lights.

We sit on the floor and look around. A half dozen other people are also sitting and waiting. Someone with a beard and long hair introduces himself as Roy.

"The Swami's out back and will be down soon," he informs us.

"Out back" refers to the rear apartment building where the Swami has a second floor apartment.

As we wait, others come in. Then, through the back windows, I can see the Swami crossing the courtyard to the storefront. He enters through the hall door and quickly slides off his white pointed shoes. Then he sits on one of the straw mats and faces his new congregation.

His attire is humble, ascetic: a saffron *dhoti* worn in the style of a *sannyasi* monk, and a saffron *chadar* over his shoulders. As he sits erect and cross-legged, his body seems to dwindle. His magnetism and personality are concentrated in his face, large and noble like a Buddha's. It is a serene, meditative, grave face, a tranquil face, encompassing joy, compassion, sorrow, and much more. it is a face unlike any other I have ever seen.

He turns to me and smiles. "You have brought your friends?"

"Yes," I say.

"Very good."

Picking up a pair of *kartals*, the kind of bell-metal hand cymbals used in temples in India, he taps them together rhythmically—*ching ching ching, ching ching ching*—then begins to chant:

vande 'haṁ
śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṁ
śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṁś ca

He sings in a pure, rich baritone, a voice filled with devotion. Since no one knows what he is chanting, no one can join in. Only after chanting for some minutes does he begin to explain the Sanskrit words.

"*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*. *Hare, Krishna*, and *Rama*. These names of God are the transcendental seeds of the *maha-mantra*," he tells us, as Roy hands out pieces of paper with the words typed on them. "*Krishna* is the name meaning 'all attractive.' God is not a void. God is a person, eternally youthful and fresh. He appears just like a

young cowherd boy, and His color is dark blue like a thundercloud. And *Rama* means the Lord as supreme enjoyer. He is the enjoyer, *Purusha*, and we are the enjoyed, *Prakriti*. And *Hare* means the energy of the Lord. Through the transcendental energy of the Lord, we can reach the Lord Himself. So when we chant Hare Krishna, we ae saying, 'O Lord! O energy of the Lord! Just lift me up and place me as an atom of dust at Your lotus feet!'"

He then urges us to chant Hare Krishna in response. Slowly, awkwardly at first, we try to follow the words on the sheets of paper. Roy and another young man join with cymbals. There are no other instruments. There is only the hypnotic *ching ching ching* of the cymbals and the words of the *mantra*. Eventually, we start clapping. I become aware of Puerto Ricans and derelicts clustered around the front door and staring through the window. Strange sights on Second Avenue.

The Swami ends the chanting with three resounding *chings*. No one seems to know what to do next. We all sit anticipating.

"Oh, look at all the prophets," someone outside says. "Look! A Buddha!"

Roy walks over to close the door.

"No, leave it open," the Swami says. He looks at the people outside as if to invite them all in. "Tonight," he begins, "we will speak of the Absolute Truth."

* * *

"The Absolute Truth," he says, "is known in various ways by different types of *yogis*. The impersonalist knows it as *Brahman*, the all-pervasive effulgence. The mystic followers of the *astanga-yoga* system know it as *Paramatma*, the localized aspect of the Supreme Lord situated in the heart. But the devotees know the Absolute Truth as Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. And in *Bhagavad-gita*,

Krishna declares Himself to be the Absolute Truth, Bhagavan, the possessor of all opulences."

* * *

Somehow, when I had previously read *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna seemed to me a literary personification of the divine, a kind of folk hero incarnation, a symbol to help us understand the Self spoken of by Shankara.

"*Atma*, the Self, is subordinate to Paramatma, the Supersoul," the Swami says. "And this Paramatma is Krishna, manifested in the hearts of all. Everything is subordinate to the personality Krishna. The demigods, Brahman, time, space, the spiritual and material universes, and all incarnations and *avataras*—all are subordinate to Krishna. Krishna is the sum total of everything; and yet He is beyond everything. He can renounce everything and still be complete in Himself. To realize the supreme ultimate truth is to realize Krishna, and realizing Krishna means becoming His devotee. So, every living entity is an eternal servant of Krishna. This is our *svarupa*, our eternal identity."

Our eternal identity?! Servants of a blue cowherd boy?

* * *

As the Swami talks of Krishna, I recall seeing in India popular religious paintings depicting the blue-complexioned Lord in various pastimes: Krishna as a naughty child, turning over pots of butter; Krishna as a playful cowherd boy sporting with His friends; Krishna as a romantic youth, playing His flute and dancing; Krishna as a gallant warrior, driving the chariot of Arjuna in battle; Krishna as the God of gods, revealing His universal form, which arises like a thousand suns.

* * *

"First you must hear about Krishna from the lips of a pure devotee," the Swami says. "*Shravanam*. In my childhood, in school, I first heard about America in my geography and history classes. By

hearing, I understood, 'Oh, that is a very wonderful country, and it is very far away. If I go there, I will see big buildings and many motorcars.' So I had some mental conception by hearing. Or, you may not have gone to India, but you have some idea of what it's like by reading or hearing. You don't go there without knowing something first. Similarly, if we want to see God, or go to the Kingdom of God, we first must hear. That is the process of *sravanam*. And *kirtanam*. *Kirtan*. You must repeat what you hear: Hare Krishna. This *kirtan*, or chanting of Hare Krishna, cleanses the dust from the mirror of the mind, dust accumulated by crores and crores of births."

A crore, I learn, is ten million.

As the Swami lectures, my hearing slowly adapts to his accent.

"People are driven made by the illusory material energy," he says. "For sense gratification, we undergo crores and crores of births and deaths trying to enjoy ourselves independent of Krishna. But when our enjoyment is directed to Krishna, we are rightly situated. This is what is meant by turning from illusion to reality. The *guru*, the bona fide spiritual master, awakens this dormant, eternal relationship, and when it is revived, we can see, hear, and speak to Krishna.

"Therefore Lord Krishna tells us, 'Engage your mind in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship Me. Thus absorbed completely in Me, you will come to Me.'"

* * *

Interrupting the lecture, an old white-bearded Bowery bum enters and walks down the middle of the room. We sit in confused silence. He approaches the Swami.

What to do? The old beggar is wearing a raincoat and batterd hat. In his hands are paper handtowels and two rolls of toilet paper. Without speaking, he walks past hte Swami and carefully places the handtowels by the sink and the toilet paper on the floor beneath. Then, clearing his throat and muttering something, he turns and walks out.

"Just see," the Swami says with satisfaction. "He may not be in order, but he has just begun his devotional service. Just see how naturally it comes. That is the process. Whatever we have—it doesn't matter what—we must offer it to Krishna."

* * *

The lecture continues past the forty-minute mark. Some people leave, evidently baffled by the strange philosophy, or the Swami's Bengali accent. Undaunted, the Swami carefully and repeatedly explains that we are not these bodies but eternal spirit souls.

"Under the influence of *maya*, illusion," he says, "we are thinking, 'I am this body, I am American, I am a father, son, husband, wife.' No. What am I? Spirit soul, part and parcel of Krishna. And my duty? The part renders service to the whole: Krishna. This is *bhakti-yoga. Bhakti* is defined by Narada as freedom from false bodily designations. The body, through its senses, perceives dualities such as pleasure and pain, but these arise from the body alone. It's just like a skin itch. The cure? Sense control through Krishna consciousness.

"And who is Krishna? The word *Krishna* means the all-attractive reservoir of pleasure. We are all hankering after some pleasure in this material world, but this material pleasure is a perverted reflection. It is temporary. Real pleasure is there in the spiritual sky, in relation to Krishna, and it is eternal."

Like a master weaver at the loom, the Swami weaves his discourse around Krishna. Krishna, "the Supreme Absolute Truth", "The Supreme Personality of Godhead," is his main theme.

"Krishna has His name, His associates, His pastimes, His transcendental body, and His abode. He's not something void or impersonal. No. He's a person."

For us, this is the biggest news of all.

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vṛkṣa-
lakṣāvṛteṣu surabhīr abhipālayantam
lakṣmī-sahasra-śata-sambhrama-sevyamānaṁ
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi

"I worship Govinda, Krishna, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor, who is tending the cows, fulfilling all desires, in abodes built with spiritual gem, surrounded by millions and millions of desire trees, always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds and thousands of Lakshmis, goddesses of fortune."

The Swami chants this verse with such devotion that his voice evokes the image of an ever-youthful cowherd boy whose transcendental body is *sat-chit-ananda*, full of eternity, knowledge, and bliss. A far cry from the vengeful, white-beared Jehovah.

"God's not an old man," the Swami says. "Why should He be old? He is eternal, changeless, ever fresh, ever youthful, ever blissful, all knowing, all powerful. Although He was a grandfather on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra, He still appeared just eighteen or twenty."

* * *

After an hour and a half, the lecture terminates, and the Swami asks for questions. One tall, lanky boy asks whether or not he can see Krishna with his own eyes.

"Yes, why not?" the Swami says. "But first you must qualify yourself to see. We can cleanse our senses by first hearing and chanting. Why put so much stress on seeing God? Hearing is just as important. you can hear by listening to *Bhagavad-gita* and chanting *Hare Krishna*. Krishna and His names are nondifferent, so by chanting *Hare Krishna*, you are actually associating with Krishna. Just try to understand…."





The Swami continues citing examples and similes to clarify his point. We are all impressed by his erudition, his inexhaustible supply of Sanskrit verses, and his insistence on scriptural authority. He spends a half hour answering the boy's question, then asks if there are any more questions. There aren't, and he picks up the cymbals and resumes chanting Hare Krishna. We respond as before, and the chanting continues for another half hour. I check my watch. The program began at seven, an it is now nine forty-five. The Swami slices up an apple and passes it to us on a metal plate. After it is distributed, he slides into his white, pointed shoes, leaves by the side door, and walks through the courtyard to his apartment.

I notice some people dropping coins into a wicker basket left on the straw mat. I contribute fifty cents and leave with Keith and Wally. Everybody's excited about the new *swami*.

On the way out, Roy tells us that we can visit during the day in the Swami's apartment. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday night.

* * *

By six-thirty Wednesday evening, we are drawn again, as if by magnets, to the Matchless Gifts storefront. After the Hare Krishna chanting, the Swami reads Sanskrit verses from *Bhagavad-gita* and criticizes the translation by Sarvepali Radhakrishnan, the current President of India.

"It is impersonalist," he says, "but what can we do? We have no other version."

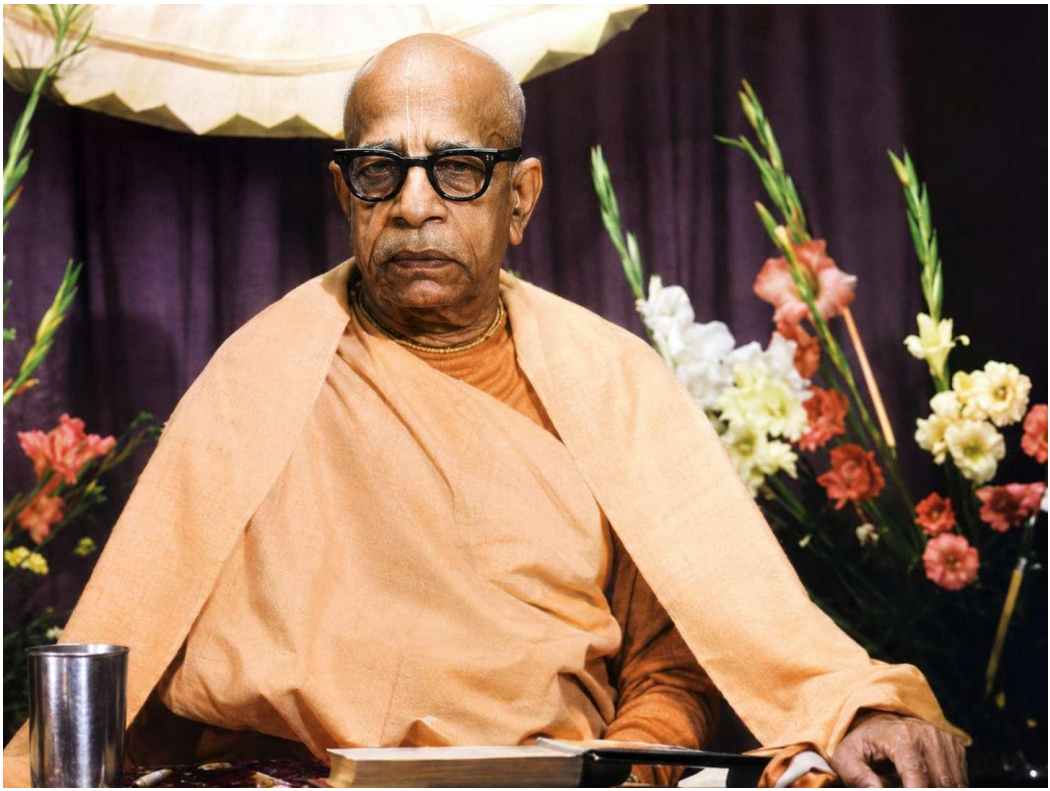
The mystery of *Bhagavad-gita*, he tells us, is that Arjuna can remain a warrior in the world and still be the greatest *yogi* by following Krishna's directions. Since we all have to follow some authority—even if it be our own mind or senses—we should accept the supreme authority, Krishna.



Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

(September 5, 1888, Thiruttani — April 17, 1975, Madras, India).

An Indian philosopher, public figure, and statesman, the second President of India (1962–1967). An Honorary Fellow of the British Academy. He was convinced that all religious doctrines are essentially one. He believed that the development of world religious and philosophical thought should lead to the emergence of a universal religion, a universal philosophy, and a universal morality, with Advaita Vedanta serving as their foundation.



Srila Prabhupada gives an evening lecture



Guests at the 2nd Avenue programs. Hayagriva is on the far right.

"*Veda* means knowledge given by God," he says. "*Bhagavad-gita* is *Veda*, and is infallible. We must have faith in *Bhagavad-gita* to make progress. Some authority must be accepted, otherwise we are wasting our time simply talking. In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna gives us confidential information about Himself, and there is no question of doubting it. We must understnad and accept. Otherwise, how can we ever know anything of God? He is beyond our material perception. 'Everything is resting on Me,' He says, 'but I am not there.' You may think, 'Oh, this table is resting in Krishna; therefore Krishna must be here.' But Krishna says, 'I am not there.' Although Krishna and His energy are nondifferent, the energy is not Krishna. There is no difference between sunshine and the sun, but if sunshine is present in your room, you cannot say that the sun itself is there. Similarly, everything is Krishna's energy, but still Krishna is beyond everything as the Supreme Person. Just because we cannot see Him, we should not foolishly conclude that He doesn't exist. We can see His energies working. Just as planets are floating in the sunshine, so the sun, the universe, everything, is resting on Krishna-shine, floating in Krishna's energy. 'Everything is resting on Me, but don't think that I am finished because you cannot see Me. I am here.'

"So, this confidential knowledge of *Bhagavad-gita* is especially meant for Krishna's devotees. It cannot be understood unless we accept Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We cannot see God by our own endeavor, but if we qualify ourselves, God will reveal Himself. By sincerely hearing *Bhagavad-gita* and chanting Hare Krishna, we can come to understand God and our relationship with Him."

He then explains that just as Arjuna heard *Bhagavad-gita* from the lips of Krishna Himself, we should hear it from the lips of Arjuna's representative, the bona fide spiritual master.

"This *Bhagavad-gita* was first heard on the Indian plain, at Kurukshetra, but this does not mean that it was spoken only for India, or that it is Indian. No. It is for everyone. The sun first rises in the east, then goes to the west. This is not to say that the east has a monopoly of

the sun. *Bhagavad-gita* may have arisen in the land of India, but it is not India's monopoly. It is for the whole world."

After the lecture, the Swami asks if there are any questions. Someone asks if it is true that he is forming an "international society," as indicated by the sign in the window.

"Yes, " the Swami says. "Of course, at present, this is our only branch, but this Society we are forming, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, is meant to teach everyone love of God by this *bhakti-yoga* process. The other day, someone wanted me to call it the International Society for God Consciousness." He smiles and shakes his head. "But I decided no," he says. "Krishna must be there."

After the questions, the Swami again slices up an apple and hands it to Roy for distribution. Then, seeing that some people are questioning the Swami further, I also approach him.

"Have you ever heard of LSD?" I ask boldly. "No," he says.

"It's a chemical," I say, vaguely feeling stupid. "Some people claim that it can give religious insights or ecstasies. Do you think that it could be helpful in spiritual life?"

He looks at me for a moment with childlike curiosity.

"You don't need to take anything for your spiritual life," he says. "Your spiritual life is already here." Yes, it certainly is here, I think, standing before the most exalted personality I have ever seen.

End of Chapter 1

Chapter 2. Transcendental Invitations

The next morning, when I go alone to see the Swami, he seems to be expecting me. Directly and simply, he begins to explain that he needs help in spreading Krishna consciousness around the world. Noticing that he has been typing, I offer to type for him, and he hands me the manuscript of the First Chapter, Second Canto, of Vyasadeva's *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

"You can type this?"

"Oh yes," I say.

He is delighted. We roll a small typewriter table out of the corner, and I begin work. His manuscript is single spaced without margins on flimsy, yellowing Indian paper. It appears that the Swami tried to squeeze every word possible onto the pages. I have to use a ruler to keep from losing my place.

The first words read: "O the king." I naturally wonder whether "O" is the king's name, and "the king" stands in apposition. After concluding that "O King" is intended instead, I consult the Swami.

"Yes," he says. "Change it, then."

As I retype another paragraph, I notice certain grammatical discrepancies, perhaps typical of Bengalis who learned English from British headmasters in the early 1900s. Considerable editing is required to get the text to conform with current American usage. After pointing out a few changes, I tell the Swami that if he so desired, I could make all the proper corrections.

"Very good," he says, smiling. "Do it! Put it nicely." Thus my editorial services begin.

I type all morning in the room where he reads, translates,

welcomes visitors, and "takes rest." There is a tin footlocker, used as a desk, and a rug on which he sits and sometimes sleeps. Apart from my typewriter table, there is no other furniture. As I type, I hear him cooking in the kitchen, and can smell the butter being boiled to make ghee. I finish the chapter: twenty pages, double spaced with wide margins. The original had filled only eight pages.

"Let me know if there's any more work," I tell him. "I can take it back to Mott Street and type there."

"More? Yes," he says. "There is lots more."

He opens the closet door and pulls out two large bundles tied with saffron cloth. Within, he shows me thousands of pages of single spaced, marginless manuscripts of literatures unknown in the Western world. I stand before them, astounded.

"It's a lifetime of typing," I protest.

"Oh, yes!" he smiles happily. "Many lifetimes."

Translation
---
of

A person who is not disturbed by the incessant entering desires, like that of wators into the ocean which always full but undisturbed, can alone achieve peace, and not the man who wants to satisfy such desires.

The great generals who ~~who~~ HAVE had very ~~great~~ HIGH estimation for your name and fame will consider that have ~~had~~ gone away from the battle field out of fear only, and thus they will think of you as fig.

* * *

It is a typically muggy, hot July day. Smog hangs over the streets like a poisonous veil, obscuring the tops of skyscrapers. The printer delivers five thousand small handbills to the Matchless Gifts storefront.

They read:

Practice the transcendental sound vibration,
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

This chanting will cleanse the dust from the mirror of the mind.
Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta
International Society for Krishna Consciousness
26 Second Avenue

Meetings at 7 A.M. daily
Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 7:00 P.M.

You are cordially invited to come and bring your friends.

“They’re finally here, Swamiji , I announce, using, like everyone now, the more respectful form of address.

“Very good! Now just distribute,” he says. I take about three hundred.

“You think they’re all right?” he asks.

“They’re fine,” I say. “People will be curious to learn more.”

“We’ll call our Society ‘Iskcon,’” he says, smiling.

“What’s that?”

S T A Y H I G H F O R E V E R

No More Coming Down

Practice KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Expand your consciousness by practicing the

TRANSCENDENTAL SOUND VIBRATION

HARE KRISHNA * HARE KRISHNA * KRISHNA KRISHNA * HARE HARE

HARE RAMA * HARE RAMA * RAMA RAMA * HARE HARE

This chanting will cleanse the dust from the mirror of the mind and free you from all material contamination. It is practical, self-evident, and requires no artificial aid. Try it and be blissful all the time.

TURN ON

through music, dance, philosophy, science, religion and prasadam (spiritual food.)

TUNE IN

AWAKEN YOUR TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE!

REJOICE IN THE OCEAN OF BLISS!

The process of Sankirtan (chanting of Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare) brings about transcendental ecstasy.

DROP OUT

of movements employing artificially induced states of self-realization and expanded consciousness. Such methods only lead to spiritual laziness and chaos. End all brickndoms, flip out and stay for eternity. Bhaktiyoga has been practiced for many centuries and is authorized by India's great acharyas. Swami Bhaktivedanta is in the bonafide line of Krishna's disciplic succession. He has especially come to this country to spiritually guide young Americans.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, Inc.
26 SECOND AVENUE (between 1st and 2nd Streets) NEW YORK, N.Y.
Phone: 674-7128

Acharya: A.C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI

Meetings every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7 P.M.
Every morning at 7 A.M.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO COME AND BRING YOUR FRIENDS

"I-S-K-C-O-N," he says, spelling the letters out. "Iskcon—International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

He laughs. His newly coined acronym amuses him. ISKCON. He is having fun.

Taking the handbills to Washington Square, I distribute them to N.Y.U. students and Greenwich Village hipsters. I chant Hare Krishna softly, happily, feeling like an emissary from another world.

* * *

Though we're not accustomed to getting up early, Swamiji's magnetism draws us out onto the nearly deserted 6:30 a.m. streets. I walk briskly from Mott Street to Second Avenue. Surprisingly, Houston Street and Bowery are no longer gray and drab. In the early morning, before the smog accumulates, the fresh sky is streaked gold and red, and even the buildings seem to sparkle. Looking down Second Avenue, I can see the parapets of Brooklyn Bridge shine over the East River. I chant all the way to the foyer of the front building, then push the buzzer marked "A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami." The door buzzes open, and I walk through the hallway and small courtyard to the rear apartment building, then tiptoe up the stairs to avoid waking the neighbors.

These early morning meetings are beautiful and intimate. On any one morning, there are only eight or ten of us present—all young, all in our twenties, except thirty-year-old Jim Greene, a carpentry teacher at Cooper Union. There is Mike Grant, a pianist-composer just graduated from Columbia; Steve Guarino, a city social worker; Charles Barnett, fresh out of high school and into *hatha-yoga*; bearded Roy Dubois, a freelance cartoonist and writer; Bill Epstein, a waiter at the macrobiotic Paradox restaurant; tall, skinny Stanley—no one knows anything about Stanley; and the Mott Street crew—Keith, Wally, myself. We all sit cross-legged on the floor in front of Swamiji, who sits behind the tin footlocker. He looks fresh from being awake for hours.

"Softly," he says, barely touching together the bell-metal cymbals. *Ching ching ching*. One, two, three. One, two, three. We clap timidly, following the rhythm of the cymbals.

"*Saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka*." Eyes closed, he chants slowly in a soft, wavering baritone, while the rays of early sunlight stream through the windows. "*trāṇāya kāruṇya-ghanāghanatvam prāptasya kalyāṇa-guṇārṇavasya vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam.*"

"The spiritual master is receiving benediction from the ocean of mercy. Just as a cloud pours water on a forest fire to extinguish it, the spiritual master delivers the materially afflicted world by extinguishing the blazing fire of material existence. I offer my respectful obeisances unto his lotus feet."

Swamiji first invokes the mercy of his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, founder of India's Gaudiya Math. It was he who told Swamiji to preach Krishna consciousness in the West.

Bhaktisiddhanta, our spiritual grandfather, another "Vaikuntha man," left the world of mortals in 1936.

Entranced, we listen to Swamaji chant. His presence dominates the small room. Absorbed in chanting, he closes his eyes. His head is golden, shiny, radiant. As he chants, he looks like a happy child calling to his Maker.

"*mahāprabhoḥ kīrtana-nṛtya-gīta- ...*

"Chanting the holy name, dancing in ecstasy, singing, and playing musical instruments, the spiritual master is always gladdened by the *sankirtan* movement of Lord Chaitanya.

Because he is relishing pure devotion, his hair sometimes stands on end, his body quivers, and tears flow from his eyes in torrents. I offer my humble obeisances unto his lotus feet…

Swamiji then sings prayers to Lord Chaitanya and His disciples: "*Jaya śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta*." Lord Chaitanya, we learn, is an incarnation who spread the chanting of Hare Krishna throughout India in the fifteenth century. After these invocations, Swamiji chants Hare Krishna, and we respond.

"Softly," he reminds us. "The neighbors complain."

We chant for half an hour, but who knows the time? It seems that we are eternally before Swamiji praising the all-attractive Supreme Person, Krishna.

The chanting ends. Swamiji hands Roy the Radhakrishnan translation of *Bhagavad-gita*, and Roy reads the Sanskrit transliteration and English translation of a Second Chapter verse. After correcting Roy's Sanskrit mispronunciations, Swamiji criticizes the translator's commentaries, condemning them as "impersonalist." Then he begins his own explanation of the text. Since there are so few of us, we can freely ask questions whenever we don't understand a point.

We seldom find this necessary. Swamiji elucidates each verse by drawing on infinite analogies and relating the real meaning to something familiar. Meticulously, he clarifies what has been considered mystic and occult.

"'Mystic' means misty," he says. "Our concept of Krishna is not misty. It is very clear. Krishna delivers *Bhagavad-gita* and says, 'This is the way I am.' Now we must understand properly, as Arjuna understood."

So in the early morning, as the trucks begin rolling down Houston Street, and the iron Jalousies of Second Avenue come crashing up, Swamiji introduces us to Krishna.

* * *

Who knows what Swamiji is really saying? More often, Shankara makes better sense to me: The Self, the intangible, impersonal *atma* within everyone, is supreme. That is certainly more logical than saying that a cowherd boy named Krishna is supreme. A blue boy at that.

"Why is Krishna blue?" I ask Swamiji. "Ask Him," he says.

"Who's going to believe this without actually seeing?"

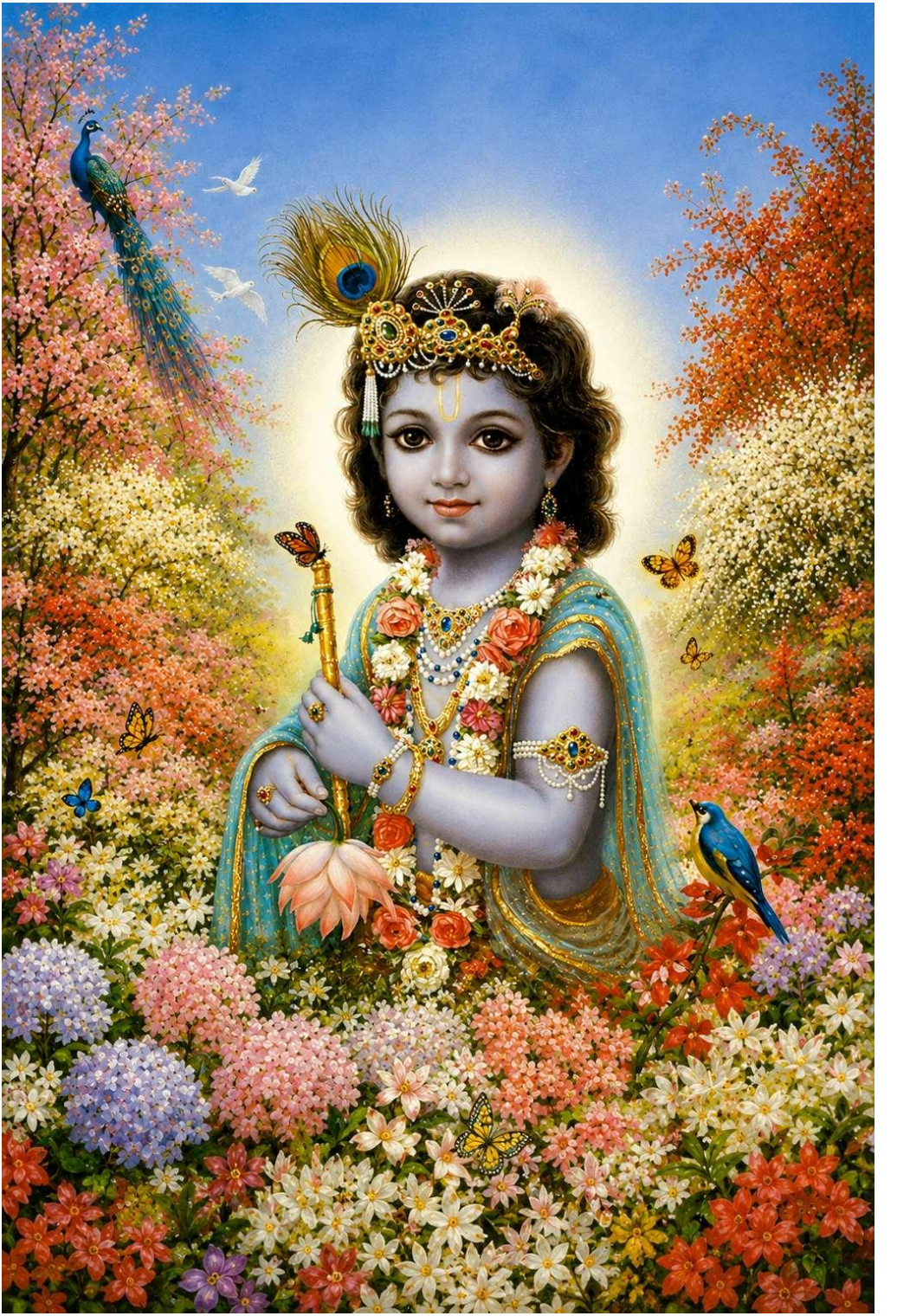
"We do not concoct some artificial God," he says. "We simply accept Krishna as He says He is, and as all the bona fide *acharyas* and *sadhus* say He is. *Govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi*."

"But don't other people experience Him differently?" I ask. "And describe Him differently?"

"Yes, and we accept as bona fide all religions founded by God. Only God can establish a religion. We accept Christian, Moslem, and Buddhist faiths, but we reject all mental concoctions of so-called philosophers and mundane poets."

"But most Western theologians and philosophers would say that God, in the form of a blue cowherd boy, is imaginary," I say.

"Yes, and some Mayavadis, impersonalist *jnanis*, also say like that. Because worshipping the impersonal is very difficult, they try to imagine some form of God. Of course, the devotees do not imagine Krishna; they see the actual form of the Supreme Lord. But the impersonalists try to imagine some form. This is very foolish. You cannot imagine the form of God. God is so great. You may imagine something, but that something is not the form of God. It is concoction. Such speculators are called iconographers. There are two classes of rascals: iconoclasts and iconographers. Those who imagine the form of God are iconographers. And those who think, 'I have killed God,' are iconoclasts.



Just like in India, during British days, there were Hindu-Moslem riots, and the Hindus would go to the Moslem mosques and break everything, thinking, 'We have broken their God,' and the Moslems would go to the Hindu temples and break the idol, thinking, 'We have killed the Hindu God.' This is foolishness. Also, during Gandhi's noncooperation movement, people rioted and broke anything belonging to the government, especially the post boxes on the street. They thought that by breaking them, they were destroying the post office, or the government. This is the foolishness of the iconoclasts. But those who have a true conception of God do not quarrel with each other. All through history there is some religious fight: Hindu against Moslem, Christian against non-Christian. God is God. He has no material qualification. The iconographers imagine, 'God is like this or that,' but the man in knowledge knows that God is one, and transcendental."

"What about Western philosophy?" I ask. "Are you saying that it's all speculative?"

"Philosophy without religion is mental speculation," he says, "and religion without philosophy is sentimentalism."

"Aristotle?"

"Mental speculation."

"And Plato?"

"Socrates was Brahman realized," he says. "He was a great philosopher who was firmly convinced of the immortality of the soul. When he was condemned to death and asked to drink hemlock poison, he did not lament because he knew that he would not be destroyed with his body. When they asked him, 'Well, Socrates, how do you want to be buried?' he replied, 'First of all, you catch me. Then you put me in the grave.'" Swamiji laughs heartily, shaking all over. "'Just catch me first,' he was telling them. He knew that they were just dealing with his body, and he was out of the bodily conception. Those who are conversant with Krishna consciousness know very well, 'I am not this

body. I am part and parcel of Krishna.'"

"Socrates also spoke of God with form," I say. "He said that his teacher Diotima tried to turn him from the imperfect beauty of earthly forms to contemplation of the ideal form of beauty."

"Yes, that is philosophy!" Swamiji says. "Now our eyes are engaged in seeing worldly beauty. But we have to retract our eyes from enjoying that beauty and instead see the beauty inside. Similarly, with the ears and other senses: we have to hear the *omkara*, the sound of God's names, from within. All the senses must be withdrawn from external activities and concentrated on the form of Krishna within the heart. This is the perfection of *yoga* and philosophy. Of course, the mind is very restless and agitated, so this is most difficult."

"What about Ramakrishna?" I ask. "Was he a devotee?"

"No. He was some mad monk."

"Really?" I had always thought Ramakrishna was one of India's favorite saints. "And Vivekananda?"

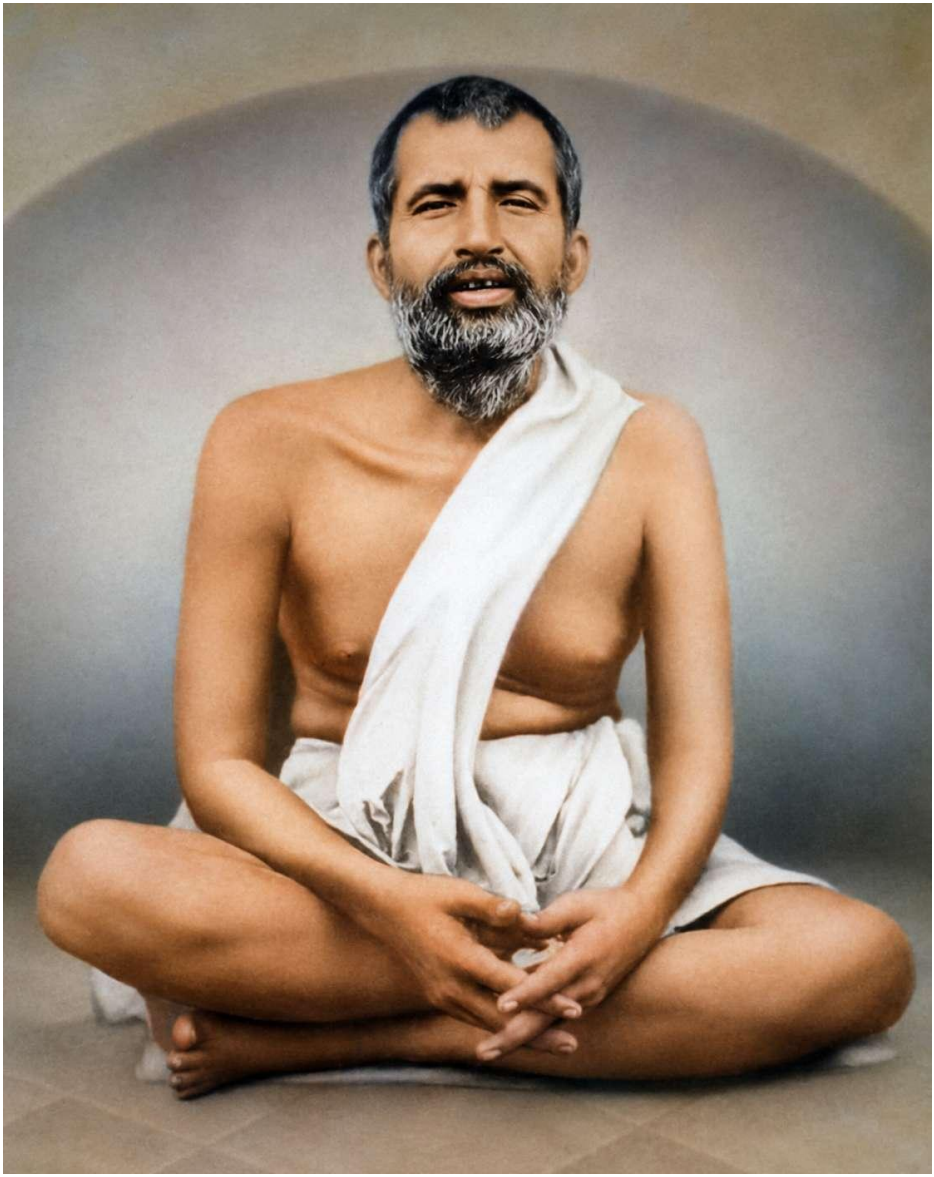
"A rascal womanizer. He said God was *daridra-Narayana*, the poor man in the street. So the Ramakrishna Mission is opening hospitals and preaching humanitarianism. They will tell you that God is in the street starving. What nonsense! Lord Brahma says, '*cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vṛkṣa*.' Krishna is tending the cows, in abodes built with spiritual gems, and He is surrounded by millions of purpose trees and is being served by hundreds of thousands of goddesses of fortune. So He is not a poor man. But Ramakrishna was a poor man. He had so much sex that he became impotent and then worshipped all women as his mother, and even called some prostitute the Holy Mother. What a rascal! Then Vivekananda called him God. But God is not such a cheap thing. We must first understand what God is. He is Bhagavan, the possessor of all opulence. We must learn of Bhagavan from Bhagavan Himself. Any man who says he's God is the opposite—dog."



Plato (c. 428–348 BC)
and his student Aristotle (384–322 BC)

Plato was one of the most famous philosophers of Ancient Greece. Having become fascinated with the teachings of Socrates in his youth, Plato travelled extensively throughout the world. In 397 BC, he founded a philosophical school in Athens known as the Academy (it was located in a garden dedicated to the ancient Greek hero Academus).

Aristotle greatly respected his teacher, but his own philosophy eventually diverged from Plato's in several important respects. The artist Raphael depicts Plato and Aristotle conversing together, surrounded by philosophers and scholars of earlier and later generations. Plato holds a copy of his dialogue Timaeus and points upward towards the heavens, while Aristotle points towards the world, holding a copy of his Ethics.



Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa.
April 1836, Kamarpukur, Bengal – August 16, 1886, Calcutta.
Indian guru, Hindu reformer, mystic and preacher.
Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa developed ideas about consciousness descending into the phenomenal world after experiencing the state of samādhi, which he called "vijñāna". In addition to affirming the supreme validity of Advaita Vedānta, he also proclaimed his acceptance of both "Nitya" (the Eternal Substratum) and "Līlā" (Dynamic Phenomenal Reality) as aspects of the same Brahman. Another of his teachings was: "Jīva is Śiva."



Swami Vivekananda.
(January 12, 1863, Calcutta – July 4, 1902, Belur).
Indian philosopher of Vedānta and yoga, social activist, disciple of Rāmakṛṣṇa, and founder of the Ramakrishna Order and Ramakrishna Mission. He was also a Freemason. He developed the concept of "Daridra Nārāyaṇa Sevā" — serving God by recognizing His presence in the poor. He also strongly advocated the practice of brahmacarya (celibacy).

Agreeing or not, I sit and listen. Gradually, as I become attracted to listening, agreement loses its importance. He is so sure of one thing: Krishna is God. I have never before seen anyone so absolutely certain beyond doubt. And his certainty is contagious. It becomes the basis of our faith.

* * *

"I want to chant in one of the parks nearby," Swamiji suddenly tells us one morning. "I leave it to you to decide where."

Chanting publicly? We all sit in surprised silence. Evangelical Krishnaism? What will people think? Since Swamiji is eager to go, we finally agree. After conferring, we decide that Washington Square is best. Sundays are always packed.

The next Sunday afternoon, we follow Swamiji down Third Street to Washington Square. New Yorkers even slow down their cars to watch ten young men follow an Indian holyman who chants on beads and wears saffron robes. Self-conscious, knowing that we are making public spectacles of ourselves, we keep our eyes riveted on Swamiji, who somehow floats through it all, the swan on water, apparently unaware of the stares and comments.

"Hey, look! That old man forgot to change his pajamas!"

A gang of Italian toughs. Oblivious to their ridicule, Swamiji ambles along unruffled, indeed ecstatic to be leading a following into the street.

Just what is he doing? I wonder. Does he think he can convert all Manhattan to Hare Krishna chanting? What must people think?

We follow him through the Sunday crowds—Puerto Rican kids playing, Negro couples strolling, long-haired boys tossing frisbees, old Polish couples sitting on benches, Good Humor men vending ice cream,

Italians tinkering with motorcycles, lovers kissing, and teenagers pounding bongo drums.

Predictably, eyes turn our way.

Adjusting his robes and sliding off his white, pointed shoes, Swamiji sits comfortably and solidly on the grass near the teenagers, next to a "Keep Off The Grass" sign. We also sit down, fearing that we are surely committing some misdemeanor. Then he begins striking the bell-metal cymbals. *Ching ching ching, ching ching ching*.

"*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*," he chants.

We respond. One of the teenagers lends us his bongo drum, and we manage to follow Swamiji's rhythm. A small crowd gathers. Minutes, eternities pass. A sailor grinds his cigaret on the ground. "What the hell is this?" he huffs.

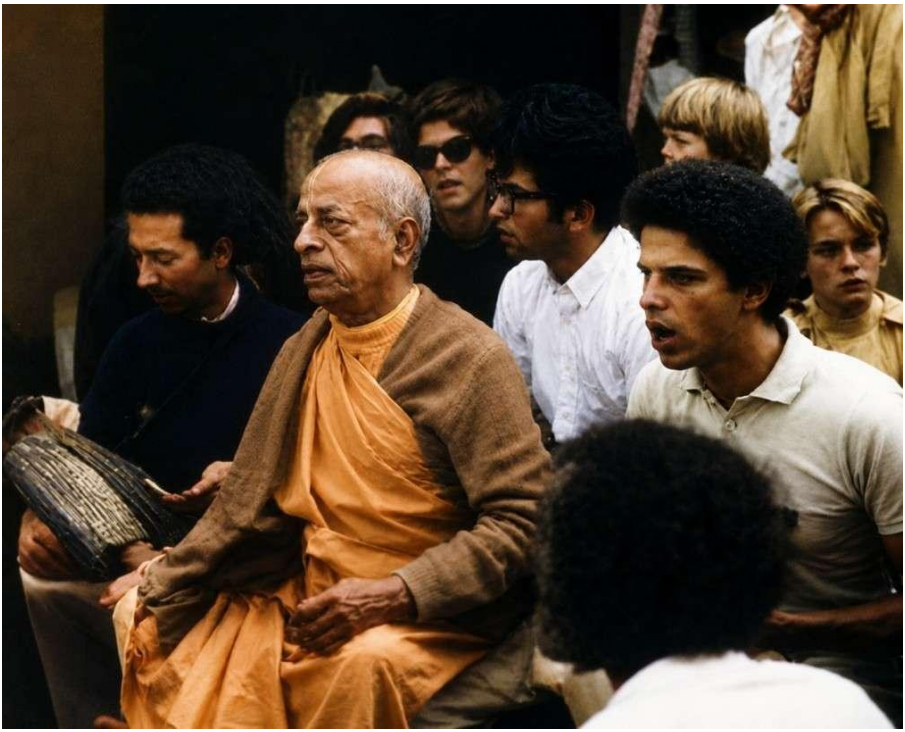
Within minutes, two burly policemen push through the crowd. "Okay, who's in charge here?" one asks.

We can indicate only Swamiji.

"Don't you see the sign?" the cop shouts.

Swamiji looks at "Keep Off The Grass." He smiles charmingly at the police and humbly walks down onto the asphalt. We ask if he wants someone to run back to Second Avenue for a rug, but he says, No," and once again sits down firmly, this time on the hot asphalt. We sit in a circle around him.

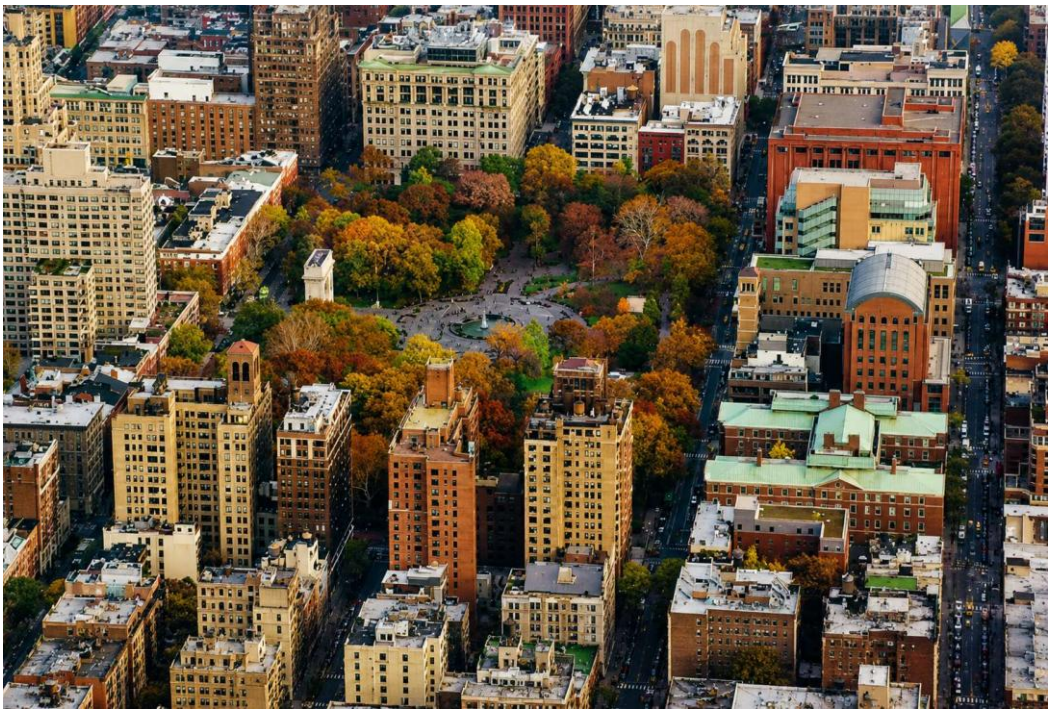
As more people gather, the crowd presses around us. Swamiji leads the chant for some thirty minutes, but for us, time stands still under the Washington Arch. Resplendent in his saffron robes, Swamiji initiates the first public chanting of Hare Krishna in America. We are the only ones to respond.



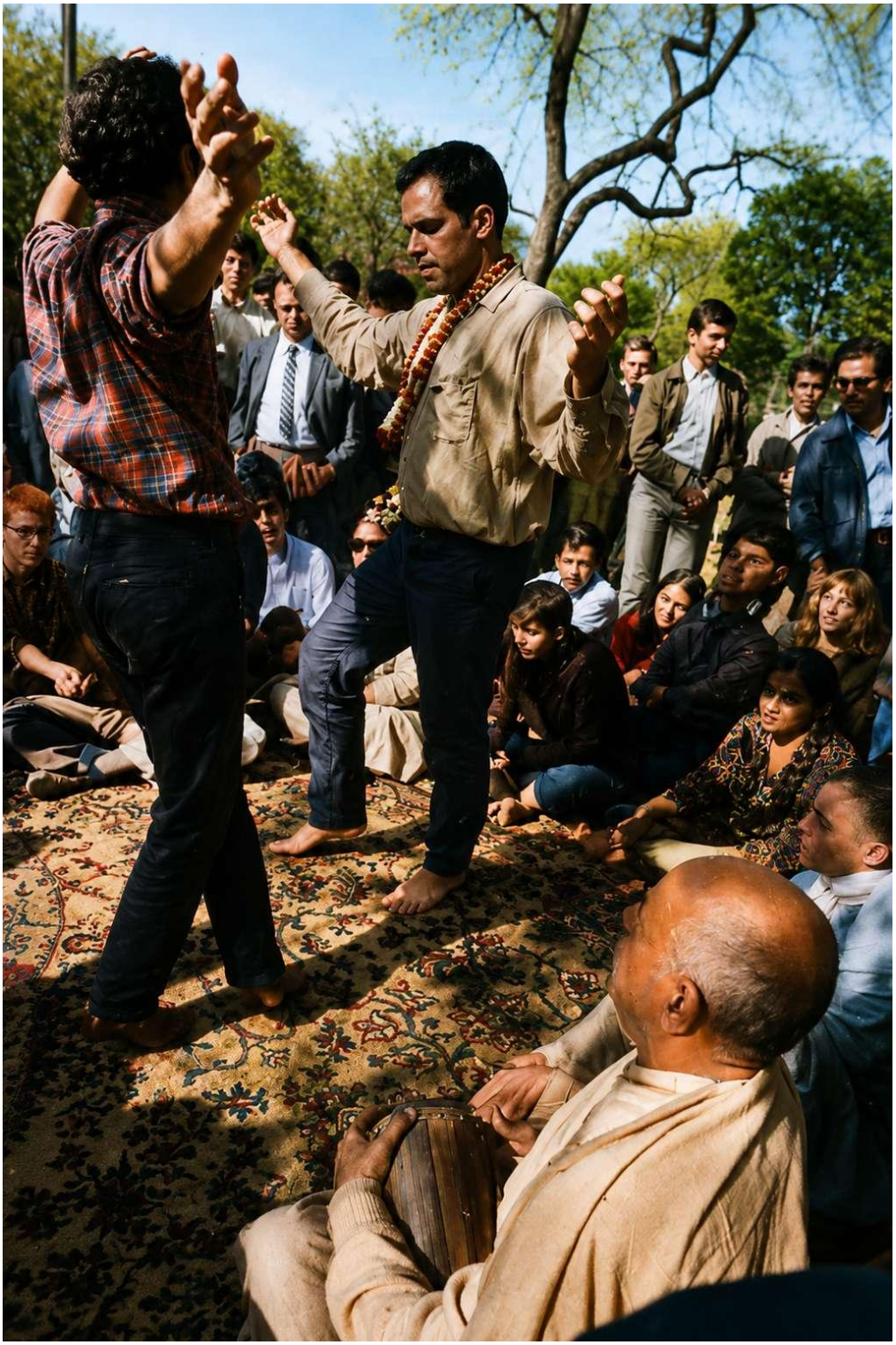
Srila Prabhupada attends the first harinama sankirtana in New York, 1966.



Srila Prabhupada in Washington Square (Tompkins Park), New York.



Tompkins Park), New York, 1966.



Everyone else just gawks.

When the chant ends, Swamiji turns to Roy. The people await some explanation.

"*Srimad-Bhagavatam*," Swamijji says. Roy hands him the first volume. Swamiji turns to the preface, then hands me the book.

"Read," he says.

I stand and begin reading the entire preface aloud. Surprisingly enough, people listen.

Disparity in human society is due to a godless civilization. There is God, or the Almighty One from whom everything emanates, by whom everything is manifested, and in whom everything is merged to rest. Material science is trying to find the ultimate source of creation very insufficiently, but it is a fact that there is one ultimate source of everything that be. This ultimate source is explained rationally and authoritatively in the beautiful *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

As I read, I hardly recognize my voice, for some larger voice seems to speak through me. Despite our timid, self-conscious beginning, we feel strangely exhilarated by our first public *kirtan*. Swamiji was right. When chanted publicly, the *mantra* is more potent.

Back on Second Avenue, Roy asks Swamiji if he is pleased with our first public appearance.

"It was very nice," he says gratefully. "Now you may go out in the afternoons and chant in the streets and parks. Lord Chaitanya has specifically recommended this sankirtan movement, chanting in public, for this age of Kali. There is no other way

harer nāma harer nāma
harer nāmaiva kevalam

kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva
nāsty eva gatir anyathā

Three times for emphasis. There is no other way, no other way, no other way to salvation in Kali-yuga."

Agreeing or disagreeing, we continue chanting. As our self-consciousness slowly wanes, we return to the streets. I pound a bass drum, toot a cornet. Roy plays a bongo. Steve and Keith clash cymbals. We walk around the Lower East Side, visit the Village, then circle down through Chinatown to alarm the Buddhists.

* * *

We are eating *prasadam* with Swamiji every day. *Prasadam* means mercy." Swamiji explains that we must first prepare food nicely, then offer it to Krishna. Just by glancing at it, Krishna eats it, then leaves everything for us out of mercy. Then, we are permitted to eat.

Swamiji teaches Keith to cook, and later Charles assists.

"When I was on the boat, I was wondering whether the American boys and girls would like *prasadam*," Swamiji laughs.

We all laugh with him, as we enjoy the *prasadam* immensely.

When I ask Swamiji about his boat journey to America, he tells us that he had gotten seasick in the beginning. Because he couldn't eat food prepared by nondevotees, nor unoffered food, he was allowed to cook in his own cabin. Keith and I are astonished to learn that Swamiji came over on the *Jaladhuta* of the Scindia Line, the same boat we had taken to India. Shortly after Swamiji had gotten off the boat, we had boarded.

It was all Krishna's arrangement," Swamiji laughs. "You do not have to search out *guru*. When Krishna sees that you are sincere, He sends *guru* to you."





The Ship Jaladuta.
In total, three Jaladutas were built in different years:
one in 1904 (top left) and one in 1927 (top right),
and both were decommissioned before 1963.
In maritime history, there were three vessels named Jaladuta. The first two, built in 1904 and 1927, were decommissioned before 1963. The photograph below shows the third vessel—a motor ship built in 1959 that remained in service until 1983. It was aboard this ship in the autumn of 1965 that Srila Prabhupada made his historic voyage from India to America, and on its return voyage to India, Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva das) traveled aboard it as well.



THE SCINDIA STEAM NAVIGATION CO. LTD.
BOMBAY

No. 774.

Place of issue CALCUTTA Date 4-8-1965

CABIN CLASS

NON-TRANSFERABLE PASSAGE TICKET

PER Regular Cargo Carrier s. s. / m.v. JALADUTA embarking about _____ 19___

From the port of CALCUTTA PORT to the port of _____

	Names	AGE Yrs.	AGE Mths.	Cabin No.	Berth No.	Passage Fare	Taxes
1	HIS DIVINE GRACE A.C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI	69					
2							
3							
4							
5	(COMPLIMENTARY TICKET WITH FOOD)						
6							
7							

Adults 1 Children — Infants — TOTAL ONE

IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED that this contract ticket is issued by or on behalf of THE SCINDIA STEAM NAVIGATION CO. LTD. and is accepted by the passenger(s) on the terms and conditions printed or endorsed on the face and back of this ticket.

For The Scindia Steam Navigation Co. Ltd.

K B Mehta

(K. B. Mehta)
Senior Deputy Manager

* * *

Prasadam quickly becomes a popular, transcendental affair. Swamiji puts all the food on one plate—mung bean soup (*dal*), white rice, cooked vegetables, and *chapatis*, the bread of India, a kind of wheat tortilla.

In Swamiji's back apartment, we roll up the Oriental rug and sit on the wood floor next to the walls. When offering the food to pictures of Lord Krishna and Lord Chaitanya and His disciples, Swamiji rings a little bell and recites prayers.

We all sit and wait. We have expanded to a dozen now. Mike's wife Jan, the only woman, does not attend the noon *prasadam* in the back apartment.

Swamiji squats and walks on his haunches, distributing *prasadam* from the big offering plate, which he pushes before him. As he picks up the rice and vegetables with his right hand and puts some on each paper plate, we repeat, after him, a prayer in Bengali and then English:

This material body is a lump of ignorance, and the senses are networks of paths to death. We have fallen into the ocean of material sense enjoyment. Of all the senses, the tongue is the most voracious and uncontrollable. It is very difficult to conquer the tongue in this world, but Krishna is very kind to us. He has sent us very nice *prasadam* to conquer the tongue. Now let us take that *prasadam* to our full satisfaction, and glorify Their Lordships Radha and Krishna, and in love call for Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda to help us.

At first we take only one *chapati* each. "Take more," Swamiji insists.

"Oh no. That's enough."

"*Achha*! Just one more."

He plops the *chapatis* on our plates. Stanley, tall and skinny, finally eats ten. Swamiji keeps piling them before him. Our appetites pick up as Swamiji prods us to take more and more. I recall that in India I had also eaten rice, *dal*, *chapatis* and cooked vegetables, but it wasn't *prasadam. Prasadam* is more succulent because Swamiji's fingers have touched it. And, as Swamiji says, Krishna has glanced upon it.

When more people begin attending at noon and it becomes impractical for everyone to eat in Swamiji's apartment, *prasadam* is taken from the kitchen down to the temple for distribution. Swamiji, however, continues eating in his room. Keith and Charles cook, and stacks of hot *chapatis* are rushed downstairs for disciples and guests.

"I have many preparations to teach you," Swamiji tells Keith and Charles. "But first you must learn these basics nicely."

catur-vidha-śrī-bhagavat-prasāda-
svādv-anna-tṛptān hari-bhakta-saṅghān
kṛtvaiva tṛptiṁ bhajataḥ sadaiva
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

The spiritual master is always offering four kinds of food to Krishna, and when he sees that the devotees are eating *bhagavat-prasadam*, he is satisfied. I offer my respectful obeisances unto his lotus feet.…

"Our method is not dry," Swamiji says as he hands *chapatis* to each disciple. "It is full of juice, full of nectar."

And he teaches Keith how to make "sweet balls" (*gulabjamuns*), dripping with clarified butter and sugar syrup. Swamiji calls them "ISKCON bullets," our "ammunition against *maya*." We sit before a large jar and spear the sweetballs that float to the top.

Slowly we become aware that Swamiji's knowledge of recipes is as vast as his knowledge of the *Vedas*. "There are so many

preparations," he says, "and one by one I will teach them to you. But first you must learn to be very, very clean. And never taste food while cooking. If you taste, everything is spoiled.

Whatever we offer to Krishna must be pure. You must learn this. That is a qualification of a *brahmin*—cleanliness."

* * *

Since Allen Ginsberg is reportedly chanting Hare Krishna at peace marches and poetry readings, we mail him one of Swamiji's transcendental invitations: "You Are Cordially Invited To Come And Bring Your Friends."

Allen drives up in a Volkswagen microbus with friend Peter Orlovsky. Allen's full beard has no tinge of gray, but his hair is receding. He is forty-two and at the peak of his fame as poet laureate of the counterculture. Somewhat self-consciously, he brings a beautiful new harmonium from Calcutta. "It's for the *kirtans*," he says. "It's a little donation."

As usual, Swamiji comes down at seven and leads *kirtan*. Allen joins, pumping a slow, wavering drone on the harmonium. After the lecture, he steps forward and offers obeisances by touching Swamiji's feet, a gesture customary in India. When Allen is introduced, Swamiji invites him to take *prasadam* with us in the morning. Then Swamiji retires to his room.

"What time should I come by?" Allen asks.

"About eleven," I suggest. "You can talk with Swamiji before *prasadam*."

Allen hesitates, then frowns. Something appears to be disturbing him, something difficult to pinpoint. "Don't you think Swamiji's a little too… well, esoteric for New York?"

I stop and wonder. I've never thought of Swamiji as esoteric, although he draws heavily from Vedic authority. Allen, however, has been a celebrated anti-authoritarian since his 1955 "Howl" poem.

"We've got a problem," I say, changing the subject. "Swamiji's visa is running out, and we need an immigration lawyer."

"We'll help with that," Allen says. "In the morning I'll bring a check for two hundred, initially." He and Peter then leave. Although the money is badly needed, I was only going to ask him to recommend a lawyer.

* * *

When Allen arrives in the morning, he brings a portable harmonium he acquired in Benares. Sitting before Swamiji in the back apartment, he chants Hare Krishna to a hurdy-gurdy rhythm. The melody is very jolly, and Allen's head wags back and forth as he pumps the harmonium, using only a drone and letting his voice carry the tune. His chanting is very different from Swamiji's. I almost expect to see a monkey with a cup appear.

Swamiji is most cordial. He smiles and begins to explain the philosophy of Lord Chaitanya. "He even led a *sankirtan* protest through the streets," Swamiji says, "and inaugurated civil dlisobedience in India. When the government officers broke the *sankirtan* drums, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu personally led thousands of people to the Chan Kazi's palace. So, you are a very influential man. I request that you chant this Hare Krishna at your poetry readings and other public functions."

Quoting *Bhagavad-gita*, Swamiji tells Allen that the common populace follows the actions of a great man and tends to imitate him. "What the great do, others follow," Swamiji says. "So this is a great opportunity for you to introduce this Krishna consciousness. Hare Krishna can purify everyone.

Whenever the lion roars in the jungle, even the elephants run away. This vibration of transcendental sound, Hare Krishna, is like the roaring of a lion. It will chase away all the elephants of dirty things, all that huge garbage, the dirtiness that has accumulated in our mind after many, many births."

Allen listens attentively. Although receptive, he seems to resist conversion. While not committing himself fully, he promises to chant more and give up smoking.

"But do you really intend to make these American boys into Vaishnavas?" he asks before leaving. "Yes," Swamiji smiles brightly. "And I will make them all *brahmins*."

"*Brahmins*?!"

Allen appears struck with wonder that anyone would venture to transform us into *brahmins*. "Well, good luck, Swamiji," he bids, giving the check to help with the visa.

End of Chapter 2

Chapter 3. Who is Crazy?

Twenty-six Second Avenue. Matchless Gifts. No doubt, to most New Yorkers, nothing more than the kind of squalid storefront someone might open a pawnshop in. What with traffic noise and our neighbors—Cosmos Parcels Express Corporation, Gonzalez Funeral Home, Weitzner Brothers Memorials, The Red Star Bar, and a Mobil gas station—no one would think it Vaikuntha. But for us, Matchless Gifts becomes a temple, a part of Vrindaban, because of Swamiji's presence and the words spoken here.

Keith, Wally, and I rummage through the Mott Street apartment, gather souvenirs from the recent India trip—two rugs, a dozen paintings, three silk wall hangings, and two brass hookah tops—and take them to Second Avenue.

Then, unknown to Swamjji, we start decorating the Matchless Gifts storefront, turning it into a temple befitting Krishna's messenger. That is, as far as we are able.

We lay down an Oriental rug and hang up the Indian paintings, silks, and a large painting of Radha Krishna rendered by Jim Greene. Then we construct a small dais under Jim's painting. Before the dais, we place ornate plaster candlesticks, and beside these, within easy reach, we hang a large brass cymbal, the kind used in high school bands.

When Swamiji enters to begin evening *kirtan*, he looks with delighted surprise at the newly decorated temple. "Ah, you are advancing in Krishna consciousness!" he says. "This is very nice. This is Krishna consciousness."

As Swamiji sits on the new dais, we all hold our breath, hoping that the shaking structure won't collapse. He leads an unforgettable *kirtan*, reaching over at times with a stick to tap the big cymbal gently. Then, getting down from the dais, he shows us how to dance. This is

something new and wonderful to see. Raising his arms, he places one foot before the other and dips slightly, gracefully, in rhythm to Hare Krishna. We follow him and dance in a circle. As the *kirtan* becomes more fiery, we strike the brass hookah tops with spoons.

The hypercritical, however, prefer the bare walls and floor. They resent the dais in particular, feeling that Swamiji shouldn't he thus honored. "Why can't he sit on the floor like us?" they complain. "Candles and incense! It's the Catholic Church all over again."

Little matter, for Swamji is pleased. "This is Krishna consciousness!" And we are pleased just to see him pleased. However modest, awkward, or unconventional, our little service rendered in love is accepted.

* * *

Swamiji is particularly delighted by two paintings we purchased in India. One is of the great monkey-devotee Hanuman carrying a hill to Lord Rama. Rama had requested Hanuman to fetch a certain herb that grew on a hill, and not being able to find it, Hanuman brought the entire hill.

"Hanuman is a monkey," Swamiji tells us, "but he is also the topmost devotee of Lord Ramachandra."

Another painting depicts an effulgent six-armed person standing with one leg crossed in front of the other, in Lord Krishna's famous *tribunga* pose. Two green arms hold a bow and arrows; two blue arms hold up a flute; and two golden arms hold a staff and waterpot.

"Oh, very good," Swamiji says, pleased. "Where have you purchased it?"

"Calcutta," I say.



"Oh, this is very nice."

"Who is it?"

"This is Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu," Swamiji says. "But why does He have six arms?"

"Because He showed Himself to be Rama and Krishna. These are the arms of Rama, and these are the arms of Krishna."

"And the other two?"

"They are the arms of a *sannyasi*, of Lord Chaitanya as the perfect devotee. "

"Then Lord Chalitanya followed you from Calcutta," I note.

"It is no accident," Swamiji says, looking reverently at the painting. "Of all the paintings in India, you have chosen this one. Why? Although you don't remember, you were devotees in past lives. Now, out of mercy, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has come. This is most auspicious."

* * *

Primarily, the lectures are now covering the first six chapters of *Bhagavad-gita*, delineating various *yogas*. What is perfection in *yoga*?

"*Hatha-yoga*, pressing your nose and sitting like a pretzel, is no longer possible," Swamiji says. "In this age of Kali, men lead short lives full of ignorance and misery. There is no question of sitting quietly and trying to meditate to control the mind. As elevated as Arjuna was, he called this method most difficult. 'The mind,' he said, 'is as hard to control as the wind.' Nowhere in *Bhagavad-gita* does Krishna tell Arjuna to go to the forest and sit idly in some lotus position. No. That is not possible. We are naturally active, and spiritual life means activity

according to *dharma*. Like Arjuna, we can be Krishna's friend if we work for Him and keep our minds always fixed on Him. That is *bhakti-yoga*, the highest *yoga*—working for Krishna with devotion. Lord Chaitanya told His disciples, 'Preach this gospel that I teach: Whomever you meet, just try to inform him about the message of *Bhagavad-gita*.' If you just do this, you are the perfect *yogi*."

"Why was it wrong for Arjuna to want to leave the battlefield?" Stanley asks after the lecture. "He was just trying to do what was right."

"For the sake of his own sense gratification, Arjuna wanted to give up fighting," Swamiji says. "He wanted to avoid fighting with his relatives. Materially, it appears very nice that Arjuna is giving up his claim for a kingdom in order to satisfy his relatives. For this, we would say that he is a very good man. But Krishna did not approve of this. Why? Because the basic principle was wrong: Arjuna had decided not to fight to satisfy his own senses. That is *kama*, lust, desire. Krishna speaks *Bhagavad-gita* to show Arjuna that his occupation as a warrior need not be changed or abandoned. But his consciousness must be changed from acting out of sense gratification to acting for Krishna."

"But was it wrong for Arjuna to want peace?" Stanley asks.

"First you must know the real platform for peace," Swamiji says. "People are always making plans for peace in the world, but they do not know the real peace formula. For the last twenty years or so, the United Nations has been trying for peace, but still war is going on. The formula is given in *Bhagavad-gita*: *Bhoktaram yajna tapasam sarva-loka-mahesvaram*: 'I am the proprietor of everything, the ultimate beneficiary. Whatever you do, do it for Me.' There can be no peace without recognizing Krishna as the true proprietor of everything."

"But to find peace, don't you have to believe that any kind of war is wrong?" Stephen Goldsmith asks. Mr. Goldsmith sits on a folding chair in the rear of the temple. He wears a suit and tie. He's a young, dapper, up-and-coming Jewish lawyer, and he helped Swamiji

incorporate the Society.

"Yes," Swamiji says.

"But *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that there's a good war and a bad war. That is, Krishna believed it was all right to kill the enemies of Arjuna because it was a righteous war."

"Yes."

"Well…" Mr. Goldsmith hesitates, uncertain of Swamiji's position. "Well, if you have a philosophy like that, how can you find peace?"

"What do you mean by peace, then?"

"Absence of war."

"Not necessarily," Swamiji says. "Absence of war is not necessarily peace. Just think it over. Suppose there is no war. Do you think that everyone is peaceful? Ask any individual, 'Are you at peace?' Stopping war does not guarantee peace. There are incalculable things disturbing you, and war is just one. We have to be relieved of all disturbing factors by taking to Krishna consciousness.

"Well, how is that possible if Krishna Himself was a proponent of war?" Mr. Goldsmith persists. "*Bhagavad-gita* starts out with a war."

"Yes, but that war was necessary. You cannot completely eradicate war from social life. Why does the government maintain an army and police force if they are not necessary for law and order?"

"Well, if you believe war is necessary, then that's the end of the discussion," Mr. Goldsmith says testily. "Because if you believe it's necessary, then Krishna believes it's necessary."

"As far as material existence is concerned, so many things are

necessary," Swamiji says. "Material existence means *janma-mrtyu-jara-vyadhi*: birth, old age, disease, and death. These four items do not depend on war and peace. War or no war, your problem is these material entanglements. As long as there is human society, there will sometimes be war and sometimes peace. But the learned man sees that although he doesn't want to grow old and die, there is still old age, disease and death. These are real problems. War is not the only disturbance. There may be excessive heat or cold, rain or drought. Maybe there will be some upheaval in the Atlantic Ocean, and this beautiful New York City will be swallowed up. There are so many natural disturbances, material problems, and as long as we have these material bodies, we have to face them. The complete solution is this Krishna consciousness. *Bhagavad-gita* does not say stop war; it says stop your repeated birth and death. *Bhagavad-gita* is not concerned with the war principle. There will be war as long as human society exists. How can you stop it?"

"Well, some people don't believe that it's necessary, Mr Goldsmith says.

"Some people may believe foolishly, but there has never been human history without war. So war will continue."

"There's never been a time in human history when everyone has accepted Krishna, either," Mr. Goldsmith counters.

"If everyone were Krishna conscious, no one would be in this material world," Swamiji says. "Then there would be no question of war. My point is that war is not the only disturbance. We have to make a complete solution to all disturbances by taking up this Krishna consciousness. Now let us have *kirtan*."

* * *

Showing us how to practice Krishna consciousness, and making sure that we will not flee the battlefield, Swamiji engages us in many

ways. Keith and Charles cook. Roy tends the tape recorder. Steve changes the plastic lettering on the windowfront sign announcing the lecture subjects. Stanley posts a warning on the bathroom wall: "If You Are Not Engaged, You Will Fall Into *Maya*."

And by way of making sure we are engaged, Swamiji goes out to Long Island to look at some used mimeograph machines up for sale. The machines are the old stencil models, well used but still working. Swamiji purchases two at seventy-five dollars each.

Back on Second Avenue, I immediately start typing stencils for his essay "Krishna, The Reservoir of Pleasure." We run off about a hundred copies, and Swamiji is pleased.

"We must begin our own publications," he says. "There are many, many literatures. Our movement is founded on these literatures through the *parampara*, the disciplic succession from *guru* to *guru*. It is not that I just give my opinion. After all, what is my personal opinion worth? But these Vedic scriptures are the foundation, and they are encyclopedic. This is Just the beginning of our translations. We see so much nonsense on the newstands. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* says that such literatures are for crows because crows delight in eating stool and staying in nasty places. But these transcendental literatures are for the swans, the *paramhansas*. They are full of nectar, and the devotees draw knowledge from them just as swans sip nectar from lotuses. They are the special gifts of Srila Vyasadeva, of Krishna Himself."

* * *

The First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, printed in India, fills three large volumes.

"This is the shortest canto," Swamiji tells us. "You can see that volume two is bigger than volume one, and volume three is bigger than two. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is like that. It is expanding. It will fill over sixty volumes when we finish the twelve cantos."

A press photo shows Swamiji presenting the three volumes to the late Prime Minister Shastri. I recall the January morning on the freighter, returning from India, when news broke of Shastri's death, just a year and a half after he had written:

Dear Swamiji. … Many thanks for your letter. I am indeed grateful to you for presenting a copy of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to me. I do realize that you are doing valuable work. It would be a good idea if the libraries in the government institutions purchase copies of this book. Yours sincerely, Lal Bahadur Shastri.

And what unique, transcendental books, these three volumes! The dust jacket reveals the universe, the spiritual sky beyond, and the original spiritual planet, Goloka Vrindaban, which resembles a lotus whorl. In the center stands blue-tinged Lord Krishna, playing a flute and enjoying His abode. On His shoulder leans Radharani, His beloved, and in the background cows graze beneath trees that yield whatever one desires. Lord Chaitanya and His devotees dance and play drums jubilantly, and cowherd girls (*gopis*) cluster around Krishna in the forests.

This topmost Vaikuntha planet radiates a spiritual effulgence known as the *brahmajyoti*, destination of the impersonalists. Within this *brahmajyoti* float unlimited spiritual planets dominated by Krishna's various expansions, all four-handed Narayana forms: Madhusudan, Sridhar, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Samkarsan, and others.

In one section of this boundless spiritual sky is found the entire material manifestation, within which lies a great four-handed Vishnu expansion. As this Vishnu breathes, universal globes flow from the pores of His skin and scatter like bubbles across the causal ocean. Inside each of these globes, Vishnu reclines on a couch provided by the coiled Sesha serpent. From the great Vishnu's navel sprouts a lotus stem, out of which Brahma, the first created being, appears. It is Brahma who is directly empowered to create the countless demigods, men, planets, suns and moons that fill our known material universe.

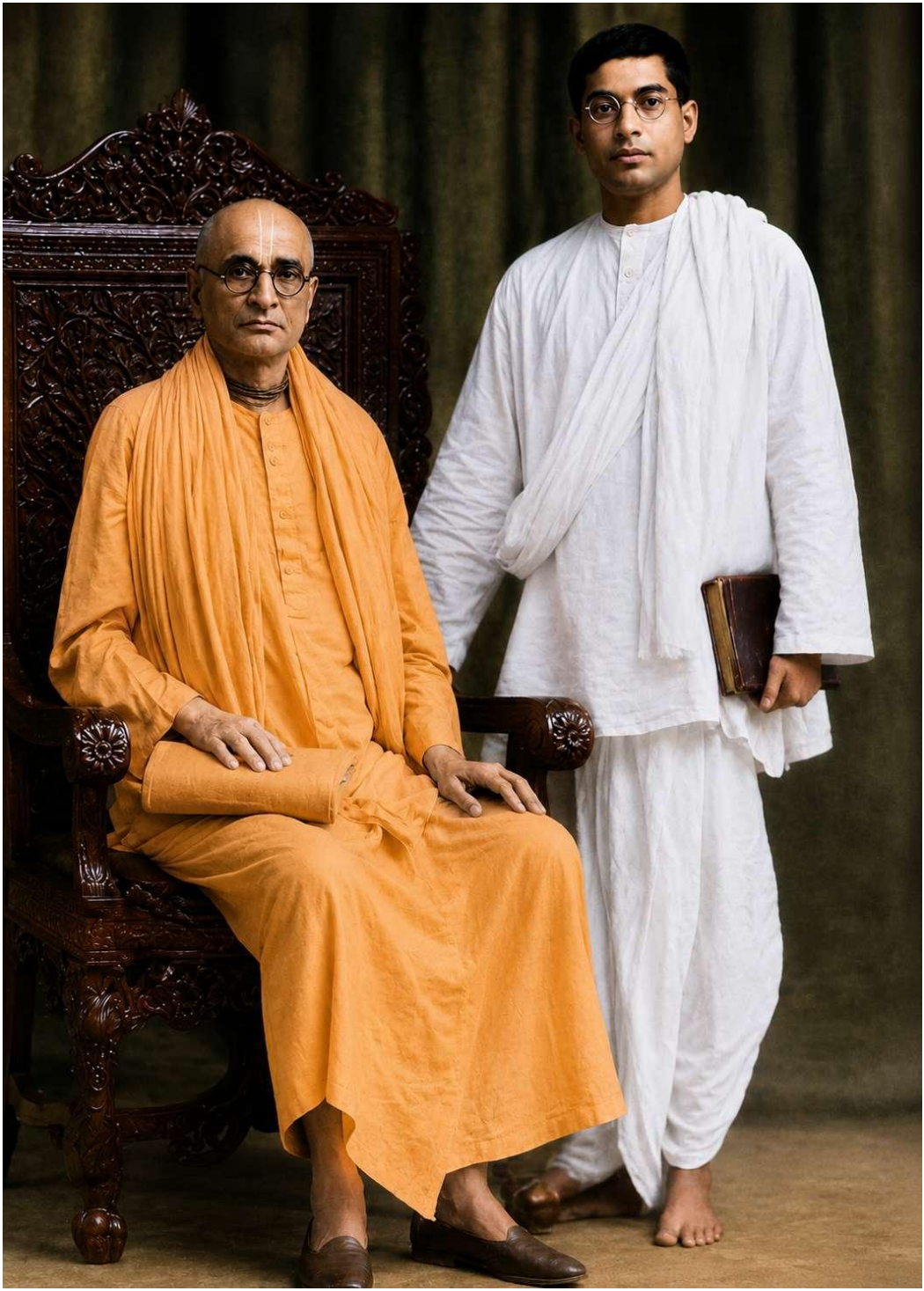
Thus the complete creation is presented on the cover of Swamiji's *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, printed by Swamiji himself in New Delhi in 1962. The volumes are dedicated to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, Swamiji's spiritual master: "He lives forever by his divine instructions, and the follower lives with him."

The brief biography on the dust jacket tells us all we know of Swamiji's previous life:

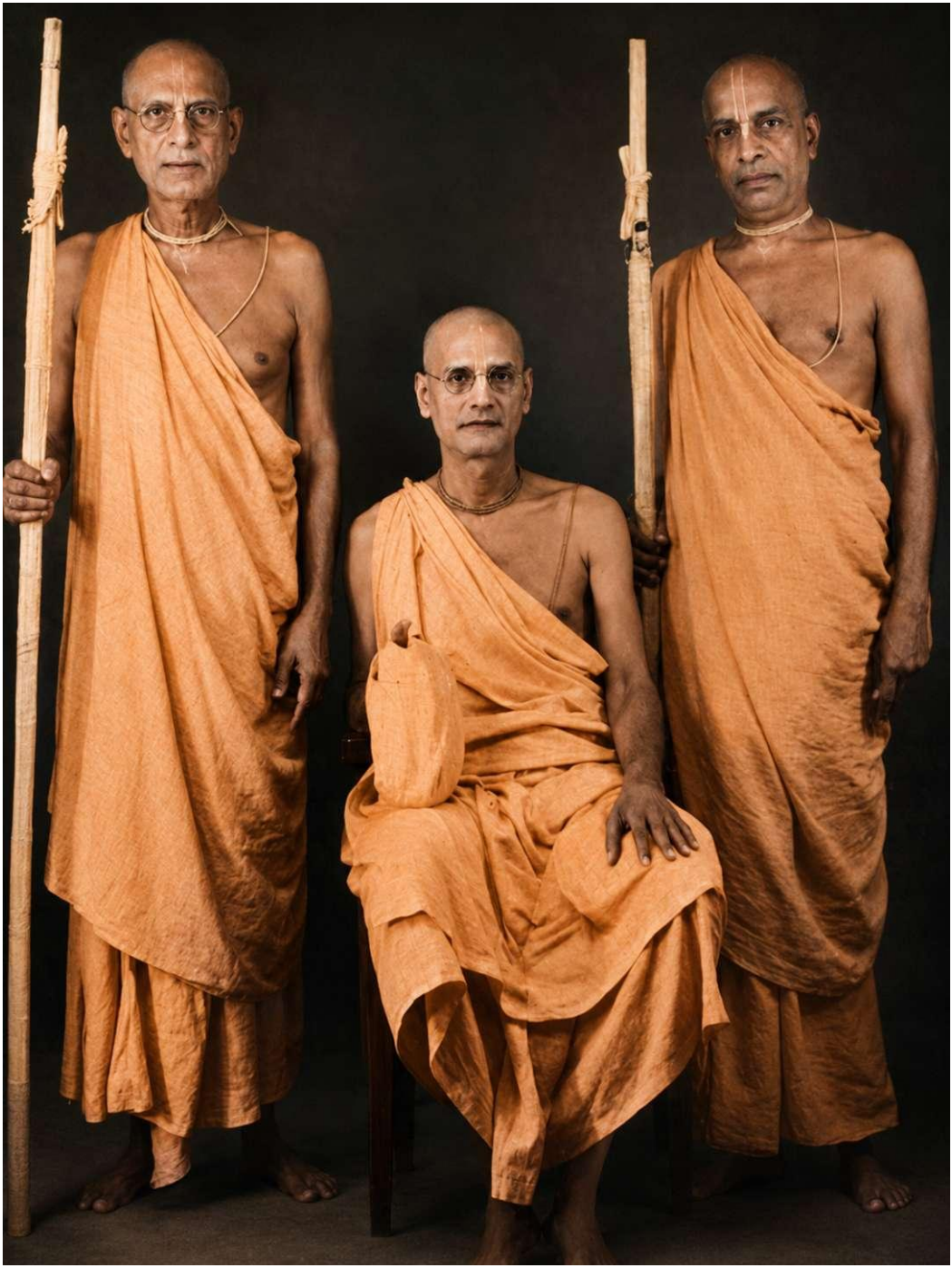
Abhay Charan De, a young (26) manager of a big business firm in Calcutta, met His Divine Grace Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati in 1922. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta liked this educated young man and injected in him the idea of preaching Lord Chaitanya's message all over the world. He was formally initiated in 1933 at Allahabad, where he had his own business. In 1936, just a fortnight before leaving this mortal world, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta specifically ordered Abhay to take up the work through the medium of the English language. In pursuance of' this order, Abhay Charan De started an English fortnight magazine *Back to Godhead* (1944). The Vaishnava Society recognized him as Bhaktivedanta in 1947. In 1950, he left his Calcutta home to live apart from his family, and in 1954 he became *vanaprastha*, completely retired from family life. In 1959, he took *sannyas*, and since then he is known as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, fully engaged in the discharge of the responsibility ordered by his spiritual master, although he is now sixty-eight years of age (1964).

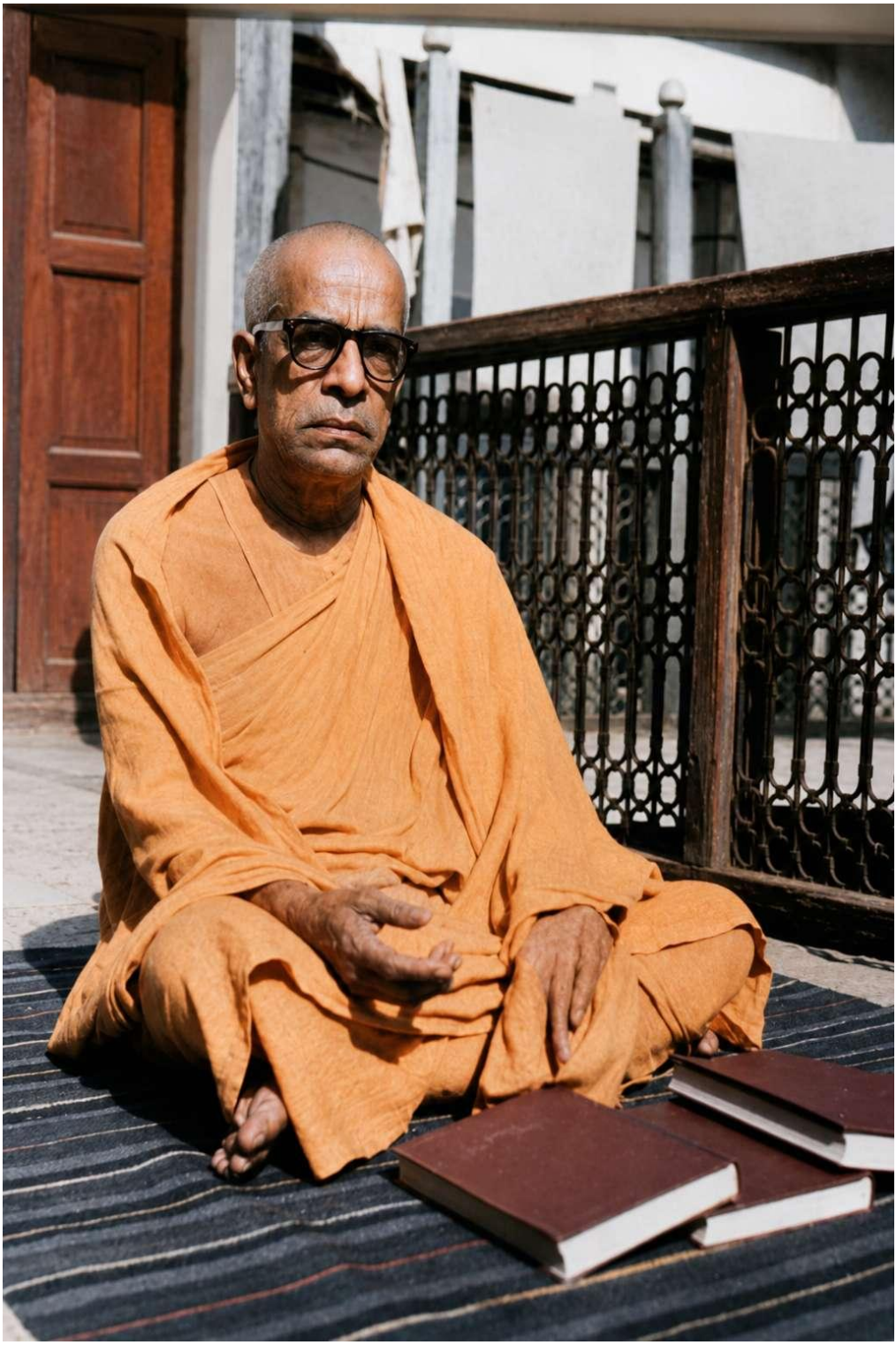
Two drawings depict the transformation of Abhay Charan De to Swami Bhaktivedanta. It is quite a metamorphosis. With his black hair and moustache, Abhay Charan reminds me of an enterprising Calcutta shopkeeper. But that is just exterior. Could there really have been an interior change?

Whatever his activities as a householder, it is hard to think of Swamiji as ever being a worldly man.









* * *

"Before writing these books, I never really wrote before," Swamiji tells me. "I wondered, 'How will I do it?' So I just sat down and repeated what I had heard from my spiritual master. I did not invent. If I'm satisfied, it is because I have delivered the message as it is, without any concoctions. But as for writing—" He laughs. "It is all the mercy of my spiritual master, who is your grand spiritual master. He was such a scholar, such a transcendental aristocrat, a Vaikuntha man. He never married. Eternal *brahmachari*. It is he who is inspiring us. He once said, 'Don't build temples in this age. Print books.' Books were very important to him, for by them we can spread this movement most effectively. Perhaps a modern gentleman may not want to visit a temple, but he will want to buy a book."

* * *

Of course, many of the visitors to Matchless Gifts have their own conceptions of what a *swami* should be. Some think he should sit in lotus position and meditate. Swamiji sits on the floor with one leg comfortably tucked under the other, a very natural way to sit. It makes the formal lotus position seem pretentious and unnatural. As for *hatha-yoga* meditation, Swamiji sometimes jokes, imitating the yogic posture by drawing himself up straight, head high in the air, eyes closed. "I am moving the sun. I am moving the moon," he says.

Everyone laughs while he holds the pose; then Swamiji laughs and breaks the spell. "Just see what nonsense," he says. "The last snare of *maya* is to think, 'I am God. I control all.' But these rascal *yogis* claim this, and so cheat the innocent public."

No names are mentioned, but afterwards Charles tells me that he was referring to certain "uptown *yogis*."

"I am moving the sun. I am moving the moon. But when I get a toothache, I run to the doctor, crying, 'Ooooh, help me!' Now, what kind of God is this?"

* * *

And some visitors think that a *swami* shouldn't use tape recorders. "We are using typewriters, dictaphones, tape recorders so much in the service of Krishna. Yes, these are material when used for ourselves, but when used for Krishna, they become spiritualized. For ourselves we can use nothing, but for Krishna, everything. That is the difference. It is our consciousness that determines whether this tape recorder is material or spiritual."

"Then why do we call anything material?" Roy asks.

"For one who has attained the higher stage of spiritual realization, there is nothing material," Swamiji says. "As stated in *Bhagavad-gita*, everything is seen as Brahman. Still, Krishna speaks of His superior and inferior energies. How is this? Without the touch of spirit, matter cannot work. Therefore it is said to be inferior. But in a higher sense, it is not inferior, because it emanates from the Supreme. You cannot separate the energy from the Energetic. *Sakti-saktimatayor abheda*. The energy and the Energetic are nondifferent. Electric energy, generated from an electric powerhouse, can give us a cold refrigerator or a hot stove. One who knows the nature of electricity knows that the same energy is working, whether hot or cold , inferior or superior. So, on the platform of knowledge, there is no distinction between matter and spirit."

* * *

When typing in the room where Swamiji takes *prasadam*, I move the typewriter with my leg. "Oh no!" Swamiji says. "Don't let leg touch!"

I'm surprised and even a little annoyed. After all, why is my leg any less spiritual than the typewriter? "You mean the typewriter is spiritual and the body isn't?" I ask.

"This material body is like an embarrassment for the soul, Swamiji

explains. “It becomes spiritualized only by rendering service. In Krishna’s service, there are many offenses to avoid, and the spiritual master tells us what they are. Otherwise, we have no way of knowing.”

Day by day, instance by instance, Swamiji lets us know what’s offensive.

* * *

I can’t resist trying to correlate his teachings with other philosophies and literatures. This undesirable, speculative tendency comes from eighteen years of American schooling.

Rabindranath Tagore, I find out, was also a “womanizer.” Nor does Swamiji like Hart Crane’s “white wings of tumult” depiction of the bridge of consciousness.

“It’s not tumult,” he says, and drops the subject.

Emerson?

“He may think like that, but who is he to say?”

Whitman?

“Sentimentalism.”

Kahlil Gibran?

“Pictures of naked people,” he says, making a face. “Poets and artists are generally passionate.”

William Blake?

“More naked people.”

But he approves Blake’s verse:

God appears, and God is light

To those poor souls who dwell in night, But doth a human Form display To those who dwell in realms of day.

Swamiji has a small record player someone gave him, but no records. Thinking he would like to hear some music, I browse through my record collection and finally choose sitar *ragas* performed by Ravi Shankar—preferable, I suppose, to Bach, or the Beatles.

When the sitar begins to play, Swamiji smiles a little, and I assume that he's pleased. He sits through the twenty minute *raga* without speaking. When it is over, I wonder whether to play the other side.

"How did you like the music, Swamiji?" Stanley asks.

"That is sense gratification music," Swamiji answers.

"Oh?" I'm taken aback.

"But it's Ravi Shankar," I protest.

"It is sense gratification music," he repeats, unmoved.

"But it's a *raga*," I insist, flustered. "They play it even in temples."

"Ravi Shankar is a businessman," Swamiji says, smiling.

"What if he wanted to become a devotee?" Roy asks. "Then he can come."

"But weren't you a businessman once, Swamlji?" Stanley asks.

"Because I went naked then, I should go naked now?" Swamiji answers, still smiling gently, as if amused by all the fuss.

"Everything's sense gratification," I pout angrily. "We can't even

play *ragas*! What are we supposed to do?"

"You must understand," Swamiji says patiently. "If you are a musician, you can play your music for Krishna. That's all right. Arjuna was a warrior, and he fought for Krishna, and that was his perfection. If you are a writer, you can write for Krishna; or a painter, you can paint for Krishna. Whatever you want, you can do. But don't do it for your own sense gratification. Do it for Krishna. Not the work, but the consciousness must be changed."

* * *

"And what about sex?" asks Stephen Goldsmith during the post *kirtan* question period. After the exchange over the war issue, Mr. Goldsmith has not been so friendly with Swamiji. His even mentioning sex surprises us.

"Sex only with wife," Swamiji says. "And even that is restricted. Sex is meant for the propagation of Krishna conscious children. My Guru Maharaj used to say that if he could beget Krishna conscious children, he would have sex a hundred times. Yet this is so difficult in this age that he remained *brahmachari*, celibate."

"But sex is a very strong force," Mr. Goldsmith protests, not letting the subject drop. "What a man feels for a woman is undeniable. "

"Therefore there is the institution of marriage," Swamiji says. "So you can get yourself married and live peacefully with one woman. But the wife should not be used as a... a machine for sense gratification. Sex life must be regulated."

'What do you mean by regulated?"

'Only with wife," he says. "For children."

"But what if you don't want children, or if you have enough children? Are there any other restrictions?"

"Yes," Swamiji says, then falls silent. We wait, but he says nothing more, apparently not wanting to discuss the matter in more detail.

"I'm not ready to have children," Mr. Goldsmith persists. "But this doesn't mean that I'm prepared to give up sex."

"No," Swamiji says. "Restriction there must be. It is not that we're to go to sex like cats and dogs. Sex should be restricted to once monthly to beget nice children."

"Once monthly?!"

"Easier to forget the whole thing," I say.

"*Accha*! That's it!" Swamiji says. "Best not to think of it. Best just to chant Hare Krishna. Then we are saved so much botheration. Sex is like an itch; when we scratch, it gets worse. So we must tolerate it, and ask Krishna to help us. We must understand that sex life is the highest material pleasure, and therefore the strongest bond to material life, to rebirth in the material world. Therefore Krishna tells Arjuna:

āvṛtaṁ jñānam etena
jñānino nitya-vairiṇā
kāma-rūpeṇa kaunteya
duṣpūreṇānalena ca

'A man's pure consciousness is covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied, and which burns like fire.' Krishna uses the word *kama*, lust, what we call sex life. That is all that keeps us from Krishna consciousness."

Stephen Goldsmith shakes his head, and Swamiji looks at him, smiling, as if to say, "Is there still a problem?"

"It's just that... well, it's been proved dangerous to repress the sex drive. There's a theory that we have wars because—"

“People are eating meat,” Swamiji interjects. “We will have wars as long as people eat meat. And if a man eats meat, he will be sure to have illicit sex also.”

Blam! Blam! Hit with double-barreled blasts, Mr. Goldsmith quietly puts on his hat and walks out the door.

After the meeting, the sexual regulations are much discussed.

“He can’t expect us to give up sex,” someone says. “He’ll chase everyone away with that philosophy.”

“He didn’t say we have to give it up,” Roy says.

“Once a month! Same thing.”

“You mean I have to have a kid every time I want sex?” a girl complains. “Forget it!”

“I thought Krishna was the God of love,” someone says. “Where does He say not to have sex?”

“What Swamiji said was very basic,” Wally says. “All *gurus* discourage sex, don’t they? It’s like telling a kid not to wet his pants.“

Admitted. We’re not even in spiritual kindergarten. But America now rides the crest of the Sexual Revolution, and renouncing sex is like fasting at the feast. One by one, we take our questions to Swamiji. Although answering us very patiently, he doesn’t budge from his position.

“Just know that you are drowning in the ocean of material sense enjoyment,” he tells us. “This *Bhagavad-gita* is like a good boat, and the spiritual master is like a good captain, and the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is like a good breeze. So you should take advantage of so many auspicious things and cross that ocean. When you surrender to Krishna, the material ocean is no more than rain water in the hoofprint of a calf.”

* * *

"George Bernard Shaw wrote one book," Swamiji says, "called You Are What You Eat."

He smiles, then laughs. "You Are What You Eat." He likes the title, repeats it. "That is a fact."

We imagine people eating pigs, frogs, shrimp.

"And Mr. Shaw was a vegetarian," he says. "A very famous playwright, no?"

"Yes," I assure him. "Very famous."

"But we are not vegetarians just for the sake of being vegetarian," he says. "We are vegetarians because Krishna says, 'Offer Me some fruit, some grains.' He does not say to offer Him meat. If He says, 'Offer Me some meat,' we will do so, but He doesn't. So we eat only fruits and vegetables, grains and milk.

That is sufficient.

Otherwise we have no interest in vegetarianism."

* * *

There is no knowing what opinion he might hold on world affairs. "India was better run under the British," he says. "They were very clever administrators. And Lord Mountbatten was cleverest of all. He saw the friction existing between Hindus and Moslems, and so he partitioned India—East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Even today this is causing trouble. Pakistan will start the next great war."

Civil rights marches, Negro riots: "What is this nonsense? People are thinking, 'I am black, white, red, yellow.' All this is skin disease. False designations. I am not this body. What am I? *Aham brahmasmi*: I

am Brahman, spirit soul. Since this knowledge is lacking, they are fighting like cats and dogs, and they will continue until they transcend their skin disease and understand that they are spiritual sons of Krishna, eternally His parts and parcels.…

NASA's space programs: "They are trying to reach the moon and other higher planets by material means. Impossible. They will not be permitted entry. You must qualify spiritually to go there. Just as you require a visa to enter another country, a spiritual visa is required there. According to the Vedas, the moon is a higher planet where demigods live in advanced civilizations."

"Then why don't they come here?" I ask.

"Why should they?" he responds, surprised. "This is a middle planet. The demigods are enjoying themselves in the heavenly planets. Why should they come to an inferior place?"

Sometimes in the morning, Swamiji glances over a newspaper. Within one hot August week there are typhoons in Japan, landslides in Ecuador, a heat wave in Texas, a bus crash in Germany, floods in Bulgaria, volcanic eruptions in Java, fires in California, a hurricane in Cuba, riots in Nagaland, and escalated bombings in Vietnam, all killing scores of people.

Krishna calls this *mrityu-loka*, the planet of death, Swamiji says. "When Maharaj Yudhisthir was asked what was the most wonderful thing in the world, he replied, 'Every day everyone sees death coming to others, yet everyone is thinking, "Death will not come to me."' We search for peace here, but there is none. Peace is in Vaikuntha, the spiritual sky. Vaikuntha means 'without anxiety.' In Vaikuntha there are no fires or floods, nor wars, nor death. But here, death is staring at us every moment. Just as college students prepare for their final examination, we must prepare for the examination at death. Whatever we do for perfection will be tested at the time of death. If we pass that exam, we are transferred to the spiritual world."

Abortion, birth control: “They are killing the baby in the womb. How cruel! In this age of unwanted population, man is losing his compassion. When you kill a living entity, even an ant, you are interfering with its spiritual evolution, its progress. That living entity must again take on that same life form to complete its designated life term in that body. And the killer must return to pay for damages.…

Proliferating nuclear tests: “Let these scientists solve the problems of birth, old age, disease, and death. But this they can’t do. Instead they create big bombs to destroy everything out of frustration. This istheir solution: Accelerate death. Such people are called demonic in *Bhagavad-gita*. Anyway, these atomic bombs are not new. In previous ages, men were so advanced that they could deliver the *brahmastra* nuclear weapon by chanting *mantra* only. The *shabda* vibration itself would destroy. Now they labor hard with these mechanical rockets. And they think they are advancing.…

* * *

Swamiji wants me to write down the meaning of Krishna consciousness for an ISKCON prospectus. “But I don’t understand enough,” I protest.

“That’s all right. Whatever you are understanding.”

Back on Mott Street, I jot down my conceptions of Krishna consciousness, trying to think of what would please Swamiji and at the same time relate his teachings to more familiar Western philosophy. After hours of writing and rewriting, I take my attempt to Swamiji, hoping it’s not too Western.

He reads it quietly, then smiles.

“Very nice,” he says. “We will print this up.” He then writes additional material on the back of the page.

“Now you may type this,” he tells me, “and we’ll send it to the

printers. I have added some additional purposes of the Society." I read the main goals of ISKCON: To spread the spiritual knowledge of *Bhagavad-gita* around the world through the *sankirtan* movement of Lord Chaitanya, to bring mankind to consciousness of Krishna and thereby attain peace, and "to erect a holy place of transcendental pastimes dedicated to the personality Krishna."

Before I take the prospectus to the printer, Swamiji hands me another sheet of paper with his now familiar round handwriting. "Add this also," he says. "Is It all right?"

I read a Sanskrit invocation, then:

Throughout the world let there be one scripture, the *Bhagavad-gita*, sung by Sri Krishna. Let there be one God only, Sri Krishna. Let there be one hymn for chanting, Hare Krishna. And let there be one occupation, the transcendental loving service of Krishna. Let the United Nations take up this cause and bring about real peace in the world. It is sublime and easy.

"*Bhagavad-gita* was not spoken for a limited circle of people," he tells us. "No. Like the sunshine, it is for everyone. The same sun shines in America and in India. You cannot say, This is an American sun,' or, 'This is an Indian sun.' Although I am a foreigner, I see that the same sun and moon are here, the same clouds and trees are here. So why should I think of myself' as a foreigner? Nobody is a foreigner in God's kingdom; everyone is a brother, everyone is under God's sunshine. The ultimate Father is the Supreme Lord. Even the animals are our brothers. Do we have the right to kill them because they are different? When we come into the sunshine of Krishna consciousness, we can see that everyone has a right to that sunshine. This is universal brotherhood. But as long as we stay in darkness, we say, 'This is my room. That is your room.' We should go outside, into the sunshine of Krishna consciousness, where there is no scarcity, and where we can live happily together with full faith in Krishna."

From the New York University library, I compile addresses of

major colleges. For hours I type up manila folders. We fill them with ads for *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the new prospectus, and Prime Minister Shastri's recommendation.

Then we mail off about three hundred fat manila folders to college libraries, offering them the three volumes of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* for a mere eighteen dollars.

Nary a college responds. We lose about fifty dollars in stamps.

And Swamiji is most frugal, even with stamps. He keeps a small postage scale for weighing letters. He never uses two pages when one will do. He never puts one extra cent on an envelope.

"When I arrived in your country last year," he tells us, "I had only one suitcase, one pair of *kartals*, and seven dollars. And all these books."

Thinking of his initial difficulties, Swamiji shakes with laughter.

"If Krishna wants, money will come," he says. "Why labor hard like an ass, like a beast of burden, to gratify these senses? This is not the purpose of human life. Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, attends the lotus feet of Narayana, Krishna. And Krishna is maintaining so many millions and millions of living entities throughout the universe. Do you think He will feed everyone except His devotees? No. Money will come without hard struggle. Just like happiness and distress. We do not look for distress, but it comes. Similarly, happiness comes. We do not have to search independently for it."

Lessons in transcendental economics: Krishna will preserve what His devotee has, and bring what he lacks. Swamiji never hoards money. What little he gets in donations is immediately spent on spreading Krishna consciousness.

"They say that when Ramakrishna saw money, his hand would curl away from it," Swamiji says, curling up his hand. "But a Vaishnava

says, 'Oh, some money! Very good!'" Swamiji opens up his palm and smiles. "'I can use this money for Krishna. I can build a temple or distribute books about Krishna.' Yes, that is proper use of money. Everything belongs to Krishna. If we find money in the street, we should not let it lie or spend it on ourselves. No. We should return it to its rightful owner. That is the proper use of money. And when Krishna sees that we are using money properly for His glorification, He sends more. After all, He is the husband of the goddess Lakshmi. Money is Lakshmi."

* * *

The hot days of August pass slowly. Whenever we tend to drift into torpidity, Swamiji quickly propels us into action. "Renunciation alone is not enough," he tells us. "One must also work for the Absolute Truth. We can choose to serve Krishna or maya, illusion, but service is always there. If you do not serve God, you will end up serving some dog.

"The eternal living entity is the enjoyed, *Prakriti*, and Krishna is the enjoyer, *Purusha*. It is the nature of the female to be enjoyed, the male to enjoy. But in reciprocation, both experience enjoyment:

Prakriti in being dominated, in serving, in being enjoyed.…

"Ramakrishna worshipped goddess Kali as the Absolute. But God is not female. That conception is lusty. Being too fond of women, rascals try to concoct some female god, calling their wives or some prostitute the 'Holy Mother,' and carrying on with their sex enjoyment. But God is always male. God is Krishna.

"And in India there are others, most abominable, called *sahajias*, who think themselves Krishna and perform their so-called *rasa-li1a* with young girls. That is most depraved. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur taught one *sahajia* a lesson in his time. Srila Bhaktivinoda is your great-great spiritual master, the father and spiritual master of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. Bhaktivinoda was a big family man with many children, and he was a government minister also. So he chastised one

such *sahajia* who could make sparks fly—some showbottle *yogi* who was corrupting young girls in the name of religion.

Bhaktivinoda Thakur saw that he was sent to prison, and the *sahajia* committed suicide while in prison.

"We cannot imitate Krishna's pastimes with the *gopis* any more than we can imitate His lifting Govardhan Hill. First, lift Govardhan Hill; then you can dance with the *gopis*. Or drink an ocean of poison like Lord Shiva; then you can smoke *ganja*.

"Our artificial attempts to enjoy like God in this material world are doomed to frustration, like two women trying to enjoy without a man. For real enjoyment, Krishna, the reservoir of pleasure, must be there."

* * *

Many of the evening lectures, delivered on the Second Chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*, stress that we are not these bodies but *Brahman*, spirit. "Your material situation is not important," we're told. "What is important is that you establish yourselves immediately in spiritual life. The spiritual man sees the Supreme Lord everywhere, at every moment, in every living being. Because he loves Krishna, he has this vision. He does not see cows, or men, or women, or fools. He sees only the Supreme Lord. Others may see him as penniless, but he knows that he's the happiest, richest man in the world.

"When Krishna appeared in this world, He showed His activities just to attract us. 'Oh, you are frustrated in friendship? Come on, make friends with Me. Oh, are you frustrated in getting a good master? Come on, serve Me. Are you frustrated in the love of your sons? Oh, take Me as your son.' In this world, we are always being frustrated in our relationships. We expect something from our friends or children, but they disappoint us, or grow up and go their own way. But Krishna will be the perfect friend, or the most obedient son, just as when He played that part with Mother Yasoda. Similarly, if you are disappointed in love,

accept Krishna as your husband or lover. You'll never be frustrated. That is the whole philosophy: Whatever you desire, you can have in relation with Krishna. With Krishna, you will never be cheated. You will be perfectly happy."

As we listen, we hardly notice that he is making us Krishna conscious bit by bit, day by day, despite our past *karma* and mental attitudes.

"A man in Krishna consciousness does not walk around in a fog," he tells us. "No. He works well and with the touch of an expert. When one enters Krishna consciousness, he becomes a poet and writes hymns to God."

Instead of railing at the evils of sex and intoxication, or criticizing our bad habits, Swamiji engages us in specific daily duties related to Krishna.

"The perfection of *yoga* is to see Krishna everywhere. Yet, even though the devotee sees Krishna everywhere, he still worships the Lord in the temple. He does not think that just because Krishna is omnipresent, it is useless to worship in the temple. If Krishna is everywhere, He is also in the temple."

When we go to him depressed, thinking that we can never change our bad habits or mundane consciousness, Swamiji gives us hope, reminding us that Krishna is our best friend and ever well-wisher. "When Krishna sees that you are sincere," he says, He will help you in your struggle against *maya*. Krishna consciousness may seem like poison in the beginning, but it is nectar in the end. So, just be patient. When you enter into Krishna's service, you will know how unhappy you were in material contamination. You will not want to go back."

"What about hell, Swamiji?" Stanley asks. "Where is it?"

"There is a hellish planet called Tamisra," Swamiji answers. "The

soul is dragged there after death. One who leads a hellish life here is trained up in Tamisra. The major portion of that planet is desert."

"Is it worse than earth?"

"Worse? This planet is a chance to progress! If Krishna comes here, do you think it is worse? We are simply making it worse."

"Are souls punished there in hell?"

"Yes, very severely. They are even thrown into fire. Of course, we are thinking we are independent, but after this body is finished, material nature can throw us anywhere. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* gives us a list of punishments—one man is punished one way, another in a different way."

Is hell eternal?" I ask. "Christians say it is." Hell is forgetfulness of Krishna," he says. "But is it eternal?"

He pauses a moment, then says, "Nothing is eternal but blissful life with Krishna."

"That's good news," I say, relieved.

"Yes! We should never think that Krishna wants to punish us. No Hell is temporary. As soon as the living entity agrees with Krishna, hell is finished. Anyone who surrenders to Krishna is free. The only requirement is sincere surrender. Krishna is our dearmost friend. He wants us to live in eternal bliss with Him. We are the ones punishing ourselves by trying to lord it over material nature."

* * *

When some of the psychedelic drug cultists visit Matchless Gifts, they argue that the Absolute Truth is nonverbal, "beyond the power of words to express." Fledgling hippies drop LSD, sit in lotus position,

contemplate their navels. “Far out. What’s happening? Can’t say. To speak is to limit. Those who speak, do not know; those who know, do not speak.” Zen is silence. “The sound of one hand clapping.”

“Nonsense!” Swamiji roars. “You cannot speak because a fool goes undetected until he opens his mouth. Then everyone knows he’s a fool. But why can you speak so much nonsense and not speak of the Absolute Truth? Certainly the Absolute Truth can be described and glorified. Vyasadeva has given us vast literatures. And in *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna, ‘I am like this. I am the sun and moon, the taste of water, the strength of the strong, the beauty of the beautiful, the author of the *Vedas* and *Vedanta*.’ Why can He not be described? He has His pastimes and activities, and these are described gloriously in Vedic literatures. The *Vedas* glorify the Absolute Truth, and this is also considered *kirtan*. It is not that Hare Krishna alone is *kirtan*; *Bhagavad-gita* is also *kirtan*. There is no question of silence. Silence means to stop talking nonsense.

Another popular concept rekindled by psychedelics is the belief that man is already God but simply hasn’t realized it. The We-are-God generation. “Returning to Krishna does not mean becoming Krishna,” Swamiji tells us. “When a son returns home to his father, he does not become his father. Distinct identities are always there. We may become the father of Krishna, like Vasudeva or Nanda Maharaj, but we can never be equal to Him. We will always be subordinate parts and parcels.”

But Swamiji particularly criticizes the Radhakrishnan commentary to the *Bhagavad-gita* verse (9.34), in which Krishna tells Arjuna, “Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.”

Upon this verse, Radhakrishnan comments that it is not to the personal Krishna that we have to surrender but to “the unborn, beginningless, eternal who speaks through Krishna.”

"Just see!" Swamiji says when this verse and commentary are read at the evening class. "I told you Dr. Radhakrishnan was an impersonalist. This Mayavadi philosophy is worse than atheism."

We are not really certain what "Mayavadi" means. When asked, Swamiji says that impersonalists are called Mayavadis because they consider Krishna's transcendental, eternal body to be *maya*, or illusion. "For them," he says, "the impersonal Brahman is the Absolute Truth, and Krishna is subordinate to Brahman. But in *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says that He is the Supreme Absolute Truth and that the impersonal Brahman is subordinate to Him."

Surprising us all, Keith rallies to the defense of Dr. Radhakrishnan. "I think he's right," he says. "After all, Krishna is in all of us. So, if we surrender to the unborn within us, then we attain the Absolute Truth."

To support his view, Keith quotes Shankara and Huang Po, Buddha and Christ, Spinoza and St. Paul. Swamiji just sits on the dais, and for the first time I notice him turn red. This is surprising, considering his golden complexion. When Keith pauses, Swamiji asks, "Are you finished?"

Keith isn't finished. He talks on about the Self and the One Mind, quoting liberally from various scriptures before winding down.

"Are you finished?" Swamiji asks again.

"Yes," Keith says.

"So, you have understood what we have been saying, that Krishna is God?"

"Yes," Keith says.

"And that worship is due God?"

"Yes," Keith says.

Suddenly, Swamiji, red and furious, begins to stand up. “Then why do you want to take it away from Krishna?” he roars, shaking the small storefront. “It’s Krishna! It’s Krishna!” He slams his hand down on the lectern. “It’s no unborn within Krishna! It’s Krishna!” We all sit stunned, as if a lion had pounced on the dais. “Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is directly telling Arjuna, ‘To Me. Worship Me.’ And Dr. Radhakrishnan says that it is not to the person Krishna but to some void. Just see what a nonsense rascal! Do you want to worship some unborn void instead of Krishna? Krishna is the Absolute Truth. His body, mind and Self are absolute. And He says, ‘Think of Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me.’ And even Shankara says, *Bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam*: ‘Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda. Your nonsense will not save you at death!’ And yet this rascal wants to take it away from Krishna. Do you want to follow such a rascal? Krishna says, ‘Worship Me.’ Do you not understand? Then why are you saying it is not to Krishna? Why? Why not to Krishna?”

We all look at Keith as if he’d suddenly turned into an untouchable. This surprises us all, since usually he is so expert. Yet he simply articulated the Mayavadi mentality of us all. We sit in stunned silence, not daring to venture further.

“Did you see how red Swamiji got?” I ask Wally afterwards. “Boy, was he angry!”

“But he’s right,” Wally says. “All the commentators try to avoid Krishna. You’ve read *Bhagavad-gita* before. Until meeting Swamiji, did you ever think of worshipping Krishna?”

I have to admit that it never crossed my mind.

Thus we discover that we are also Mayavadi impersonalists. Addicted to inactivity and hedonism, we know nothing of spiritual personality and action. Swamiji has to shout loud indeed to make us understand that God is a person and that action for His sake is on the spiritual platform.

"This is *Bhagavad-gita*'s most essential message," Swamiji says the next morning. "Lord Krishna tells Arjuna to fight, but He says, 'Do it for Me.' When we work for Krishna and chant His name, we are already liberated and living on the spiritual plane. Just as a person feels heat when he touches something hot, you are liberated as soon as you enter into the service of Krishna."

We all feel as though we've just touched something very hot. There is no doubt that our long slumber is being disturbed.

"We are declaring war," Swamiji says. "War on *maya*."

* * *

Soon after we declare war on Mayadevi, she strikes.

"When Mayadevi sees that you are beginning devotional service," Swamiji says, "you can expect her to attack."

Keith is the first casualty because he is first to try to please Swamiji by wearing robes and shaving his head, leaving only the *sikha*, the Vaishnava tuft of hair in the back. Although the Lower East Side is a nonconformist neighborhood, the combination of robes, beadbag, *sikha* and *tilak* forehead marking is unique. In fact, it is outrageous. A person can be immediately categorized with long hair and beard, but there is no way he can dress like a devotee—that is, like Swamiji—and still blend in with the hip New York scene. About everything, there is the outrageous factor: shaving the head would be all right, save for the *sikha* in back; the robes also have a kind of tail in back; and when the hand is put in the beadbag, one finger sticks out. And the *tilak*—mud!—on the face! Traffic stops to marvel as Keith walks to the First Avenue vegetable markets to buy food for the temple. Seeing public reaction to Keith, the rest of us delay shaving up and wearing robes.

When Swamiji informs us that full-time devotees can live free in the temple, Keith moves in at once. Then, out of a desire to help financially, he goes down to the Department of Welfare. After some

hours, we receive a frantic phone call from him. It seems that to collect welfare, he needed a psychiatric evaluation. When he went to Bellevue Hospital to find a psychiatrist, he unwittingly signed himself in.

"They tricked me," he tells me on the phone. "I signed a form to see a doctor, but now they've locked me up. It's horrible here. Just get me out."

Before hanging up, he sounds about to break down. I assure him that we'll help get him out some way.

"I never suggested that he collect welfare," Swamiji says after I tell him. "How can they just lock him away?"

"I think someone has to commit you," I say, "or you have to sign yourself in." Swamiji shakes his head.

"Then take him some *chapatis*," he says.

* * *

The visiting hour is from two until three in the afternoon. Charles makes the *chapatis* and packs some rice and bananas in a paper bag. Wally and I then take the *prasadam* up to Bellevue, walking to save bus fare.

At two p.m. sharp, a bell rings, and we are allowed entry through locked pea-green doors. Keith hurries toward us, looking like an old-time inmate with shaved head and a white hospital gown.

"So, they let you keep the *sikha*," I say.

"They took away my beads," he complains. "That's the worst part. A couple of inmates are chanting with me, though."

"Swamiji's disturbed," I tell him. "He needs you to help with the cooking. He wants to know when you're getting out."

“They tell me just a couple of days,” he says, “but some people have been in here for months. Everything’s vague. They like playing games, trying to push you over the edge.”

“They’re just watching you,” I say. “It’s called the Observation Ward.”

“Next time you come, bring me something to read,” he says. “Anything of Swamiji’s. All I have are the *Narada Bhakti-sutras*. They’re beautiful, though. I didn’t understand them in India.”

We promise to return the next day with *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and more *prasadam*.

* * *

Back at Second Avenue, Swamiji hands me a new ten-page essay compiled from a lecture. On the first page he has handwritten the title: “Who Is Crazy?”

“They are saying that he is crazy, he tells me, “but actually *Srimad-Bhagavatam* says that those who are struggling day and night for a little food and sex enjoyment are crazy. And the man engaged in devotional service is sane. for he knows the real goal of human life. That’s the criterion.”

I take the essay from him and begin typing the stencil. “You may give it to his psychiatrists,” he adds as an afterthought. “They may read and benefit.”

We mimeograph about a hundred copies of the essay and the next afternoon take a few down to the Observation Ward.

Keith and the inmates are delighted to receive them. The on-duty psychiatrist, however, is irate. “Don’t you know what I can do to you?” he threatens us.

Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta

TWO ESSAYS



Krishna The Reservoir of Pleasure

&

Who Is Crazy?

50¢

Wally and I try to talk to him about Krishna consciousness, but he quickly interrupts. “You believe in a personal God?” he asks. “Why are you so insecure? The idea of a personal God went out seven hundred years ago.”

When we give him the “Who Is Crazy?” essay, he says, “Wrong move,” and the discussion ends. Seeing what Keith is up against, we bid him good luck.

“Krishna says that His devotee will never be vanquished,” Wally reminds him. Still, Keith looks at us helplessly, Swamiji’s essay in his hand.

When the visiting hour ends, the heavy doors slam shut.

* * *

August 31, the 27th Anniversary of World War 11. An organization called The Beliefs of Man has invited Swamiji to a United Nations Peace Vigil. The vigil is supposed to last round the clock until September 20, when the General Assembly convenes.

At eight in the morning, we accompany Swamiji to the Peace Circle just opposite the U. N. Building on the East River. Apart from us, the Circle is vacant. The day is already hot, and there is no breeze off the river.

Our eyes fixed on Swamiji, we begin clashing cymbals and chanting Hare Krishna. Within minutes, a guard informs us that we’re causing too much disturbance. This is a peace vigil, and vigils are quiet affairs. Swamiji assents and stands with us on the sidewalk, abandoning the *kirtan* and chanting softly on his beads instead.

We stand chanting Hare Krishna softly until we tire; then we sit and chant. The few passers-by must think us very, very strange. We sit in a semicircle, and Swarmji sits facing us, his right hand in his

beadbag, his brow furrowed, expression grave, as he chants *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*.

After chanting quietly for four hours, we hardly care what people think. Swamiji certainly doesn't. His only concern is serving Krishna, even if it means sitting on the sidewalk by the East River.

In the afternoon, we return to Second Avenue.

"We have nothing to do with these peace vigils," he tells us. "We just want to spread this chanting of Hare Krishna, that's all. Once people take to this chanting, peace will automatically come. They won't have to try artificially for peace then."

The next morning, our photo appears in The New York Post. The reporter refers to Swamiji as "Swami Krishna."

The war rages on in Vietnam.

"As long as people eat meat, there will always be wars," Swamiji says. "By eating meat, they are developing the mentalities of tigers. And so they go on killing and being killed."

It is not good to chant for political purposes, he informs us. Gandhi used *Bhagavad-gita* to further his political philosophy, and Gandhi's commentaries, interpreting the Battle of Kurukshetra allegorically, show that he didn't really accept Krishna and Arjuna as historical personages.

"Gandhi wanted to prove nonviolence from *Bhagavad-gita*," he says, "but *Bhagavad-gita* was spoken on a battlefield, and Arjuna's problem was whether to fight or not to fight. Violence is there in *Bhagavad-gita*. How can you say it isn't? Why present some word jugglery and mislead the people by saying otherwise? Gandhi was having *Bhagavad-gita* classes morning and evening, and *Bhagavad-gita* was his life and soul, but unfortunately he interpreted it in his own way. That is not the way to understand *Bhagavad-gita*. By the worldly

estimation, Gandhi was a very great man, and a good man by his character and behavior. His personality was ideal. He spoke for nonviolence, but he was killed by violence. And although he worked his whole life for unification of Hindus and Moslems, India was partitioned."

"So, Gandhi ultimately failed?" Roy asks.

"For success, we have to follow the right person in the disciplic succession set by Lord Krishna," Swamiji says. "Krishna did not advocate nonviolence. You cannot eradicate violence from this world. Krishna tells Arjuna, 'You must fight!' We must be careful not to interpret Krishna in our own way. For proper understanding, we must follow in the footprints of the *mahajans*, the great personalities."

"In what cases is violence permitted?" I ask.

"According to *Shastra*," Swamiji says, "if someone burns down your house, or takes away your land, or gives poison, or kidnaps your wife, you can kill him. That is self defense, not violence. But whimsically, we cannot kill even an ant.

"Some years ago, at Jhansi, I was invited on Gandhi's birthday to speak about nonviolence. So, I said that violence means to check a person from the discharge of his duties. From my viewpoint, that is violence. Every man's prime duty in life is to reestablish his lost relationship with God. That is everyone's birthright. A civilization that is checking this duty is committing the most virulent type of violence. If people are not educated in this light, if they are being misled, then they are victims of the greatest violence. Human life is meant for crossing this ocean of material existence. Those who try to impede this progress are called *atma-hanah*, killers of the soul."

Roy asks if we should return to the U.N. tomorrow.

"No, why should we?" Swamiji says. "They were not permitting

our *kirtan*. Besides, we should not chant for ulterior motives such as mundane peace. We should ask only for Krishna's causeless devotional service birth after birth. That is Lord Chaitanya's prayer. And Hare Krishna *sankirtan* is the supreme peace formula.

"What do they know about peace? Modern civilization is cats and dogs fighting. Nothing more."

Is Swamiji impressed by the United Nations?

"They are just putting up flags, that's all. Each nation is thinking, 'This is my land.' There will be one world only when people accept one God, Krishna, and one scripture, *Bhagavad-gita*, and one occupation, the loving service of Krishna. Otherwise they will just keep on adding flags."

* * *

That evening, at the end of the lecture, Swamiji announces that we will soon have initiation.

"What's that?" Stanley asks.

"I'll tell you later," Swarmji says, and returns to his room. This sets off a wave of discussions and speculation.

"Just what is he talking about?" I ask Roy.

"I understand it's a kind of formality," he says. "It means accepting the Swami officially as spiritual master.

"And what else?"

"Well, nobody's quite sure, he laughs. "We'll have to wait and see. "It's a tradition in India," Wally says, "to accept a *guru*."

"Isn't he already our *guru*?" I ask. "What's going to change?"

“Swamiji mentioned something about a fire sacrifice,” Roy says. “Fire sacrifice?!”

Just what is Swamiji planning? The more we learn, the more we feel that we are being led into unknown spiritual territory.

The next morning, after the lecture, Stanley raises his hand and asks. “Swamiji, some of us are wondering what initiation actually means,” he says in his most humble manner.

At first, Swamiji doesn’t answer, but sits quietly on the dais, his head held high. A long minute passes as we await his answer. “Yes,” he finally says, clearing his throat. “Now I will tell you. Initiation means that the spiritual master accepts the student and agrees to take charge of him, and the student accepts the spiritual master and agrees to worship him as God.”

There is a stunned, thoughtful silence. Had a bomb exploded, we couldn’t be more shocked. Swamiji sits as immobile as a statue, his head still high in the air, his eyes darting from person to person. A strange tension fills the room. He awaits further questions, and when there is none, he gets up and walks out without saying another word.

Everyone suddenly starts talking at once. I turn to Wally. “He just blew my mind,” I say. “Mine too,” Wally says.

No one quite knows what to say. Just a week before, Swamiji said, “Whenever anyone claims to be God, he should be considered dog.

* * *

That afternoon, when we visit Keith in Bellevue, we tell him about our confusion.

“I don’t know if I want to be initiated now,” Wally says. “I don’t think I can worship Swamiji as God.” Keith sees no inconsistency.

“Aren’t you already doing that?” he asks. “You’re accepting whatever he tells you.”

“We should get it all cleared up,” I say.

“Yes,” Keith says. “Before initiation. There shouldn’t be any doubt in your mind. Ask Swamiji exactly what he means.”

* * *

Back at the temple, we confer with the others, then go up to Swamiji’s apartment.

“We’re confused,” I say. “We don’t really know what initiation means. You said that we’re supposed to consider the spiritual master God.”

“This means that he’s due all the respect of God,” Swamiji says. “He’s God’s representative.”

“Then he’s not God?”

“God is God,” he says patiently, “but the spiritual master is as good as God because he can deliver God. Just try to understand. The government agent is as good as the government because the government has empowered him. So we say that he is a representative. Is that clear?”

“Yes,” we say, relieved.

“It is the Mayavadis, the impersonalists, who claim to be God,” he adds. “They think that by merging, they can deny personality. But a Vaishnava devotee never thinks this way. From *Bhagavad-gita*, we understand that individuality is kept even after the highest liberation. Otherwise, there is no question of any relationship, of any service, or reciprocation in love.

"So, your question shows that you are serious about understanding. This means hearing carefully. My Guru Maharaj used to say that you have to select a spiritual master not by seeing but by hearing. Don't choose someone just because he has long hair or a beard, or some beautiful bodily feature. No. You must hear. The Vedic process is based on *sruti*: submissive aural reception. Then *pranipata*: surrender. *Nipata* means a blank slate. We should not approach a bona fide spiritual master Just to argue with him. Nor should we blindly accept. We should be intelligent enough to inquire sincerely, to ask questions, just as you are asking questions now, and then to render service.

"Nor should we judge a spiritual master by material calculations. My Guru Maharaj's spiritual master was Gaura Kishora das Babaji, who was completely illiterate. Although my Guru Maharaj was the most learned scholar of his age, he accepted Gaura Kishora as his spiritual master. Even though Gaura Kishora could not even sign his name, he would always refer to the *Vedas* when speaking.

yasya deve parā bhaktir
yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ
prakāśante mahātmanaḥ

'Only unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master are all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed."'

Although we are not great souls with implicit faith, we are satisfied that Swamiji will not lead us astray. He tells us that the initiation ceremony is scheduled for September 9, a most auspicious time, the day after Janmastami, Lord Krishna's appearance day. We have till then to decide.

End of Chapter 3

Chapter 4. Second Avenue Fire Sacrifice

September 8, 1966. Janmastami. Lord Krishna, we learn, is not born like an ordinary child. He appears. Five thousand years ago, in Mathura, India, He appeared as four-armed Narayana, attired in His transcendental garments. At His mother's request, He assumed a two-armed form, like an ordinary child. Sri Krishna is most obliging to His devotees.

"Today we will fast," Swamiji tells us. "Normally we do not fast all day. Krishna consciousness is not for one who eats too much or too little. Gandhi fasted many days for political reasons, but we don't. In *Bhagavad-gita*, that kind of fasting is considered *rajasic*, or passionate. We fast according to regulations: Ekadasi, the eleventh day of the full moon, we take no grains. That is a partial fast. And Janmastami, there is complete fast all day until midnight. So today we will fast and chant, and tomorrow there will be initiation."

There are eleven of us to be initiated. Roy buys us beads for chanting, a hundred and eight round wooden beads the size of marbles. Standing in the courtyard behind the temple, I string them into a rosary called a *japa-mala*. While chanting, I carefully slide each bright, red bead up the string and then knot it. It takes hours to complete knotting all the beads. When I ask Swamiji why there are a hundred and eight, he tells me that they represent the *gopis*, the Vrindaban cowherd girls beloved of Lord Krishna.

In the afternoon, Stanley and I walk over to the Orchard Street flea market, buy cotton cloth, and dye it saffron in Swamiji's bathtub. We then cut the cloth in lengths of about four yards for robes. Stanley even goes so far as to shave his head, but the rest of us balk at this, especially after seeing what happened to Keith. Besides, many of us wear long hair with a certain perverse pride, considering that it identifies us as members of the hip scene. We are the Hair Generation.

"In Kali-yuga, people think they will be beautiful just by wearing

long hair," Swamiji says. "That is the verdict of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. "

We deliberate on this. Mercifully, Swamiji does not insist on our shaving, nor on the wearing of robes. When, in the late afternoon, some of us become restless and hungry from fasting, Swamiji tells us that there's fruit in the refrigerator.

"If you are feeling weak, take," he says.

We don't, but allow ourselves some water instead. For most of us, fasting until midnight is the most severe austerity we have ever undertaken.

After evening *kirtan*, we request Swamiji to read from his new manuscript, and he sends Roy upstairs to bring down his translation of *Bhagavad-gita*. This, we feel, is a special event. At last we won't have to hear the impersonalist Radhakrishnan translation! As in the First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the translations are supplemented with Swamiji's elaborate purports explaining all aspects of the verse in the Vaishnava personalist tradition.

After the reading, Swamiji relates the story of Lord Krishna's appearance some five thousand years ago.

"Those who can understand the nature of Krishna's advent are not born again," he says, "but attain the abode of Krishna. That is Sri Krishna's promise to Arjuna in the battlefield."

He then tells of the midnight birth of Lord Krishna in the prison of His demonic uncle, King Kamsa.

"The Lord's appearance can be likened to the rising of the full moon in the sky," he tells us. "He appeared to His devotee-parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, fully decorated, dressed in yellow silks, holding in His four hands the conch shell, club, disc, and lotus flower, and wearing beautiful ornaments. Since the evil King Kamsa was killing all

of Devaki's children, Vasudeva took Krishna to Vrindaban, where He was raised as the son of Nanda Maharaj, a wealthy owner of many cowherds."

After describing the birth of Lord Krishna, Swamiji begins to talk of tomorrow's initiation, telling us that there are four basic restrictions for all initiates: No meat eating (including eggs and fish), no gambling, no illicit sex, and no intoxicants (including alcohol, cigarets, LSD, marijuana, tea, and coffee).

"For spiritual advancement, purification is necessary," he says. "Some so-called devotees smoke and drink and talk about Krishna, but this is a mockery. To really understand Krishna, we must be pure inside and out. Only pure chanting can bring real spiritual advancement. Beginners may tend to relax their efforts, but to advance, we must constantly increase our efforts and devotion. It is difficult for a beginner to follow these regulative principles and keep his mind on Krishna if he associates with skeptics; therefore we've established this society.

"Years ago, when one of my God-brothers went to England, one certain aristocrat asked, 'What can I do to become a *brahmin*?' My God-brother told him that first of all he must refrain from meat eating, intoxication, gambling, and illicit sex. 'Impossible!' the aristocrat replied." Swamiji laughs heartily. "He was thinking that this is impossible because material life revolves around these four sinful activities. People are working hard day and night just to enjoy these four pillars of Kali-yuga. Kali-yuga is the most degraded age, and Maharaj Parikshit restricted the personality Kali to live in places where these four sinful activities take place. So you must very carefully avoid them. By chanting regularly and maintaining these regulative principles, you can make progress. There's no doubt.

* * *

All the rules set us pondering, but no one says anything. What are we to do? Object? Complain? How will it be possible to change

overnight the habits of a lifetime, or several lifetimes? If we truly desired to change our lives, we would throw ourselves at the feet of Lord Krishna and rely on His protection. But what do we know of Krishna? We can only look toward Swamiji. “Whatever impedes Krishna consciousness should be rejected, he says, “and whatever helps should be accepted.” Before his purity, sex, meat eating, intoxication, and gambling seem nasty indeed. They are *anarthas*, unwanted things.

“Your sinful *karma* is like a revolving fan,” Swamiji explains. “By chanting Hare Krishna, you turn it off. The fan may still revolve for a while after being turned off, but since it is getting no more juice, it will soon stop.”

“When it stops, does it stop for good?” someone asks.

“You know where the switch is,” Swamiji says. “You can always turn it back on.”

Despite reservations and anticipated difficulties, we place our budding faith in Swamiji. By chanting and hearing him discuss *Bhagavad-gita*, we trust that the rest will follow. if not, what’s there to lose in trying?

“In this effort there is no loss or diminution,” Krishna tells Arjuna, “and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear.”

“We are all trying to squeeze some enjoyment out of these material bodies,” Swamiji says. “But instead of enjoying, we’re suffering. Have I told you of the camel? Sometimes the camel eats thorny branches, and his mouth bleeds. Tasting his own blood, he thinks that the thorns are very savory, and so he just keeps on chewing. Material pleasure is like that. We think we are enjoying, but actually we’re drinking our own blood. This is due to ignorance.”

* * *

We continue chanting on our new beads all evening. None of us has ever before chanted for such a long time, and, despite fasting all day, we feel mysteriously energized. As midnight approaches, we hungrily envision the great birthday feast of Lord Krishna, mountains of succulent *prasadam*: cake and *kachoris*, *halava* and *puris*, *sabji*, sweet rice, *samosas* and *gulabjamuns*. Just a few minutes before midnight, Swamiji finally descends from his kitchen with the *prasadam*. But our faces drop. There is only a platter of cut fruit.

"Oh no!" I whisper to Wally. "Is this all we get after starving all day?"

The expression on everyone's face reflects the general disappointment. Without saying anything, Swarmji gives the plate to Roy, who passes it around.

"We'll never make it," Wally says, taking a slice of apple and half a banana. But to our surprise, the small serving of fruit satisfies us perfectly.

Whether fasting or feasting, when we are with Swamiji, we are having fun—that's all we know. For us, he is a sage, grandfather, spiritual master, and favorite uncle all rolled into one. Sitting on the dais, eating a little fruit with us, he chats about seemingly mundane topics, and laughs.

"Chanting, dancing, eating *prasadam*, philosophizing," he says. "That is our process. Who would not like it?"

Yes, who would not like it, eternally, in Swamiji's company? Though we do not say it, we feel in our hearts that he is our only link to Krishna in a dark and lonely world.

* * *

"Now that you have beads," Swamiji says the next morning, "you

should chant sixty-four rounds every day."

"Sixty-four rounds?" To pronounce every word of the *mantra* distinctly, we require five minutes to chant a round. Sixty-four rounds would take over five hours. "Impossible!" we say. "We'll never have the time."

"All right," Swamiji says. "Thirty-two rounds."

"'Impossible," we say. "We'll never be able to do it. It's way too much."

"All right," Swamiji says. "Sixteen rounds. No less."

After the *kirtan*, Swamiji requests us to chant one round, and the little storefront vibrates with the *mantra*. It is most soothing. It drowns out even the constant Second Avenue cacophony of traffic, kids, and barking dogs. "It is best to chant all your rounds early in the day," he says. "Actually, before the sunrise. Perhaps this you cannot do, but at least try to have sixteen rounds chanted by midday. Of course, chanting should go on all the time. There is no restriction."

"Even when we go to the bathroom?" I ask.

"Yes," Swamiji laughs. "Even then. Of course, you must not take your beads into the bathroom. But the *mantra* you can chant all the time."

* * *

That afternoon, Wally and I again visit Keith in Bellevue. He is glad to hear that we've cleared everything up with Swamiji.

"Tonight we're taking initiation," I tell him. "There's to be a fire sacrifice."

"I'd give anything to be there," he says. "I finally got to see a

psychiatrist today, but no word yet."

"Swamiji says that we'll have a special initiation for you when you get out," I say. "He really needs you to help with the cooking."

"I try to sit down and read Narada," he says, "but the wards won't let me sit still. They keep harassing me for some reason. I've gotten a few boys to chant, though. They don't know what to do about that."

"Careful, don't antagonize them," Wally advises. "Remember that you want out. Swamij's waiting for you."

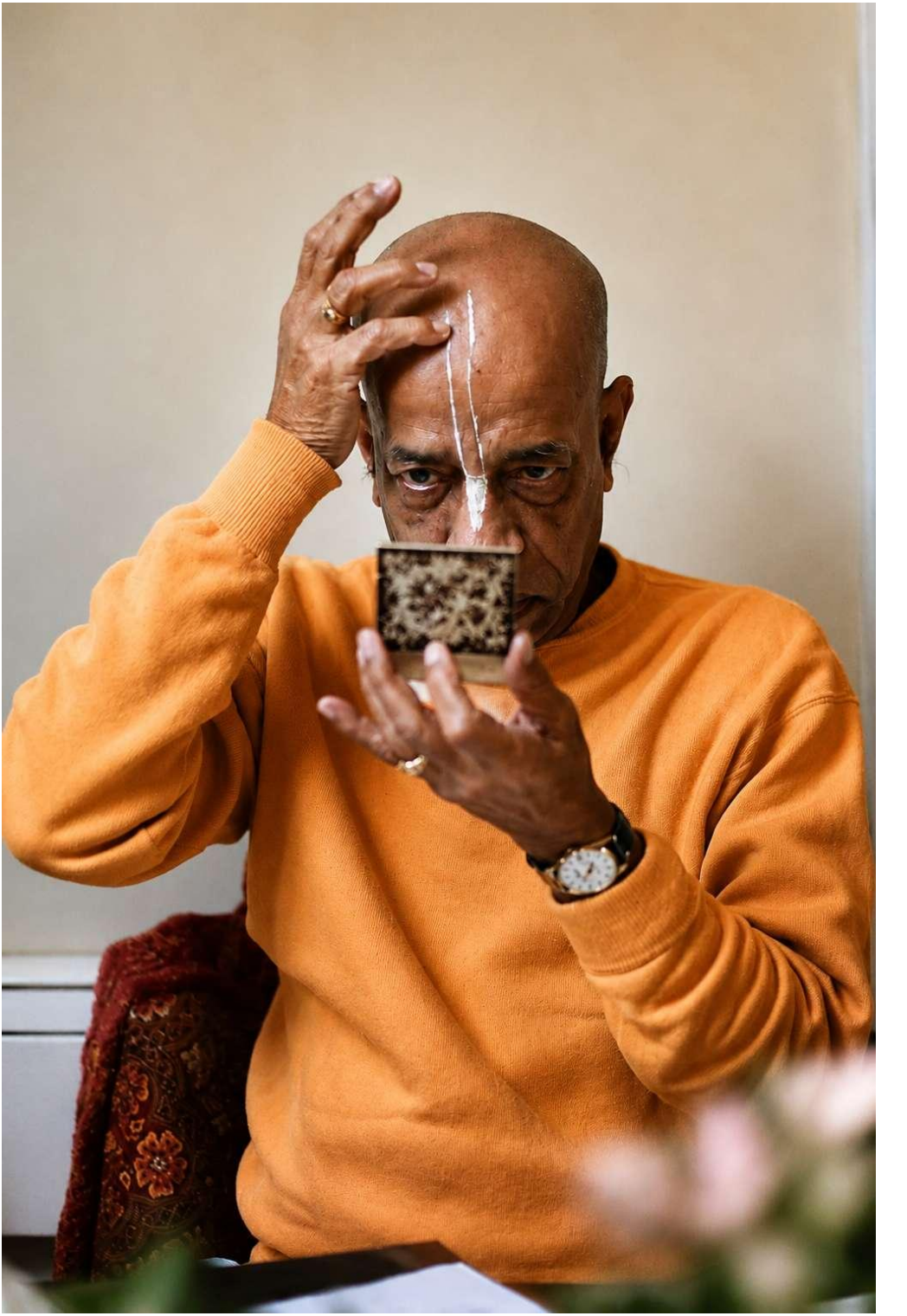
Despite laughter and words of encouragement, we don't succeed in cheering him up.

* * *

In the afternoon, following Swamiji's directions, we prepare for the initiation by getting soil, sticks, flowers, clarified butter (ghee), sesame seeds and barley, various colored dyes, and bananas—all, we are told, for the fire sacrifice.

That evening, Stanley and I put on robes for the first time. Swamiji shows us how to wrap the *dhotis* around our waists and tie them Vaishnava style. Since my material is unusually long, I've difficulty keeping the *dhoti* from falling down. Seeing this, Swamiji pulls the knot tight, like a ship's captain securing lifelines, determined not to lose a man in the ocean of *maya*. He approves of the turtle-neck saffron T-shirts we bought on Orchard Street to match the robes.

When all eleven of us are assembled in his apartment, Swamiji leads us into the altar room and shows us how to put on *tilak*. Following his example, we carefully mix the fuller's earth in our palms with water.



"This should be mud from the holy river Jamuna," he tells us, "but here, this will have to do." Then we put the moist clay on our foreheads before a little hand mirror. Somehow I can't make the Vaishnava "V" as Swamiji did, and I wind up with a smeared variation. Seeing this, Swamiji swiftly runs his finger down my forehead, and I look in the mirror and see a perfectly formed *tilak* marking.

"My Guru Maharaj would never use a mirror," Swamiji says, "but his *tilak* was always perfect. He would never see a disciple unless the disciple was wearing *tilak*."

Although the complex ritual is mysterious to us, Swamiji somehow makes it seem perfectly natural and proper. All we really know about the initiation ceremony is that it is to be a fire sacrifice (*agnihotra-yajna*) in the ancient Vedic style. This in itself captivates us.

In the center of the room stands a small mound of earth, and placed beside it are bananas, kindling, incense, a pot of ghee, sesame seeds, barley grain, and colored dyes. Swamiji sits on the floor in front of the mound and gestures for us to sit on the other side. Since the room is small, the eleven of us fill all the space, sitting cross-legged, knee to knee, on the floor. Only three of us wear robes; the others are dressed casually in dungarees and T-shirts. Some guests stand in the back room and stare curiously through the opened door and partition. We chant Hare Krishna softly in order not to disturb the neighbors. At eight p.m., Swamiji lights the incense and softly begins to recite Gayatri *mantra*, offering obeisances first to the sun god.

"*Om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ tat sabitur...*"

He indicates that we are all to chant Hare Krishna on our beads, and suddenly the room is buzzing with *mantra*.

Then Swamiji takes a spoon in his left hand and drops water thrice into his right hand from a tiny silver goblet. He sips the water, places one more spoonful in the right hand, and flicks it on the floor. He passes

the goblet and spoon around, and we follow suit. Despite the simplicity of the act, some of us place the water in the wrong hand or sip it at the wrong time, and he patiently corrects us. After we get the knack of it, he begins chanting.

"Now repeat after me," he says, invoking the purificatory *mantra*.

apavitraḥ pavitro vā
sarvāvasthāṁ gato 'pi vā
yaḥ smaret puṇḍarīkākṣaṁ
sa bāhyābhyantaraḥ śuciḥ

We try our best to pronounce the words after him.

Translation: "Unpurified or purified, even having passed through all situations, one who remembers the lotus-eyed Supreme Personality of Godhead is cleansed within and without."

After we thrice repeat the Sanskrit, Swamiji raises his hand for silence. He then reminds us that we should never fret when confronted with adversities, for we should always know that Lord Krishna is driving our chariot.

"Krishna and Arjuna sat in the same chariot," he tells us. "But Arjuna knew that Krishna is the Supreme. We are also in a kind of chariot with Krishna. That chariot is this material body, and within the heart Lord Krishna is present as the Supersoul, witnessing all our activities. Even though He accompanies us within the material world, Krishna is never attached. He does not act out of need because He has no desires. He is Paramatma, the Supersoul, and we are *jiva-atma*, the individual fragmental souls. In the *Upanishads*, these are compared to two birds sitting in the same tree, the tree of the body. One bird, *jiva-atma*, is enjoying the fruits of the tree, while the other bird, Paramatma, just sits and watches. These two birds have an eternal transcendental loving relationship, but the one bird has become so absorbed in enjoying the tree's fruits that he has forgotten his Friend. This

forgetfulness of Krishna is called *maya*. Still, His love for us is so great that whenever we transmigrate from one body to another, Krishna goes with us to see what we are doing. He is simply waiting for us to turn our face toward Him. As soon as we turn our face toward Krishna, He says, 'My dear son, come on. You are eternally dear to Me. Now you are turning your face to Me, so I am very glad.'

"Krishna is always fulfilling our desires. If we want to turn away from Him, He allows us. And if we want to suffer, He lets us. But an intelligent man will ask, 'Why am I suffering? I do not want to grow old and die, but I must.' Why are we undergoing all this suffering? For a little sense gratification, that's all. Here, everyone is simply mad after sense gratification. Over and over, people are chewing the chewed. You have chewed sugarcane? After sugarcane is chewed, there is no more juice. It is to be spat out. But still, thinking there is some enjoyment in this material world, people are chewing the chewed. And what is the result? Although people are searching for eternal pleasure, they are only suffering.

When you begin to question this suffering, it is time to approach a bona fide spiritual master who can teach you how to put an end to suffering.…

"We are not meant for suffering but for eternal enjoyment. We are not this dull matter, but Brahman, spirit soul, part and parcel of the Supreme Brahman, Lord Krishna. And when we realize our nature as Brahman, we become joyful. *Brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā* …."

His talk continues for some thirty minutes. Legs aching, we try to modify our cross-legged positions, even as Swamiji tells us that we are not these bodies. But at no time can we take our eyes off him. With his words, he captivates us. Once again, he reminds us to follow the four basic regulative principles against meat eating, illicit sex, intoxication, and gambling.

"These are the four trademarks of this age of Kali," he says. "In

this age, men are short-lived , ignorant, quarrelsome, forgetful, and always anxious. So let us put all this nonsense aside, chant Hare Krishna, be happy and go back home, back to Godhead."

As the lecture ends, Roy passes out small wooden neck beads, called *kanthi* beads, and we put them on one another, tying them in back.

"Hey, how do you get these off?" Wally asks.

"You don't," Stanley says. "They're collars for Krishna's dogs."

Then, one by one, Swamiji takes our *japa* beads and chants on them, reciting the complete Hare Krishna *mantra* on each one of the hundred and eight beads. We chant also, and the drone of our voices fills the tiny room. Then we individually receive our beads and our new spiritual names. Mike Grant becomes Mukunda, Jan becomes Janaki, Wally becomes Umapati, Carl becomes Karlapati, Stanley becomes Stryadhisa, Roy becomes Rayarama, Stan Moskowitz becomes Satyabrata, Jim Greene becomes Jagannatha, Bill Epstein becomes Ravindra-svarupa, Janos, visiting from Montreal, becomes Janardana.

Swamiji beckons to me, and I move forward and hand him the large, red *japa* beads. After chanting the round, Swamlji gives the beads back. They are now sanctified.

"You start here," he says, "and chant around like this to here. Don't cross over. Then back around like this. Sixteen rounds a day. And your name is Hayagriva."

I take the beads with my right hand, hold them tightly, and bow to the floor, reciting the *mantra*: "*Nama oṁ viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*."

"I offer my obeisances unto His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, who is very dear to Lord Krishna, having taken shelter at His

lotus feet."

While reciting this, I sense everything becoming lighter and brighter, as if the whole room is brightening and the burden of many lifetimes is being dispersed. Out of compassion and mercy, the spiritual master absorbs the sinful reactions of his disciples' *karma*.

"The word *guru* means heavy," Swamiji had told us, leaving it to us to understand why.

* * *

After chanting on all eleven sets of beads, Swamiji sprinkles the colored dyes up and down and sideways on the mound of earth before him. We all strain to watch each move. He dips the twigs and wooden splinters in clarified butter, then lights them with a candle. One by one, he takes up the splinters and builds a small fire on the mound. He then mixes the sesame seeds, barley, and clarified butter in a bowl and passes it around, telling us to scoop up handfuls. As he recites the Sanskrit prayers, we repeat the words:

vande 'haṁ
śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṁ
śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṁś ca

"I offer my obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master and unto the feet of all Vaishnavas."

In Sanskrit, we also offer obeisances unto the major teachers in the disciplic succession. Each prayer is ended by the word *svaha*, thrice repeated. When we say "*sva-HAH*," we throw the sesame seeds and barley onto the *karma*-consuming fire. Meanwhile, Swamiji continues pouring on butter, sesame seeds, and barley, and piling up kindling until the mound is blazing. The prayers flow on with rhythmic *svaha's*, seemingly endless, and as we continue the litany, the flames rise, and the room heats up. When the prayers finally end, we can hear only the

crackling of the fire and popping of sesame seeds.

Someone distributes bananas, and Swamiji tells us to put them on the fire. We do so, and the bananas quickly begin to smoulder. As the smoke thickens, some guests begin coughing and retreating into the hallway. Swamiji calmly pours the remaining butter and seeds onto the fire. We wonder if someone will panic and call the fire department. A strange sight indeed for New York firemen: Swamiji, unaffected amidst the smoke, sitting in front of the fire, beaming with pleasure at his eleven new disciples.

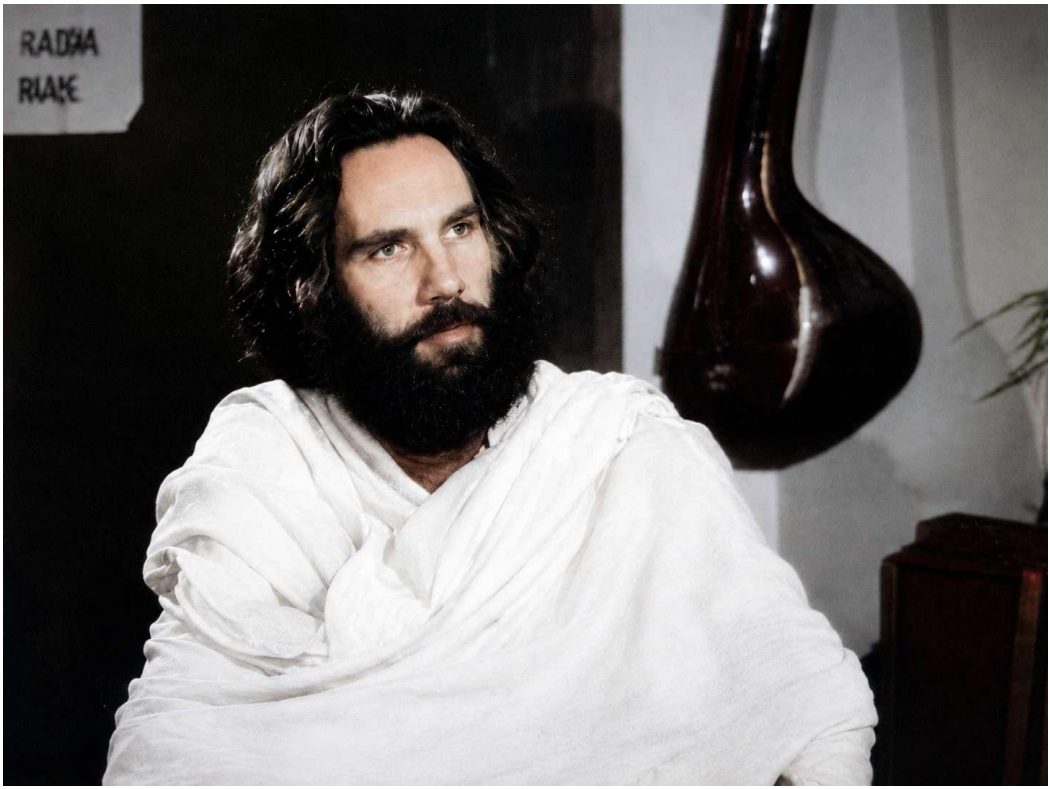
"This kind of smoke does not disturb," he says, as Mukunda and Janaki rush to open windows. "Other smoke disturbs, but this kind of smoke does not."

Smiling broadly, Swamiji stands up, claps his hands, and chants Hare Krishna loudly. Placing one foot before the other, he dances beside the fire. We also dance and chant, and the smoke slowly abates. Our sinful *karma* burned to ashes!

The sacrifice completed, Swamiji mixes some ashes with the remnants of butter and places a little on our foreheads. I ask him the meaning of my new spiritual name. "Hayagriva is an incarnation of Krishna who comes in Satya-yuga, the Golden Age," he says. "Hayagriva means bird-horse. As Hayagriva, Krishna has a horse's head and wings like a bird. When He breathes, the *Vedas* come out."

Trying to picture Hayagriva, I imagine the Greek god Pegasus, logotype of the Mobil filling station outside.

"Not that you are Hayagriva," Swamiji quickly warns. "But Hayagriva-das. *Das* means servant, servant of Hayagriva. We are all servants of God. Mukunda means Krishna, the giver of liberation. Therefore, Mukunda-das-brahmachari. Rayarama-das-brahmachari. *Brahmachari* means celibate student."



Hayagriva-das



Mukunda-das-brahmachari



Wally becomes Umapati

While *prasadam* is distributed, Swamiji talks to the guests, urging them to follow the example of his new disciples. He laughs and jokes happily, explaining the meaning of each name.

As midnight nears, we all leave for our apartments, eleven previously unacquainted people by destiny chosen out of a city of millions, joined by a strange holyman from another land, perhaps another universe, bound by his desire to spread Krishna consciousness in America.

End of Chapter 4

Chapter 5. The Hare Krishna Explosion

"If Krishna sees you are taking one step toward Him," Swamiji says, "He will take ten toward you. He is so happy to see you turn to Him. He is more eager to see us return to Godhead than we are to go."

Back in the Mott Street apartment, I stare at myself in the mirror and repeat my new name. "Now you are Krishna's," I think, inspecting the new *kanthi* beads around my neck. "These are Krishna's dog collars, and they don't come off."

We all optimistically resolve to try to follow the rules. For most of us, meat eating and gambling pose no problems. Rules governing sex and intoxicants, however, force some rapid changes in living patterns. I decide to convert the old Mott Street apartment into a *brahmachari ashram*. Down come the psychedelic posters, and up go pictures of lotus-eyed Krishna.

The next day at the temple, we find a new notice posted on the bathroom door. There are additional rules and regulations written neatly in ink by Swamiji himself.

NOTICE

All initiated devotees must attend morning and evening classes. Must not be addicted to any kind of intoxicants, including coffee, tea and cigarettes. They are forbidden to have illicit sex-connections. Must be strictly vegetarian. Should not extensively mix with non-devotees. Should not eat foodstuffs cooked by non-devotees. Should not waste time in idle talks nor engage in frivolous sports. Should always chant and sing the Lord's holy names, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna. Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

Thank you.
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, Acharya

NOTICE

All initiated devotees must attend morning and evening classes.

Must not be addicted to any kind of intoxicaste including coffee, tea and cigarettes.

They are forbidden to have illicit sex-connection.

Must be strictly vegetarian.

Should not extensively mix with non-devotees

Should not eat foodstuff cooked by non-devotees

Should not waste time in idle talks nor Engage himself in frivolous sports.

Should always chant and sing the Lord's Holy names

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Hare.

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.

---

thank you,

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami
Acharya.

International
Society for Krishna Consciousness.
26 Second Avenue
New York N.Y.

Dated Nov. 25, 1966

Umapati says nothing when he reads the notice. Rayarama simply chuckles. “No coffee, no tea,” he says, shaking his head.

With dismay we begin to realize that more than hamburgers are off limits. We’re all fond of coffee and tea, and it’s hard to imagine breakfast without eggs. Besides, breads, hot cakes, ice cream, and cookies usually have eggs in them. Also, “no foodstuff cooked by non-devotees” excludes all restaurants, quick food shops, and even most packaged supermarket foods. And no yeast, garlic, onions, and mushrooms puts an end to pizza. Somebody even points out that most cheeses are made with rennet—cow’s stomach!

“I’m ninety percent lenient,” Swamiji says, laughing. “If I were to tell you everything at once, you’d faint.”

* * *

As Keith enters his second week in Bellevue, Umapati and I continue taking him fruit and *chapatis*. Daily, the hospital doctors give us some hope, and then delight in crushing it.

“A private psychiatrist and my parents can get me out,” Keith tells us. The doctors have diagnosed Keith as a “malignant schizophrenic.”

When Swamiji hears, he shakes his head sadly.

“We are all at Krishna’s mercy,” he says. “When we have these material bodies, we have to undergo so many difficulties. Haridas Thakur was scourged for his devotion to Krishna and then thrown into a river for dead. Yet at no time did Haridas complain. The devotee looks on his miseries as Krishna’s mercy, as minimal punishment for his past misdeeds. He thinks, ‘O Krishna, I should be suffering so much more, but because of Your causeless mercy, my sufferings are minimized.’”

* * *

Three days after initiation, Swamiji conducts our first wedding:

Mukunda and Janaki, who were initiated together and whose marriage must now be Vedically sanctified. Janaki's sister Joan arrives from Oregon and helps decorate the small apartment for the wedding, stringing flowers across the ceiling. In the kitchen, Swamiji supervises the cooking. It is to be our first big feast. He shows us how to make *kachoris*, fried pastries filled with spiced potatoes. All afternoon, we labor over *kachoris*, and *puris*. In all, the preparations number fifteen—*gulabjamuns* (sweet balls), *sabji* [vegetables], sweet rice, *halavah*, and various chutneys.

Mukunda appears in white robes, and Janaki wears a new red silk sari, and heavy silver earrings. The sari is Swamiji's idea.

"Girls look very feminine in saris, no?" he says, laughing.

About forty guests crowd into the apartment. Janaki sits beside Mukunda in front of Swamiji and the sacrificial mound. Obeisances and garlands are offered, incense is lit, and the wedding begins.

"*Om bhur bhava sva tat...*"

The water goblet is passed around, as on initiation night. Swamiji gives a brief talk.

"In a Krishna conscious marriage there is no question of divorce," he tells us. "In the material world, when a man gets tired of one wife, he takes another. Or when there is some argument, there is immediate separation. But in Krishna consciousness, no. Marriage is for life. It is the wife's duty to serve the husband, to keep the house clean, cook nicely, and make her husband comfortable when he comes back from work. The wife is like goddess Lakshmi. When she is present, nothing is lacking. It is her duty to bear Krishna conscious children and aid her husband in a life of progressive Krishna consciousness. And it is the husband's duty to protect the wife and provide for her. The wife should not have to go out and work. That is a very bad proposal. The wife is never to be independent but is to be protected and remain at home. In

this way, the marriage will go smoothly. And even if there is some argument, there is no question of separation. Argument between husband and wife is said in the *Vedas* to be like thunder without lightning. There is much noise but no danger. So remember this, live together in Krishna consciousness, and be happy."

The ceremony continues as Janaki's sister Joan formally presents Janaki to Mukunda.

"I accept Janaki-dasi as my wife," Mukunda repeats after Swamiji, "and I shall take charge of her throughout both of our lives. We shall live together peacefully in Krishna consciousness, and will never separate."

Swamiji turns to Janaki.

"Will you accept Sriman Mukunda-das-brahmachari as your life's companion?" he asks. "Will you serve him always, and help him to execute his Krishna conscious activities?"

"Yes, she replies. "I accept Sriman Mukunda as my husband throughout my life. There shall never be any separation between us, either in happiness or distress. I shall serve him always, and we shall live together peacefully in Krishna consciousness."

Mukunda and Janaki exchange garlands and sitting places. Mukunda rubs vermillion down the part in her hair, then covers her head with her sari. Stryadhisa ties Janaki's sari to the hem of Mukunda's dhoti.

"Leave the clothes tied for a week," Swamiji says. He then sprinkles the colored dyes on the mound for the fire sacrifice. Again we dip our hands in the ghee, barley and sesame, the fire is lit, and prayers begin. Again, the apartment is clouded with smoke.

* * *

After the feast, we are bursting with potato *kachoris*.

"Here in America, I see that it is customary for boyfriend and girl friend to live together," Swamiji says. "Of course, in the material world, that sex desire is natural, but we say don't live together like cats and dogs. If you want sex, get yourself married."

It is late when the wedding breaks up, and Rabindra-svarup and I accompany Mukunda and Janaki back to their loft, just a few blocks away on Bowery.

"We're going out to San Francisco next week," Mukunda tells me. "And from there we're going on to India. You know, you should consider going to the Coast. I hear that San Francisco's ripe for Krishna consciousness."

"Isn't it a little early to expand?" I ask. "We're just getting started here."

"Well, there's a disciple of Swamiji's out there now, he tells me, named Harvey Cohen. He's generated a lot of interest just talking to people. He's trying to locate a kind of storefront temple and prepare an event for Swamiji in January."

Mukunda is very enthusiastic about going to India and expanding Krishna consciousness worldwide. "After all," he says, "Swamiji called it The International Society for Krishna Consciousness. So, sooner or later, we have to go international." He thinks that Swamiji should get out of New York before the winter snows.

"His health is good now," he says, "but who knows? He's used to tropical Calcutta."

Later, we watch Allen Ginsberg on a TV talk show. Ginsberg chants Hare Krishna and mentions that there's a new *swami* on the Lower East Side who has just opened classes in *mantra-yoga*.



We applaud happily. It's our first plug on TV.

* * *

Despite being in Swamiji's presence and daily witnessing his inspiring transcendental activities, I find some difficulty following all the basic rules. When I confess this to Swamiji, he jumps to his feet. "Then chant Hare Krishna!" he says, the force of his gesture sweeping me upward with him, so that I stand up automatically. "Chant Hare Krishna! Krishna! Krishna! Krishna help me! Krishna save me!"

I begin chanting, impelled by his sheer, spiritual force cleansing the dust from the mind's mirror, purifying, lifting me up.

"There are so many inconveniences because of this body," he says. "The senses want so many things. Bad habits force us to act, habits from this lifetime and other lifetimes as well. But Krishna says that even if a person seems to act immorally due to some past association or bad habits, he is to be considered a *sadhu*, a saint, if he is determined to become Krishna conscious. Some way or other, we must continue our duties. Then gradually, with advancement, purification will come. Of course, a devotee is never immoral, but maybe due to past association, he may appear immoral, or fall down due to bad habits. Sometimes habits become second nature.

"Just like with the thief who went on pilgrimage. At night, when the other pilgrims were sleeping, this thief started stealing baggage and picking pockets, but he thought, 'Oh, I have come to this holy place, but still, due to habit, I am stealing. No! At least during my stay here, let me not steal.' In the morning, when the other pilgrims got up, they started looking for their bags, but saw that they were all in different places, all mixed up. 'What is the matter? What has happened?' they asked. Then the thief stood up and told them, 'Gentlemen, I am a thief by occupation. Because I am in the habit of stealing at night, I was going to steal something from your bags, but since I've come to this holy place, I decided not to do it. So instead I have simply put one man's bag here,

another's bag there.' This is the nature of bad habit. Even though one does not want to do it, he has the habit. Therefore Krishna says that if one decides to stop his bad habits and cultivate Krishna consciousness, he is to be considered saintly. Even if by chance he falls down and does something socially immoral, that should not be taken into account. Because he has taken refuge of Krishna, he will very soon become saintly. Very soon."

* * *

"My Guru Maharaj Srila Bhaktisiddhanta used to say, 'This world is no place for a gentleman.' And it is true. Maya is so strong. I was in the dark well of householder life, and he... pulled me up!"

This memory brings tears to his eyes. For us, Swamiji is the unblemished swan floating transcendentally, yet he says that his spiritual master rescued him from the ocean of material suffering.

"The role of the spiritual master cannot be overestimated," he says. "Guru is as good as God. Not that he is God. Mayavadis say like that. No. Only Krishna is God. That's a fact. But for the devotee, *guru* is as good as God."

* * *

As Keith enters his third week in Bellevue, Umapati and I continue visiting him one hour daily. Since he refuses to eat any of the hospital food, we bring him *chapatis*, fruit and vegetables, and a little rice mixed with *dal*. The doctors are as determined as ever to put him away, and Keith is about to abandon hope.

"They're even talking of transferring me to Central Islip," he says.

When we return to Swamiji, we inform him that Keith's plight is becoming serious. "Why did he ever go there?" Swamiji asks. "I never told him to go there."

"That's why he's in trouble," I say, then suddenly think of Allen Ginsberg. "Maybe Mr. Ginsberg can help," I suggest.

"Yes, try him," Swamiji says.

Allen recommends Dr. Horner, a Jungian psychiatrist at the Einstein Clinic. I phone Dr. Horner and explain the dilemma. The next day, the doctor goes to Bellevue, talks with Keith, then writes up a report stating that he is following a legitimate religious discipline and should be released. But even this is not sufficient; a family member must sign the release papers. Not knowing where to turn, Keith phones his father on Long Island. Unfortunately, his father, a fundamentalist Baptist minister, fears that by consorting with a *swami*, Keith has fallen into the hands of an anti-Christ. He hesitates signing.

Although nearly thirty years old, Keith needs his father's signature. Finally, in desperation, he promises to go home with his father and become a Christian. Within hours, Keith is back on Second Avenue, out of breath from running.

"I had to jump out of my father's car to get here," he says, "but it worked." When Swamiji sees Keith, he stands up and embraces him.

"Come on! Krishna has saved His devotee!" Swamiji says. "Oh, I was crying to Krishna, 'How has this nice boy been taken from me?' and praying that they would release you. Because they are in the crazy-man business, they were saying you are crazy. But factually the materialists are crazy because they take this temporary body for the all in all and neglect the eternal soul. A crazy man thinks that all others are crazy. But we do not care for their opinion. We will let Krishna decide who is really crazy."

* * *

The day after Keith's release, September 23, Is the appearance day of Radharani, Lord Krishna's eternal consort, and Swamiji announces the second initiation ceremony.

"Today, we will fast until noon," he says. "Srimati Radharani is so kind that She does not want us to go hungry."

In the morning, he shows Keith how to make *rasagullas*, sweetballs consisting only of milk curds cooked and soaked in syrup. They are very sweet and succulent. A large pot sits in the corner of Swamiji's little altar room, and sometimes, when I get the urge, I ask Swamlji if I can have one.

"Yes, take," he says invariably.

To be initiated with Keith are Bruce, Charles, and Steve. Bruce looks like a football tackle; in contrast, Steve and Charles are ascetically thin. Keith becomes Kirtanananda, Bruce becomes Brahmananda, Charles becomes Acyutananda, and Steve becomes Satsvarupa.

"Today, September 23, is Radha's birthday," Swamiji says. "She is fifteen days younger than Krishna. When Krishna was a boy, He played with the children of the countryside, and because He was so beautiful, all the girls prayed that someday He would be their husband. Since Radha loved Krishna the most, She is the symbol of greatest worship. Krishna and the *gopis*, the cowherd girls, were the same age, but because girls are married earlier than boys, they were all married before Krishna. Yet, despite their marriages, they all loved Krishna so much that whenever He would play His flute, they would leave their homes and go to Him. This continued until Krishna was sixteen; then He left His friends and went to live with His real father in Mathura, and all His friends spent the rest of their lives weeping and longing for Him. Radha and Krishna met again during a solar eclipse at Kurukshetra, and it was a meeting of love, but then They were again separated. Radha is Krishna's beloved, and by Her blessings Krishna will accept us. '*Hare*' means Radha, so when we chant Hare Krishna, we are chanting Radha Krishna. We say Radha's name first because Krishna loves Her."

The fire sacrifice in Swamiji's back apartment is joyful. There are none of the blunders of the first initiation; we manage to pour the water in the proper hand and say *svaha* at the right time.



Keith *(6.09.1937-24.10.2011)* becomes Kirtanananda



Steve (December 6, 1939) — became Satsvarupa (on the left in the photo, holding the microphone of a reel-to-reel tape recorder). In 1970, he would receive *sannyasa*, become Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, and publish *Prabhupada-lilamrta*.



Bruce (August 14, 1943 — June 7, 2015) — became Brahmananda.
His memories of Srila Prabhupada are in the book *Swamiji*.

It is the first of the Mother Scenes. Brahmananda had written an enthusiastic letter to his brother Greg about Swamiji, and Greg, who had just started college in Colorado, sold his typewriter and bought a plane ticket to New York to attend the initiation. Surprisingly, Brahmananda's mother also shows up, but she is so furious at Greg for quitting college that she doesn't speak to him. Sitting on a folding chair in Swamiji's room, she endures the initiation with stonefaced silence. When it is over, she tells Swamiji, "You could have left me at least one of my sons."

"Go bow down to your mother," Swamiji tells Brahmananda, and Brahmananda immediately complies, touching his forehead to the floor.

"I still don't see what's wrong with Judaism," she pouts, less than flattered by this strange gesture of humility from her son.

"Jewish Christian, Moslem—it is not a question of that," Swamiji says. "It's a matter of developing your love for God. That is the test for first-class religion.

* * *

Swamiji treats mothers respectfully, compliments them for having such fine, intelligent sons, and comforts them with sweetballs. Although a number of mothers come accusing him of stealing and corrupting their children, they always leave pacified. Some even attend *kirtans* and sit on folding chairs in the rear of Matchless Gifts. During one Sunday feast, one mother even runs outside for a marijuana break.

"Why don't you just let *prasadam* satisfy your tongue?" her son chastises her.

My mother writes Swamiji a letter thanking him for "the great and remarkable change" in me.

"We just want you to know how much we appreciate the work you are doing in this country, especially among the younger generation.

They need you, a spiritual advisor and leader, to lead them out of their confused, frustrated, materialistic and rebellious state—back to Godhead."

Swamiji is so pleased with the letter that he has it xeroxed for distribution.

* * *

By early October, our Sunday "love feasts" begin gaining popularity on the Lower East Side. Since most of the guests are young and unemployed, the donations hardly cover food costs. But no matter.

"Let them come and take," Swamiji says. "They will become attracted when they see that our philosophy is not dry."

Under his direction, Kirtanananda and Acyutananda learn to cook *kachoris*, *samosas*, sweet rice, *halava*, sweet balls and mung bean *dal*. Kirtanananda is such a talented cook that Swamiji calls him "Kitchenananda." After the feasts, we are so full that we can only roll over on the temple floor and sleep.

But this overindulgence is not allowed for long. One morning, after class, Swamiji says, "You should eat as little as possible."

"First you said we should eat lots of *prasadam*," Umapati protests. "Now, you say we should eat little. How can we know which instruction to follow?"

Swamiji looks down from the dais calmly, smiling slightly. "When I said to eat a lot, you didn't have any questions," he replies.

* * *

Since it's a beautiful October night, we sit out in the courtyard to chant. When Umapati admires the full moon, Greg admonishes him.

"That's *maya*," he says.

This sparks a debate. Should a devotee look on the moon as *maya*? We take this question to Swamiji.

"For the devotee, the world is as good as Vaikuntha," he says. "Krishna says that the sun and moon are His eyes. When a devotee looks at the moon, he sees Krishna."

We want this clarified.

"Is the difference between the spiritual and material universes just one of consciousness?" I ask.

"Yes. "

"But in addition to this universe, is there a universe separate and different?"

"Yes," Swamiii says. "it Is said that this material universe occupies just a small portion, a corner, of that limitless spiritual sky. It is here as a sort of prison for the conditioned soul. But for the devotee, it is as good as Vaikuntha."

"But here, there's the law of change?"

"Yes. Here, nothing is permanent. Everything is changing: coming into being, staying a while, leaving some by-products, dwindling, and vanishing. But the spiritual world is not like this. There, everything is *sat-cit-ananda*, full of knowledge, bliss and eternity. Here, if we want to read a book, we have to open it, but there, the book opens itself. There, everything is full of spiritual consciousness. The houses are made of *chintamani*, touchstone, and the trees give as much of whatever fruit you want. Many descriptions are given in *Brahma-samhita*."

I still have difficulty accepting the Vedic teaching of an enclosed heliocentric universe. How to explain the stars?

"Maybe when the *Vedas* mention the universe, they mean the solar system," I suggest.

"*Veda* is infallible," Swamiji says. "What do these modern scientists know? They are trying to acquire knowledge through their imperfect senses, by using telescopes and so many devices. But the eye itself is an imperfect instrument. How can you arrive at perfect knowledge by something imperfect? The knowledge of the *Vedas* is perfect and infallible because it comes from the Supreme Perfect, Sri Krishna. Since we are in the disciplic succession starting with Lord Brahma, we accept this knowledge as perfect. Let the scientists say what they like."

This particularly upsets George Henderson, mathematics PhD, an old friend who has been attending *kirtans*.

"Our interest is precisely in what is measurable by the senses," he says. To our surprise, Swamiji suddenly comes on like thunder.

"Are your senses perfect?" he asks.

"I'm speaking of the whole scientific community," George says.

"Then are their senses perfect?"

"For scientists, man is the measure of all things," George says.

"Only God has perfect senses." Swamiji says. "Therefore only God can measure perfectly. Everyone else is imperfect. Are you God?"

"Wha—?"

"Are you God?" Swamiji repeats loudly, shocking us all. "If you are God, then you can show us your universal form."

George sits quietly, perplexed and embarrassed. Afterwards,

Swamiji tells us that if someone claims to be God, we should request to see his universal form as revealed at Kurukshetra.

"Since Arjuna was Krishna's devotee, he had no desire to see the universal form," he tells us. "The devotee is interested in Krishna in His original two-armed form. But Krishna showed Arjuna the gigantic universal form as a lesson to mankind, as a test for knowing what is God. If some rascal is claiming to be God, we should demand to see his universal form. And if he shows it, then he is God. But this form is not manifest to please the devotees. It is more or less to convince the materialists how great God is. The devotee doesn't have to be reminded of God's greatness. He already knows that God is great. He is Just interested in serving Krishna in His original form as a cowherd boy."

"What is Krishna's size?" I ask.

"He's your size," Swamiji says. "His size is average. He can be as big or small as required, bigger than the biggest, or smaller than the smallest. That is absolute. So when He comes, He comes our size. In Mathura, many people were thinking of Him as an ordinary human being. This is due to *yoga-maya*. He may appear to be like us, but He is not. He is always the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"To understand Krishna as He is, we must consult authorities—*guru, sadhu, shastra*. Otherwise we have no way of knowing. For example, one night I heard a strange noise and couldn't tell what it was. I just knew that it was not an ordinary noise, that's all. The next day, the police came and asked, 'Swamiji, did you hear a gunshot?' Then I knew that the noise had been a gunshot. If the police had not come, I never would have guessed what the noise had been. Similarly, we may try to guess what the Absolute Truth is, thinking, 'It's this, or it's that.' Then one day Krishna or His representative comes and says, 'It's this!' But until Krishna tells you, you cannot guess."

* * *

Kirtanananda, Rabindra-svarup and Stryadhisa are now living in the temple full time. In the morning, they store their sleeping bags behind the dais and tidy up the temple for Swamiji's entrance. Inevitably, the neighbors begin to complain, objecting specifically to the seven a.m. kirtans, which are growing louder due to increased attendance and enthusiasm. The woman upstairs pours hot water through the floorboards and encourages her children to jump and pound to disturb the lectures. One Puerto Rican boy, convinced that we are all demon worshippers, throws a rock through the plate glass window.

Public relations improve, however, with our first big branching out—the Tompkins Square Park *kirtans*.

It is Allen Ginsberg who first suggests Tompkins Square between Avenues A and B on the Lower East Side.

"If you hold *kirtans* there, you'll interest a lot of people and maybe get better temple attendance," he tells us. "It's a kind of Sunday meeting place."

We promptly get a permit to chant in the park, and on Sunday Swarmji leads us down the crowded weekend streets. Kirtanananda also wears robes, and our walk through the Polish, Ukranian, and Puerto Rican neighborhoods is sensational. By the time we reach the park, dozens of curious people are following.

We spread a carpet beneath a large oak in the center of the park. Then we form a circle around Swamiji, who takes up a small bongo drum and begins leading the chanting. At first, the crowd greets us with cold indifference but soon warms up as the words of the *mantra* become more familiar. Swamiji pounds the drum tirelessly. Thirty minutes pass, an hour. Elderly Polish and Ukranian residents stare dumbfounded, then walk away grumbling. Soon more people stand around us and press forward to better see Swamiji. Stryadhisa and I clash cymbals, and Kirtanananda plays the harmonium given by Ginsberg. Someone brings a tamboura, but it is drowned out in the din. Puerto Rican kids run over

from the playground, stare with wide eyes, then laugh happily. A jet booms overhead. The Good Humor man gravitates toward us, ringing his ice cream bells. Acyutananda, Brahmananda, and Greg dance in a circle, and the more venturesome spectators join in the chant.

After a long *kirtan*, Swamiji begins to give a talk, but since the people can hardly hear him, he takes up the drum and starts chanting again. A little boy throws an egg at Rayarama and runs. Our voices begin to grow hoarse, and I wonder how long Swamiji will last. But his voice seems even stronger after the second hour. As he chants, his brow furrows in concentration, and veins stand out on his neck. "Hare Krishna! Krishna! Krishna! Hare Hare!" Allen Ginsberg joins, shaking his head rhythmically and playing finger cymbals. A New York Times reporter asks me to bring Ginsberg over to talk.

"He shouldn't interrupt a man worshipping," Allen says. "Tell him that."

Swamiji's fingers continue beating out the rhythm on the drum. How can he keep at it so long? "Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna!" he calls out over the cement park of stunted trees, the playgrounds, benches, brownstone apartments, and the locked and empty Presbyterian Church.

"*Hare Rama, Hare Rama*," we reply. "*Rama Rama, Hare Hare*." A Negro joins in with a saxophone. Someone comes with a bass drum. Tambourines rattle, and people start getting up to dance. To our surprise and happiness, Swamiji's park *kirtan* begins to turn into a joyous celebration, an open party for the Lower East Side.

"Hey, man, who's that old priest?" someone asks. "He's not a priest," someone answers. "He's a *swami*!"

"Hey, that's cool, man. I dig it!"

Rayarama and I hand out leaflets:

STAY HIGH FOREVER

S T A Y H I G H F O R E V E R

No More Coming Down

Practice KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Expand your consciousness by practicing the

TRANSCENDENTAL SOUND VIBRATION

HARE KRISHNA * HARE KRISHNA * KRISHNA KRISHNA * HARE HARE

HARE RAMA * HARE RAMA * RAMA RAMA * HARE HARE

This chanting will cleanse the dust from the mirror of the mind and free you from all material contamination. It is practical, self-evident, and requires no artificial aid. Try it and be blissful all the time.

TURN ON

through music, dance, philosophy, science, religion and prasadam (spiritual food.)

TUNE IN

AWAKEN YOUR TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE!

REJOICE IN THE OCEAN OF BLISS!

The process of Sankirtan (chanting of Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare) brings about transcendental ecstasy.

DROP OUT

of movements employing artificially induced states of self-realization and expanded consciousness. Such methods only lead to spiritual laziness and chaos. End all brickndoms, flip out and stay for eternity. Bhaktiyoga has been practiced for many centuries and is authorized by India's great acharyas. Swami Bhaktivedanta is in the bonafide line of Krishna's disciplic succession. He has especially come to this country to spiritually guide young Americans.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, Inc.
26 SECOND AVENUE (between 1st and 2nd Streets) NEW YORK, N.Y.
Phone: 674-7128

Acharya: A.C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI

Meetings every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7 P.M.
Every morning at 7 A.M.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO COME AND BRING YOUR FRIENDS

No More Coming Down
Practice Krishna Consciousness
Expand your consciousness by chanting the
Transcendental Sound Vibration
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare

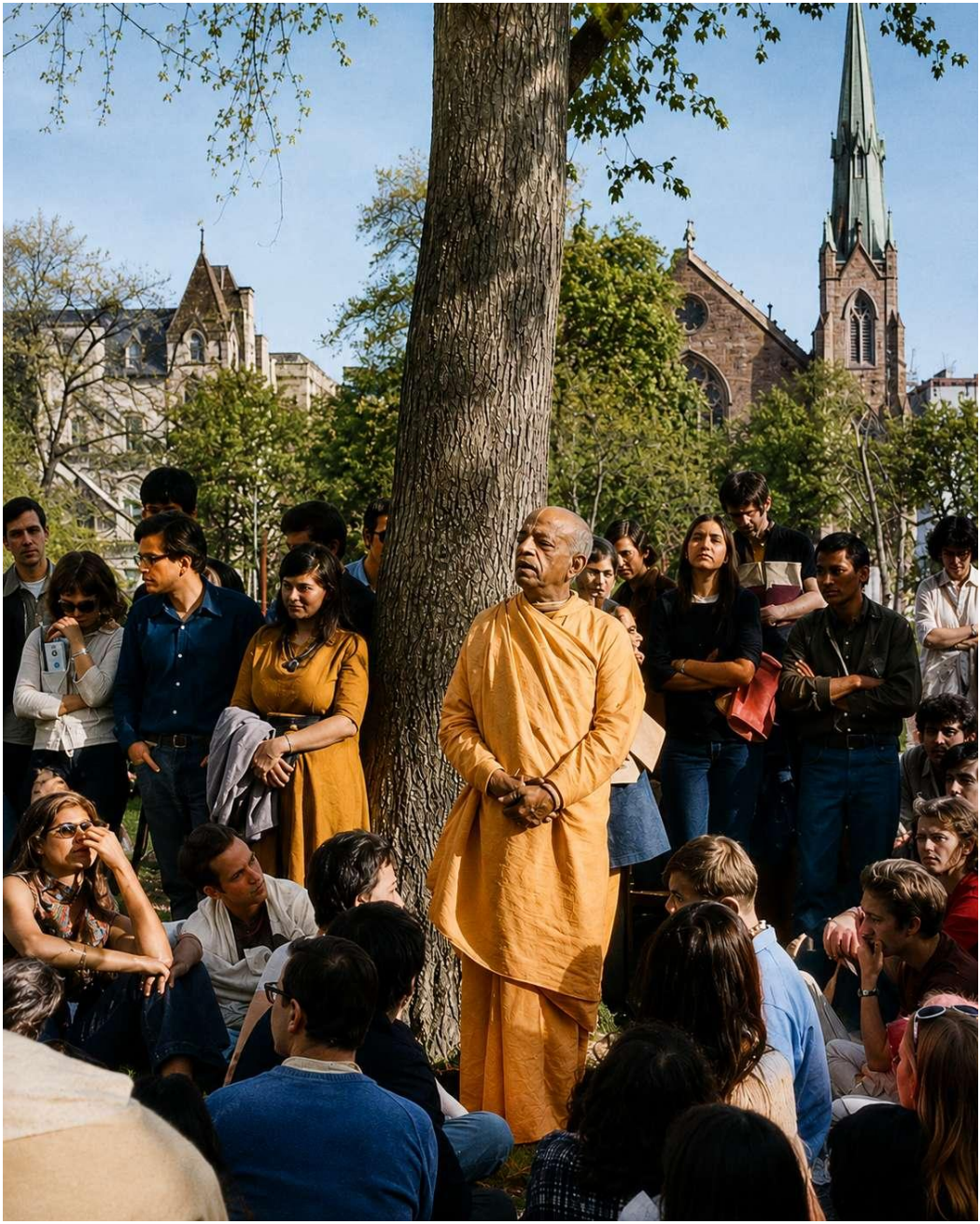
This chanting will cleanse the dust from the mirror of the mind and free you from all material contamination. It is practical and self-evident without artificial aid. Try it and be blissful all the time. End all bringdowns! Turn on through music, dance, philosophy, science, religion and *prasadam* (spiritual food). Join the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Although Polish housewives throw the leaflets away, the young renegades from American suburbia like the idea of staying high forever. Granted, staying high forever may not be the ideal impetus for pure devotional service, but the message to chant Hare Krishna gets across. Moreover, Swamiji approved the leaflet: "Yes, stay high forever! That's the idea! Yes! No more coming down to this material world!"

"Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna," we continue into the late afternoon. Swamiji's fingers are red from beating the little drum, but he doesn't slow down. Only he can light the fuse to set off the Hare Krishna explosion.

When dusk approaches, he brings the chanting to a close. We roll up the carpet as people enquire about the temple. The Times reporter, remarkably, returns with us to Matchless Gifts and sits downstairs with Swamiji to talk. Acyutananda brings him a bowl of sweetballs.

The next morning, Monday, October 10, *The New York Times* prints a photograph of Swamiji seated on the carpet, pounding the bongo drum while Brahmananda and Acyutananda dance in front of him. The headline: "SWAMI'S FLOCK CHANTS IN PARK TO FIND ECSTASY."



After a long kirtan, Swamiji starts to speak,
but since people can barely hear him,
he picks up a small drum and begins chanting again…



New Indian Religion Sends You Higher Than LSD!

The Secrets Of Krishna Consciousness



The New York Times.

Swami's Flock Chants in Park to Find Ecstasy

50 Followers Clap and Sway to Hypnotic Music at East Side Ceremony



Two youths are stirred to dance at concert presided over by Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta in Tompkins Square Park.

Swamiji smiles broadly when he sees the write-up. “Very nice. Now we can continue this program every Sunday.”

* * *

Before our next park *kirtan*, however, we receive a big, unexpected publicity boost. The *East Village Other*, a local underground newspaper with a good circulation on the Lower East Side, prints a full front page photo of Swamiji standing beneath an oak in Tompkins Square, a crowd clustered around him. The headlines: “SAVE EARTH NOW! HARE KRISHNA, HARE KRISHNA, KRISHNA KRISHNA, HARE HARE, HARE RAMA, HARE RAMA, RAMA RAMA, HARE HARE.”

We rush the first copy to Swamiji, and when he sees it, he breaks into a smile. We read it aloud for him.

An old man, one year past his allotted threescore and ten, wandered into New York’s East Village and set about to prove to the world that he knew where God could be found. In only three months, the man, Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta, succeeded in convincing the world’s toughest audience—bohemians, acid heads, pot heads and hippies—that he knew the way to God: Turn Off, Sing Out, and Fall In. This new brand of holyman. with all due deference to Dr. Leary, has come forth with a brand of “consciousness expansion” that’s sweeter than acid, cheaper than pot, and non-bustable by fuzz. How is this all possible? “Through Krishna,” the Swami says.

“What are these hippies?” Swamiji asks. We try to explain as best we can.

“I’m afraid that many people would consider us hippies,” I say.

“No, we’re happies,” Swamiji laughs. “But whatever you once were, Krishna will change you. Right?”

east village other

SAVE EARTH NOW !!



HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE
HARE RAMA HARE RAMA RAMA RAMA HARE HARE ...

inner space

Flying Saucers



We also have to explain “acid heads,” “pot,” and “fuzz,” and when Swamiji understands, he smiles, and says, “Yes, that is right. Krishna consciousness may seem like poison in the beginning, but it is nectar in the end. So it is sweeter.” Then: “Who is this Dr. Leary?”

We explain that he’s the leader of the psychedelic movement and has just founded the LSD (League for Spiritual Discovery) church.

“He claims that LSD is an easy means to God realization,” Kirtanananda says.

“Then his God is LSD,” Swamiji says. “If he claims that you can reach God through LSD, then LSD is stronger than God. But we do not say like that. His means are artificial. And risky. What will he do when there is no more LSD? Is LSD eternal? Is God so cheap that He can be reached by simply taking a pill? *Yogis* perform many lifetimes of austerities and still do not see God. And in *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says that He can be reached only by the path of pure, unalloyed devotion. After many, many births, the man of knowledge surrenders to Krishna because he knows that Krishna is everything. But this Dr. Leary is saying surrender to LSD. That is nonsense. Such people are misled and misleading.“

We chant in Tompkins Square Park every Sunday through October, and after each *kirtan*, more people follow Swamiji back to Matchless Gifts. Thanks to the *East Village Other* article and these park *kirtans*, we quickly become known on the Lower East Side as The Hare Krishna People.

* * *

A CBS television news team visits Matchless Gifts and films a lecture by Swamiji and a kirtan. “Happiness on Second Avenue” is the theme. They decide not to use the interview with Swamiji because “his accent is too heavy.” Kirtanananda tells how Krishna consciousness embraces all faiths. Brahmananda is a football tackle turned Saint Peter.



Timothy Francis Leary

(October 22, 1920 — May 31, 1996).

An American writer, psychologist, advocate for psychedelic drug research, and software developer who created some of the first computer-indexed psychological tests. Leary gained notoriety for his research into the effects of psychedelics on the human psyche and nervous system. His research was in full swing when psychedelics—primarily LSD—were declared illegal. Leary became hugely popular at the height of the hippie movement. Over time, the press began referring to him as the "LSD guru." Leary actively promoted psychedelics, gave lectures, and wrote a number of books devoted to expanding the boundaries of human consciousness. In the 1980s, Leary became fascinated with computers and even created several software products.



Timothy Francis Leary and Alan Ginzberg

I tell how chanting has converted Lower East Side youth from LSD madness. They film us leaving the temple to go on street *sankirtan*. Satsvarupa, Acyutananda, and Strydhisa clash cymbals. I follow, pounding a big bass drum.

Not all news write-ups are flattering, however. The *National Insider*, a less successful version of *The National Enquirer*, headlines: "NEW INDIAN RELIGION SENDS YOU HIGHER THAN LSD." We shudder at a photo of Rayarama dancing, captioned: "Cultist about to go into a trance."

* * *

Following Swamiji's advice, I write the Mayor of New York. His secretary replies: "Mayor Lindsay is most appreciative of the work that your Society is doing, especially in the realm of combatting drug addiction."

He promises to forward my letter to the City Narcotics Coordinator.

Meanwhile, we tell the hippies that chanting gets you higher than LSD, just as *The National Insider* said.

* * *

A wide-eyed, bearded youth comes up to Swamiji's apartment unannounced. "I'm higher than you are," he tells Swamiji.

"Please accept my humble obeisances," Swamiji says, bowing slightly.

"I'm higher than you are," the young man insists, intent on more than mere acknowledgment. "Today I heard the Big Voice."

Brahmananda gently, diplomatically removes him.

"Please do not let in any more crazies," Swamiji finally tells us.

Then: “If you tell people that they are in the grasp of material nature, they will not understand you. They’re so accustomed to suffering that they mistake their suffering for happiness. The real proprietor of this body is Krishna, and the soul within the body is part of Krishna. Krishna is eternal, full of knowledge and bliss. He is not entrapped by material nature. We are conditioned souls, but we can never escape from this conditioning by trying to convince ourselves that we are God. Now they are taking some intoxicants, LSD, and convincing themselves that they are God for a short time, and then they have to come down, and again and again undergo the same process, and all the time they are being bound by some material chemical—LSD. In this way, they get involved in material nature all the more. Therefore this Krishna consciousness is needed. It is the greatest boon to society because it can free everyone from the bonds of material nature. There is nothing material about Krishna consciousness. The names of Krishna are purely spiritual and liberating.”

* * *

In the evenings, due to increased *kirtan* attendance, the Matchless Gifts storefront overflows to the sidewalk outside. One night, Ginsberg brings Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg of the Fugs rock group. The Fugs pride themselves on being the most verbally obscene rock group on earth. After a vivacious *kirtan*, Swamiji delivers a “sex is stool” lecture. Sanders and Kupferberg sit and stare in disbelief, Sanders’s long red hair and beard bristling in protest. After all, he’s the singer of “Group Grope” and “Slum Goddess of The Lower East Side.”

Swamiji quotes the great sage Yamunacharya: “Since I have been engaged in the transcendental service of Sri Krishna, whenever I think of sex, my lips curl, and I spit at the thought.”

The Fugs never return.



The Fugs.

Ed Sanders (center), Tuli Kupferberg (left).

They led the 1960s underground scene and became an important part of the American counterculture of that decade. The band is known for its comedic, even lewd nature, but also gained prominence for its staunch anti-Vietnam War sentiment in the 1960s. In 1969 correspondence found in an FBI file, the rock band The Fugs was called "the most vulgar thing the human mind could possibly conceive."



The Fugs and Alan Ginzberg

* * *

Of course, many come looking for miracles. Wanting to be "zapped," they expect to receive an immediate electrical jolt from the *guru*.

"What is that 'zap'?" Swamiji asks. "Why not put your hand in a socket? These are cheap show-bottle tricks. In drugstores, they keep some big bottle with tinted water to attract customers. There is no real medicine inside, just water. So we call this a show-bottle. Show-bottle *yogis* throw some sparks or produce a little gold, and people think, 'How wonderful! He has produced some gold.' They do not stop to consider that there are many gold mines in the world, and so what is this little gold worth? No. A real *yogi* does not resort to such cheap tricks. And some people think that if they grow long hair and beards, they will become *yogis*. That is more nonsense. These are not *yogis*, but bogies."

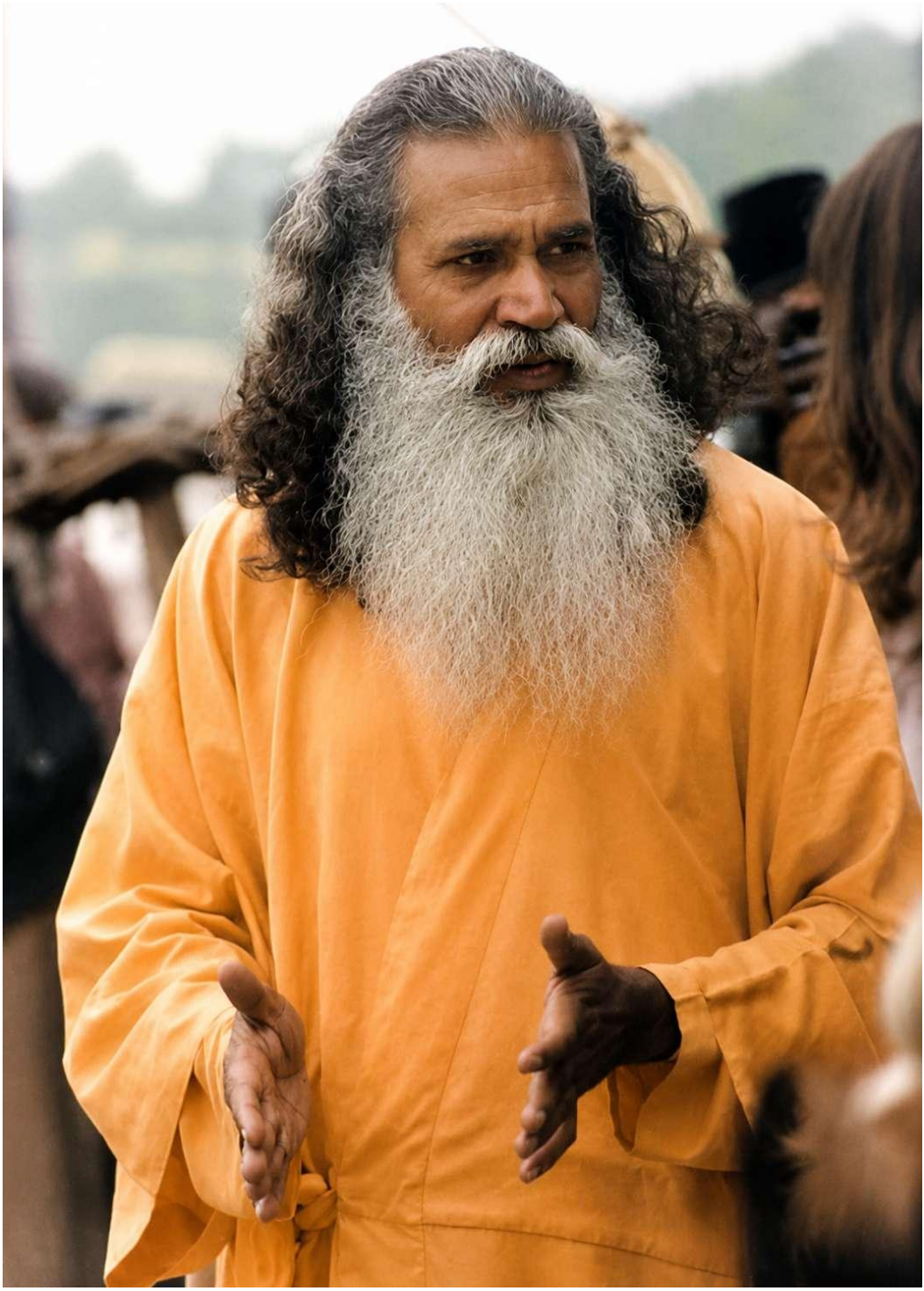
Posters of bearded Swami Satchitananda, who offers an amalgam of *yogas*, abound throughout Manhattan. His disciples visit, but they are not impressed by Swamiji. No beard. No zaps.

But if one looks carefully, he can perceive certain subtle, transcendental marks: Swamiji's large ears, shaped like a Buddha's. ("This boy hears nicely.") And the myriad expressions of his eyes, displaying the whole range of human sentiments—love, devotion, tolerance, disapproval, humor, sympathy, fervor—as well as transcendental emotions unfamiliar to us. And his natural, aristocratic gestures. ("The transcendental autocrat!") The more we acquire devotion to him, the more his unique features and qualities manifest, and we come to see him as a purely transcendental personality.

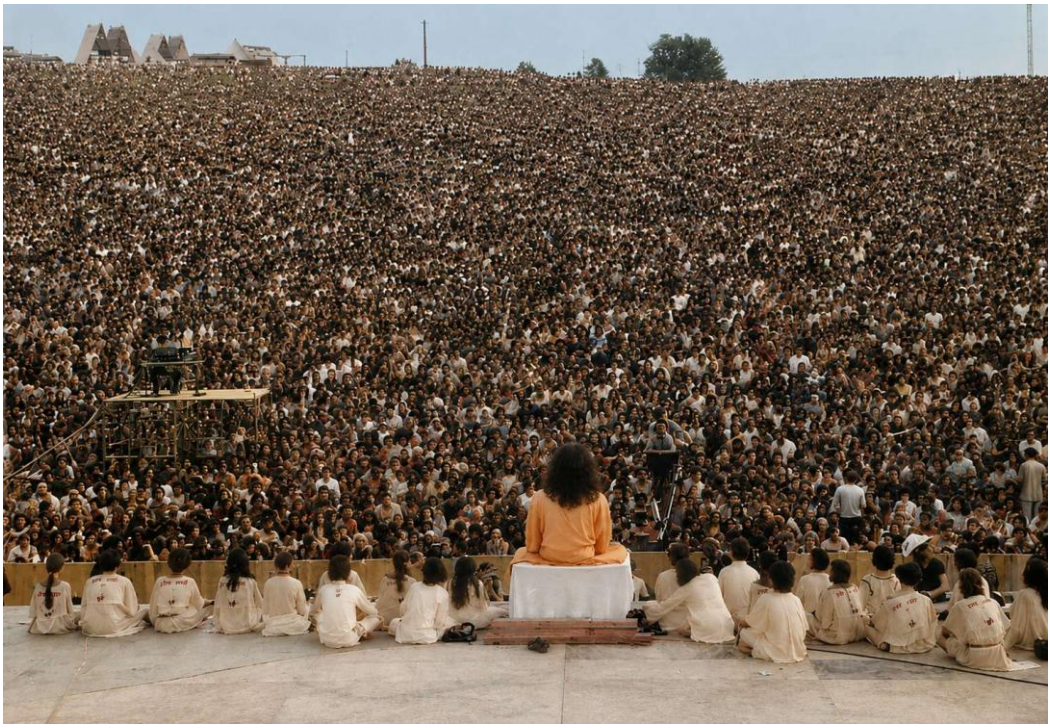
"He looks like a Buddha," a girl whispers one day.

"I saw leprechauns running around his feet," another says.

When Yogi Dinkar, a disciple of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, comes to



Swami Satchitananda, photo from 1969, USA.



Swami Satchidananda
(photo from 1969, USA).
(December 22, 1914, Coimbatore — September 19, 2002, Chennai, India).
An Indian *guru* and *yogi* who emigrated to the United States and gained many followers in the West. He was the author of numerous philosophical and spiritual books, the most popular of which was his textbook on Hatha Yoga. In 1969, he spoke at the opening of the Woodstock Festival, calling music "the divine sound that controls the entire universe."



Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

(January 12, 1918 — February 5, 2008).

A Neo-Hindu preacher, founder of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the TM-Sidhi program. In early 1959, he arrived in California, where he taught TM to those interested for several months. Interest in "Vedic knowledge" made it possible to establish a permanent TM center, as well as centers in New York and Europe. In the 1960s, the hippie movement also made a major contribution to the spread of TM in the United States.

By 1965, Maharishi had trained a total of around ten thousand TM teachers through his centers. The number of people trained in TM reached 550,000 in America and over a million worldwide, with the movement growing by 35,000 people per month.

In 1968, the members of the legendary band The Beatles became Maharishi's students, though they grew disillusioned with the guru fairly quickly after their trip to India. Upon returning, John Lennon wrote the sarcastic song "Sexy Sadie." It is believed that the split with The Beatles eventually led to the closure of the ashram in Rishikesh. In the 1990s, McCartney and Harrison offered their apologies to Maharishi. Maharishi replied that he considered The Beatles to be angels, and he could never hold a grudge against angels.

visit, Swamiji invites him to speak at an evening *kirtan*. Yogi Dinkar is a thin, white-haired gentleman from Brooklyn. “I sense greatness here,” he says. “This is real *yoga*. I have been to many *yoga* meetings and heard many speeches on *Bhagavad-gita*, but here I sense real greatness. There is no doubt of this.”

“When you meet Swamijl,” one boy says, “you feel like you’ve travelled all over the world countless lifetimes just to see and hear him.“

There are other initiations: Brahmananda’s younger brother Greg becomes Gargamuni. Then there is Ranchor, a student recruited from Tompkins Square Park. Bob Corens, a social worker, becomes Rupanuga. Dan Clark, an avant-garde filmmaker, becomes Damodar. Judy Koslofsky, an art student from City College, becomes Jadurani.

* * *

Jadurani is our first *brahmacharini*, unmarried female devotee. At first, Swamiji, in accordance with Vaishnava tradition, was not going to accept female devotees, but the social situation in America changed his mind. Time and circumstance. After all, as Americans, we are fallen *mleechas*—meat eaters. “If nothing else, just get them to chant Hare Krishna and take *prasadam*,” Srila Bhaktisiddhanta had enjoined.

Swamiji decided to accept the girls, initiate them, and then get them married. In the Vedic tradition, women are never allowed independence. They are meant for marriage, for bearing children, cleaning the home, cooking, helping the husband progress in Krishna consciousness, churning butter.

“By churning butter, they develop good bodies,” Swamiji smiles.

Jadurani is nineteen and very pretty. She’s an artist, and Swamiji immediately engages her in painting pictures of the four-armed Narayana forms.



Of Russian descent, Judy Koslofsky, an art student from City College, becomes Jadurani.



Srila Prabhupada with Rupanuga



Brahmananda's younger brother Greg becomes Gargamuni

At first, there is some resentment toward Jadurani. Stryadhisa seems most disturbed. A girl is simply a distraction. Others also criticize, but Jadurani quietly sits in the corner of the little altar room and paints.

Her Narayana is too muscular, Swamiji complains, too much in the style of the passionate Michaelangelo. "Muscular bodies are in the mode of passion," he says, "spiritual bodies are not. The mundane conception of beauty is simply passionate. Try again. Less muscle. No, not fat. God is not fat. Nor lean. Lean men look like wolves, hungry wolves hunting for sex."

Poor Jadurani begins to wonder: Neither muscular, nor lean, nor fat. What, then, is God's somatotype?

"Perfect beauty," Swamiji says. "Beauty complete and full. When we see Krishna, we will want nothing to do with the so-called beauty of the material world. Krishna's beauty is attracting everything in the creation—great demigods, men, women, even plants and animals. That beauty is unlimited. What we call beauty here is but a perverted reflection."

Jadurani tries again. She paints dozens of Narayana's with rounded, idealized features and large, teardrop-shaped eyes. No one, I think, at any time ever looked like that, except in nursery book fantasies. But Swamiji is pleased.

"Yes, you are making progress," he tells Jadurani.

Three blocks away, someone throws a piano out onto the street. Vandals smash it up until only the core remains. Acyutananda and I borrow a dolly, and we wheel the piano innards to Matchless Gifts and set them in the back.

"What is that?" Swamiji asks.

"Piano strings," I say. "For *kirtan*."

"Achha!"

At *kirtan*'s climax, we pound our fists on the bare strings. The din can be heard to Houston Street. Burton Green, a pianist specializing in "getting into the piano," joins in. He invites Swamiji to his current recital at Town Hall, and Swamiji politely accepts.

At the concert, Burton soon abandons the keyboard and leans inside the piano to beat on the strings with hammers. Swamiji sits chanting quietly on his beads, ignoring the discords. Hermaphroditic-looking poets recite garbage, fortunately too incoherent for him to understand. During the intermission, when Burton asks Swamiji if he is enjoying it, he politely says yes. It is past his usual hour to retire, and we suggest leaving, but Burton begs us to stay for the second half, and Swamiji acquiesces.

After the concert, we walk to Broadway to take the downtown subway. Pointing to the lights of Times Square, Swamiji tells us that when he first arrived in New York, he was surprised to see billboards openly advertising sex movies—something never seen in India. Recalling some of the movie titles, he laughs.

"Walking down the road, a man sees some stool," he says, "and the stool is soft, and he thinks, 'This is nasty.' And a little further down the road, he again sees stool, but it has been in the sun for some time, and because it is hard, the man thinks, 'This is good.' But he does not stop to consider that hard or soft, stool is stool. Pleasure or pain—they are the same. In this material world, pleasure is simply hard stool. But we are thinking it is so nice."

Afterwards, Swamiji confides to Brahmananda that he went to the concert just to see Town Hall. "I'm thinking of renting it," he says. "We may give some program there."

* * *

It is beautiful autumn weather, and Swamiji accepts an invitation to Dr. Mishra's Ananda Ashram upstate. Swamiji was introduced to Ramamurti Mishra soon after arriving in the United States, and Mishra welcomed and accomodated him at his *yoga* studio in the West Seventies and at Ananda Ashram.

Actually, Mishra was at philosophical loggerheads with Swamiji, and he had even requested that Swamiji not lecture at his *yoga* studio. Mishra preached Mayavadi impersonalism: at death one merges with the Absolute and becomes eternally formless. The "We Are God" school. Over the years, Mishra had managed to print one book on *hatha-yoga* and attract a small following. Now, since Mishra is in India, Ananda Ashram thought it a good time to invite the controversial Swamiji.

The *ashram*, near Monroe, New York, a two-hour drive from Manhattan, is certainly idyllic. A large white mansion and several small buildings overlook a tranquil mountain lake. We all feel a tinge of envy that we cannot afford such a place for Swamiji, and regret that after the weekend he has to return to the urban squalor of the Lower East Side. Still, we hope that some day we'll be able to present him something even grander.

Mishra's group clearly divides into two camps: The elderly widows hold the purse, and the young hipsters hang on. Eyes closed, they all sit in lotus position, holding their breath and meditating on Om, the impersonal aspect of God.

"Krishna contains Om," Swamiji tells us. "In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says that Brahman, the impersonal *brahmajyoti* effulgence, is contained in Him. So when we chant Hare Krishna, we are automatically chanting Om as well."

* * *

The first night at the *ashram*, Kirtanananda, Acyutananda, Brahmananda, Gargamuni, Satsvarupa, Umapati, Stryadhisa, and I sleep outside in our sleeping bags. I awake three or four times, and each time I'm flat on my back looking up at the ever shifting star patterns, my sense of time confused.

Sometime just before morning, I dream.

I dream of devotees clustered about an effulgent, golden personality. His transcendental body, radiating a beauty strange to the world, captivates everyone. Stunned, I enquire, "Who is he?"

"Don't you know?" someone says. "That's Swamiji!"

I look again, but see no resemblance. The golden person, seeming no older than twenty, appears to have descended straight from the Vaikuntha planets.

"If that's Swamiji," I wonder to myself, "why doesn't he come to earth like that?"

A voice somewhere within answers: "People would follow me for my beauty, not my teachings."

Then, astonishingly enough, I see the radiant personality turn into Swamiji and then quickly back into the beautiful demigod. He does this several times, and I watch awestruck.

And I awake with the dream clear in my mind, more like a vision than a dream. I feel strangely refreshed, as though bathed in some unknown balm. Again, I see that the constellations have shifted and that the dimmer stars have faded into the encroaching dawn.

Pondering what I had seen, I recall Swamiji's saying that although

most dreams are simply functions of the mind, dreams of the spiritual master are of spiritual significance.

"If the *guru* gives instructions in a dream," he told me, "the disciple is supposed to follow them." Then: "I came to the West after my spiritual master repeatedly advised me in a number of dreams." I lie still, watching the now waning stars in the clear air and thinking about the golden demigod.

Then dawn begins to break.

* * *

Kirtanananda, Acyutananda, Stryadhisa, and I stand beside the mansion watching the sun rise gloriously over the mountains, spreading bursts of purple, gold, and scarlet. The colors reflect in the lake, a mirror without a ripple. Just as the colors heighten to their full splendor, we hear a tapping on the window behind us. It is Swamiji beckoning for us to join him inside for morning *kirtan*.

"Nature is very beautiful," he tells us. "The whole creation is very grand, but we should not become so attracted to it that we forget its creator. Here in this world, everyone is enamoured with the creation, but no one knows the creator."

We sit on little cushions beside the living room wall. To our left, French windows open out on a view of the mountains and the early morning sun. To our right, another sun: Swamiji. Playing cymbals that flash in the sunbeams, he leads us in chanting Hare Krishna.

Our chanting awakes Mishra's younger disciples. One by one, they descend the stairs into the living room, sit in lotus position, and begin deep breathing exercises. Stryadhisa bounds around the room like an ecstatic kangaroo, his arms flapping in the air. Acyutananda dances like a tiny dervish. Kirtanananda plays harmonium. *Ching ching ching*, the cymbals strike the rhythm.

After the chanting, the *ashram*'s president gives a short talk praising our *kirtan* as an expression of the highest types of *yoga*. The elderly widows enter. Enlivened by Swamiji's presence, they begin talking about their mystical experiences.

"When I meditate," one lady says, "I feel just like a drop of water entering the great ocean and merging, merging, merging.…

"That is not correct," Swamiji says abruptly. The lady is jolted out of her rapturous recall.

"When you use a simile or metaphor," he continues, "all the elements should correspond, otherwise it is faulty. First of all, a drop can never merge with the complete ocean. A drop is eternally a drop, nothing more. And even if it did somehow manage to merge with the rest of the water, it can never become everything in the ocean because it would remain distinct from the great ocean denizens. You cannot deny that there are great fishes swimming there. So how can you become the whole ocean and merge with it if you are just a drop? And how can you know of the inhabitants of the ocean? No. For a simile to be correct, all elements must correspond. This is a faulty simile used by the Mayavadis to mislead."

The elderly ladies sit shocked. The drop in the ocean is one of Mishra's favorite examples.

Whenever they bring up a point made by Mishra, Swamiji attacks. He knows Mishra. He considers his philosophy "disguised atheism, worse than Buddhism." To our surprise, as the ladies continue presenting Mishra's philosophy, Swamiji begins to shout his rebuttals. Soon, the ladies lapse into silence. The younger disciples sit in lotus position and stare at their noses. Our eyes are fixed on Swamiji.

We remain at Ananda Ashram two days, then return to the city.

The Lower East Side is an Iron Age jolt after the quiet, autumnal

Catskills, but once we are sitting in Swamiji's room eating sweetballs and listening to him talk, we forget the environs. Ananda Ashram may have the splendor of the sun, moon, and stars, but we have Swamiji.

We receive an invitation from Swami Nikhilananda of the uptown Ramakrishna Mission. Since Swamiji has referred to Ramakrishna as "that mad, impotent monk," I ask whether we should accept.

"Yes, why not? You may go with one other *brahmachari* and tell them something of our philosophy."

Acyutananda and I go, wearing robes. When we enter the lecture room, Swami Nikhilananda is on stage giving a talk. The audience consists of elderly ladies and Ivy League young men wearing suits with vests. Swami Nikhilananda, a trim gentleman in his fifties, is clean shaved and dressed in a suit. I feel uncomfortably exotic in my robes, until I see one lady in a sari.

Nikhilananda tells us that life is a great play in which we all have a role as saint, lover, soldier, or thief. Our role really doesn't matter. At the end of the play, we all go back stage and shake hands with the Producer, who congratulates us, more or less, on our performance.

After the lecture, we're invited to the salon upstairs. We decline white wine and coffee. "Not even a little coffee?" Nikhilananda asks, surprised.

"Not even tea," I say. He lights up a cigaret. "Nor cigarettes."

"Yes," he smiles. "I see that Swamiji is teaching pure *yoga*. This is very difficult for you Westerners, no? Yet he is having some measure of success, I hear, especially among the young drug addicts. He is doing good to get them to stop taking LSD and marijuana. You must congratulate him."

"And illicit sex, meat eating, and gambling," Acyutananda says. "Not even eggs."



Swami Nikhilananda
(1895–1973)

In 1933, he founded the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, and remained its leader until his death in 1973.

“Not eggs!” Nikhilananda shakes his head. “Well then, you must tell me how to give up these cigarettes.”

“Chant Hare Krishna,” I suggest. “You can’t smoke while chanting.”

“Heavens!” he laughs. “Yes, chanting!” He looks at one of the Yale men. “Maybe you can heat them up some milk,” he says.

* * *

Back at Matchless Gifts, we tell Swamiji about our meeting.

“Just see!” he says. “Swami means one who can control the senses, and he wants to know how to stop smoking. So what is this nonsense?”

“Well, most of his following are old ladies,” I say.

“Yes,” Swamiji laughs. I have seen them. The cheaters and the cheated. Because they’re just about to die, they take to this *yoga* and that, and pay money to some charlatan to teach them all nonsense. But you can see that none of my disciples are old. The oldest is twenty-six, twenty-eight. All you young men have your lives before you, and much energy to spread this movement. This is what is wanted. So Krishna is sending you to help me. I cannot do it alone. I am old and may die at any moment, but you are young and full of energy. So don’t spoil your lives. Take to Krishna consciousness and be happy.”

* * *

Although Swamiji only reads the Vedic literatures, he sometimes quotes William Cowper (“England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.”); Samuel Butler (“He that complies against his will, is of his own opinion still.”); Milton (“Freely we serve, because we freely love.”); and Shakespeare (“The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, are of imagination all compact.”). I am surprised therefore when Swamiji calls

the great Bard a mundane poet. Riled, I jump to Shakespeare's defense.

"When you are in Krishna consciousness, you can see that all the great poets and artists are praising the Supreme Personality of Godhead," Swamiji says. "All glorious and beautiful things in this world are coming from just a tiny spark of Krishna's potencies, and poets are always writing about these things. So, in that indirect way, they are praising Krishna. But because they do not know it, they are not in Krishna consciousness. Our method is to praise Krishna directly. Shakespeare may be a very great poet by literary standards, but because he does not praise Krishna directly, we call him mundane."

"Shakespeare often wrote about ghosts," Stryadhisa says. "Do they actually exist?"

"Yes, and they are always causing disturbances," Swamiji says with such assurance that I expect to see one fly by.

"People who commit suicide become ghosts. It is a very horrible state. Disembodied. They often look for bodies to inhabit, and sometimes they inhabit bodies of drunkards. And drunkards sometimes become ghosts, too. It is a horrible state because ghosts want to be embodied. And when a person is too much attached to some house or place, he becomes a ghost just to remain there. But there's one sure way to get rid of ghosts. Chant Hare Krishna. Ghosts will not remain where there is *hari-nama*."

And Communism?

"That is artificial philosophy. How will people ever be equal? In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna says, 'I instituted the four castes.' In every society you have *brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas,* and *sudras*. By natural propensity, a man is an intellectual or priest, soldier, merchant, or worker. These four castes will always be there in all societies, even in Russia. This is not caste by birth, but by qualification, by *guna*, the material mode predominant in each individual. So Marxist socialism is

artificial because it tries to make everyone equal, and this will never be possible because individuality is always there. The only real socialism is Lord Chaitanya's spiritual socialism. Whether one is man, woman, *brahmin, sudra,* Hindu, Moslem, Christian, American, Indian—it doesn't matter. Krishna is for everybody."

"And democracy?"

"That's government by the people, by the majority. But if we can expect no good from the majority in this age of Kali, then what of their government? They will elect rascals, that's all. The majority will elect anyone who promises to gratify their senses. What is required is a Krishna conscious king advised by qualified *brahmins*. That is the Vedic way. A spiritual aristocracy. When the leaders are Krishna conscious, the state functions properly. But materialistic democracy and socialism or whatever—these become dog-eat-dog societies."

* * *

Umapati and I are concerned over Swamiji's attacks on the Buddhists. Although Gautama Buddha is mentioned in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* as an *avatar*, Swamiji relegates his gospel to a mere attack on animal slaughter.

"Lord Buddha came to earth to preach *ahimsa*," he tells us. "Nonviolence. And in order to do this, he had to deny the *Vedas* because the *Vedas* permit animal sacrifice under certain conditions. So Buddha rejected the *Vedas* and preached *nirvana*, void: Since life is suffering, best to negate everything. Yes, material life is suffering, but God is not void. God is a person, and human life is a means for us to awaken our relationship with this Supreme Person. Therefore we call the Buddhist philosophy atheistic."

When Umapati and I return to Mott Street, we discuss Swamiji's lecture. "What of the eternal and omniscient Tathagatas?"

"Don't they exist in the realm of *nirvana*? And isn't *nirvana* emptiness with form?"

"And what about Buddha? Isn't he worshipped as the embodiment of the Tathagatas?"

While we are criticizing Swamiji's attack on Buddhism, Kirtanananda comes in and announces that he's leaving the Swami. "I just don't like what's going on," he says.

"That's just what we were talking about," Umapati says.

"You fools!" Kirtanananda says, suddenly turning against us. He had lied just to get our confidence. "Do you think I would ever leave the Swami? You won't solve anything by sitting in here complaining. You have to go and talk to him."

Finally agreeing, we approach Swamiji in his back apartment.

"There are some points we're having trouble understanding," I begin, speaking softly. "And what is that?" Swamiji asks, ready for anything. I feel smaller and smaller. "Why do you call the Buddhists atheists?" I manage to ask.

"Because they are," he says.

"But we don't understand that," I persist. "That just contradicts the *Sutras* we've read."

"They have no personal conception of God," he replies, "and they deny the *Vedas*. Therefore they're atheists."

This doesn't satisfy me. It seems an oversimplification.

"But atheists don't believe in a Supreme Being or supreme consciousness behind the universe," I venture. "As far as I can see,

when Buddha or the Buddhists speak of divine consciousness or the one mind, they're speaking about God, and so they can't properly be called atheists."

I ventured too far. Swamiji suddenly jumps to his feet.

"If I say they're atheists, they're atheists!" he shouts, pointing to emphasize every word. "They deny Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and they deny the *Vedas*, and they reject Vedic culture, and therefore they're atheists!"

We haven't seen him so angry since he yelled at Kirtanananda. I want to hide under the rug. I fear that if he doesn't quiet down, something terrible might happen. And my stupid questions responsible!

"Yes, of course," I quickly agree, trying to rectify my affront.

Swamiji sits back behind the footlocker, his fury seeming to leave as quickly as it came. After a long silence, I suggest that I thought I had recalled reading certain passages in which Buddha might have spoken of God.

"Then you bring such passages," he says. "But you will find that there are none."

That evening on Mott Street, we thumb through the Buddhist *Sutras* without finding any overt mention of God, at least not in the Vedic sense. God is only vaguely implied by "divine consciousness" and the "Tathagatas," which seem to have some attributes of God. Swamiji's right. From the Vedic viewpoint, Buddha is certainly an atheist.

Nonetheless, we choose passages that best support our case and take them to Swamiji. "You're right," I begin. "There's no mention of God."

"Just see!"

"But we found some passages that imply—"

He shakes his head, indicating that I'm not to bother. "A preacher has to attack, he says, ending the discussion.

I feel very small and very stupid, a dumb oaf before majesty, a pedantic bookworm before divine grace.

* * *

Swamiji is worried about Stryadhisa, who eats only when prodded. He's a tall, thin boy, and his self-imposed fast is making him look like a war prisoner. I figure he's enjoying a starvation high. He must be chanting over a hundred rounds a day, and he sleeps no more than two or three hours. His glazed eyes are sunk in dark caverns. Chanting rapidly on his beads in a soft voice, he ignores all other devotees.

"Why are you doing this?" Swamiji asks him. "You must eat more to maintain your health."

"Yes, Swamiji," Stryadhisa says. He bows, goes down to the temple and eats half a *chapati* and a couple of spoonfuls of *dal*, chanting between bites.

"*Bhagavad-gita* says that this *yoga* is not for him who eats too little or too much," we tell him. Pretending not to hear, he goes on chanting.

"Krishna says that those who fast too much are demonic," Gargamuni tells him. "Hare Krishna," Stryadhisa says.

"You can't take the kingdom of God by storm," Kirtanananda warns.

"Hare Krishna, Hare Rama," Stryadhisa says, his eyes wide and glassy in his bony face.

* * *

A big event! Larry Bogart, a friend of Swamiji who works at the United Nations and who helped Swamiji incorporate ISKCON, is coming to visit, and Swamiji himself helps Kirtanananda and Acyutananda prepare a special feast.

"No one is to disturb me now," he tells Stryadhisa, and Stryadhisa goes downstairs to sit guard. When Larry Bogart comes a little early, Stryadhisa meets him at the temple door.

"Swamiji is busy right now," he says. "Maybe you'd like to come in and wait." Mr. Bogart enters, and Stryadhisa arranges a folding chair.

"Would you please take off your shoes?" Stryadhisa requests.

Mr. Bogart complies. Stryadhisa hands him a copy of "Who Is Crazy?"

Mr. Bogart waits patiently for a half hour. Then he requests Stryadhisa to inform Swamiji that he is waiting. After all, Mr. Bogart is an important man.

"But Swamiji told me that no one is to disturb him," Stryadhisa says.

"Then tell him I dropped by," Mr. Bogart says, putting on his shoes and leaving.

* * *

As Swamiji prepares the feast, he mentions Mr. Bogart's tardiness. Finally, as the feast is nearly ready, he tells Kirtanananda to phone the U.N. to see if he is coming.

Stryadhisa enters, chanting furiously.

“Mr. Bogart was in to see you, Swamiji,” he says. “Well, send him in,” Swamiji says.

“He waited and then left. He told me to tell you.”

“What? He has been and left? Why didn’t you bring him up?”

“You told me no one was to disturb you, Swamiji,” Stryadhisa says. “But—Mr. Bogart … a very important gentleman … We were expecting…” Then Swamiji explodes. “Fool! Stupid! Rascal! Nonsense!”

Before Swamiji’s chastisement, Stryadhisa is crushed. He makes a perfunctory bow and runs out.

* * *

Stryadhisa doesn’t eat for two days. He sits in the temple corner and chants. “Tell him he must eat,” Swamiji says, disturbed.

“You must eat,” we tell Stryadhisa. “Swamiji says.”

“*Harekrishnaharekrishnakrishnakrishnaharehare*,”

Stryadhisa rambles, not even looking up. “He’s in maya,” Gargamuni says.

Finally, Stryadhisa goes alone to see Swamiji. He asks for some money. Very little. Only a half dollar. “What for?” Swamiji asks.

“For some gasoline, so I can burn myself up.”

Calling in Brahmananda, Swamiji tells Stryadhisa to repeat his request. “Please, Swamiji,“ Stryadhisa says. “It was rather confidential.”

We confer on what to do. In Vietnam, Buddhist monks are daily burning themselves up like matchsticks. All we need to close us down is a Second Avenue incineration. And Swamiji would surely be deported.

We finally phone Stryadhisa's mother, who comes and takes him home.

We don't quite know what to make of all this. Stryadhisa was certainly chanting enough. "You can't take the kingdom of God by storm," Kirtanananda concludes.

"He disobeyed Swamiji," Gargamuni says, scooping up another sweetball. "He wouldn't eat." We never mention Stryadhisa again. We know that for Swamiji, it is like losing a son.

In the evening, sitting on a little bench out in the courtyard, Swamiji tells us that if he could just make one person Krishna conscious, he would consider his mission successful.

"Now more people are coming to the *kirtans* because we are getting some notice in the papers," he says. "But because I do not lie to them and tell them they can be Krishna conscious while having sense gratification, they go away. What am I to do? Change Krishna's message to suit Americans? That cannot be done. It is not my message to change. I can only deliver it as it is. If I have to sit under a tree with just one sincere disciple, that will be all right. We do not require many stars. just one moon. One moon will light up the sky."

We all look at one another, each of us yearning to be a moon for Swamiji. But the dark clouds of ignorance and forgetfulness are hard to disperse.

"Do you ever think of returning to Vrindaban, Swamiji?" Rayarama asks.

"My heart is always hankering after that Vrindaban," he says,

smiling. “Even though I am sitting in New York, a magnificent city, the world’s greatest city, I shall be very happy to return to my Vrindaban, that sacred place. Of course, if someone asks, ‘Then why are you here?’ I must say that it is my duty. I have brought some message for you people. My Guru Maharaj has ordered me, ‘Whatever you have learned, whatever knowledge you have, you should go to the Western countries and distribute It.’ So, in spite of all difficulties, I am here. If I go and sit down in Vrindaban, I would be very comfortable there and have no anxiety. But I have taken these risks in old age because I am duty bound. In spite of all inconveniences, I have to execute my duty. That is the basic principle for advancement of spiritual knowledge.”

“Maybe someday you can take us to Vrindaban,” Klirtanananda suggests. “We would all like to go there with you.”

“Yes,” Swamiji laughs. “You will like it there. In time, we will go , But actually we are already residing in Vrindaban, the place of Krishna. Now I am in America, but this does not mean that I am out of Vrindaban. If we think of Krishna always, we are always in Vrindaban. In New York, I am still in Vrindaban because my consciousness is there. Krishna consciousness means living with Krishna in that spiritual planet, Goloka Vrindaban. You simply have to wait to give up this body. That is the process.

ananya-cetāḥ satataṁ
yo māṁ smarati nityaśaḥ

For one who remembers Krishna, Krishna becomes a very cheap commodity. ‘Oh, I am very cheap for the devotees,’ Krishna says. The greatest, most valuable thing becomes cheap for one who takes to Krishna consciousness.

tasyāhaṁ sulabhaḥ pārtha
nitya-yuktasya yoginaḥ

— ‘Because My devotee is continually engaged in *bhakti-yoga*, I am easily available.

Swamiji pauses a moment and looks at us. “Of course, you may think it is sometimes not so easy,” he says, reading our thoughts and smiling. “Sometimes, when the moon is covered by clouds, we think it is not there because everything is dark. But when the clouds pass, we see that the moon has been there all the time, shining in all its brightness. This Krishna consciousness movement is that benediction moon, shining through the clouds of Kali-yuga.”

End of Chapter 5

Chapter 6. Back to Godhead

"October 21, 1966. I walk into Swamiji's room, offer obeisances, and he hands me the first three volumes of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which he had printed in India.

"Here," he says. "Take and read."

I open the books. In the front of each, he has written my spiritual name. "With my best blessings, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami."

"Oh, thank you, Swamiji," I say.

"That's all right," he says, smiling. "Now you compile this *Back To Godhead* magazine."

Back to Godhead! That is, we were there once. It's a question of recovering a lost land. As Swamiji says: "I have come to remind you of what you have forgot."

Following the orders of his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, Swamiji began *Back To Godhead* in 1944. Published bi-monthly in India from 1944 to 1956, *Back To Godhead* established Swamiji as one of India's leading personalists. Now Swamiji enjoins Rayarama and me to introduce it to the West.

"Work sincerely," he tells us, "and make it as big as your *Time Magazine*."

On October 23, I type up the stencils of our first edition. Our motto is the same as Swamiji's original: "Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience."

We include two lectures of Swamiji from notes taken by Umapati in September. There's also some poetry by Kirtanananda, and an essay by me. We mimeograph as many copies as the stencils can make—about

"Godhead is Light , Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no Nescience."



EDITED & FOUNDED

(Under direct order of His Divine Grace Sri Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupada)

By Mr. ABHAY CHARAN DE.

All Glory to Sri Guru and Gauranga

"BACK TO GODHEAD"

वन्देऽहं श्रीगुरोः श्रीगुर पदकमलं श्रीगुरून् बैष्णवांश्च
श्रीरूपं सायजातं सहगणरघुनाथान्वितं तं सजीवम् ।
साद्वैतं सावधूतं परिजनसहितं कृष्णचैतन्यदेवम्
श्रीराधाकृष्णपादान् चहगण ललिता-श्रीविशाखान्वितांश्च ॥

The man having forgotten himself as the son of Godhead, has forsaken his real constitutional nature. He has misidentified himself with everything non-godly and therefore manipulates a material existence conducted by the mind and the six instrumental senses. He is concerned only with his material coverings of gross&subtle on and the subtle mind but cannot see either is what we mean by Nescience which is darkness. The man having designated himself with the relation of his vehicular body and the finer elements of mind and ego etc., like the motor-car driver who has identified himself wrongly with the motor-car itself, has manufactured a civilization which is self contradictory and self denial.

His so called rationality having not gone far above the rationality of the lower animals, he laments at the death of his fellowmen or at the loss of his own things which he has never witnessed by real experience. This is what we mean by Nescience which is darkness. He slightly feels only and that after the death of his fellowmen that the body loses something that moves it just like the driver moves the motor-car, but still due to the darkness of Nescience he never concerns himself with the driver of the body but takes care superficially only for the body or the mechanical car.

In the darkness of Nescience he is fully amazed with mechanism of the gross body just like a boy who is amazed with mechanism of the motor-car, but he hardly tries to understand that without a driver any amount of astounding mechanical arrangement of the motor-car or that of the human body, it cannot move either of them even by an inch. This is what we mean by Nescience which is darkness.

The defect of the present day civilization is just like the above. This is actually the civilization of Nescience or illusion and has, therefore, civilization been turned into militarization. Every one is fully concerned with the comforts of the body and everything related with the body and no body is concerned with the Spirit that moves the body although even a boy can realise that the motor-car mechanism has little value if there is no driver of the car. This dangerous ignorance of humanity is a gross Nescience and has created a dangerous civilization in the

Godhead is Light ; "Neacience is darkness." "Where there is Godhead there is no Nescience.



(An instrument for training the mind) *Edited and founded* In obedience humaness of his Divine master,
Under direct order of His Divine Grace Sri Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupada
by Goura-nadi Abhay Charan Bhaktivedanta

VOL. III | Post Six pies a Copy. | Doble, Saturday 9th May 1944. | Fortnightly published. | PART V

Sufferings of Humanity

Is Providence responsible for it ?

Dr. Martins of Delhi asked whether it is God who is responsible for all the miseries in the world. First let it be understood that, as far as God is concerned, there is no mala *karma*. The people commit mala and they suffer for it. Just as a man who takes a poisonous drug at dentistesles be the world are allte to the false utilization of the law of nature. The laws of nature are very strict. If a man transgress the laws he must suffer automatically. The example is given in the *Bhagavad-gita* (3.27): "Nature acts in her is not the doer, but still if one transgresses the laws of nature he must suffer. The laws of nature are enacted and execution is also carried out by nature's agents.

The Lord stimulated the material nature (*prakrti*) and material nature is working under His order. He doesn't do it directly, but as a king gives order to his minister, material nature works according to the order of the Lord. So if we transgress nature's laws we must suffer, although not directly inflicted by God. Just like a law we enact and so we may be punished according to our offensive actions, similarly *dharma-yuddha* means a fight for religious principles. *Dana-yuddha yuddha* means fighting simply for sense gratification. Although there is no law in nature for fighting, still if a man fights simply for sense gratification, he becomes responsible and is punished by the laws of nature. *Yuddha* in general may be religious, but today it is mostly against the laws of nature.

Unless a man acts in accordance with the law, he is bound to suffer. (Gita, chapter 18). If a man acts in "this nature" by his own free will he is responsible. The Supreme Lord says in the Gita (18.61), *ishvarah sarva-bhutani hrid-deshe arjuna tishthati bhraman sarva-bhutani yantrarudhani mayaya.* The Lord is the machine, and we are all like machines, and He is driving us. If we act accordingly, under His direction, we are happy; if we act independently, we must suffer. We are constitutionally seres (servants) of the Lord, but in this material world we are trying to become enjoyers. As soon as one tries to become an enjoyer, he must suffer.

there is no denial of this position of the Lord. Lord means the enjoyer and we are all meant to be the servants of the Lord. That is the constitutional position of life. Lord means the enjoyer, and we are meant to serve. In the material world when this natural constitutional position is forgotten, we are miserable, as a fish thrown out of water.

The Supreme Lord is perfect and we are perfect, because we are parts or parcels of Him. But the external energy covers our constitutional position, just as the reflection of our face in water is covered by the waves. Therefore material people's constitutional position is covered by ignorance, clagled thus they become energy. As soon as they revive their position as parts and parcels of the Lord, then they become freed from this bondage. This is the aim of Krishna consciousness.

He is as kind as a father or mother to His children. He gives everyone freedom, that we can act according to our constitution. But if we misuse that freedom we are punished as a result of our misuse.

Just like a father gives freedom to his son, but if the son misuses it, the father must correct and punish.

The human life is full of chantces and full of miseries. But at the same time there must be beauties, better we must take there also. Say, man runs to a well for running water, but on the way something in its his hone the running after his hater of happiness, but after thow or other weare bit by the snake of miseries. If a man is bit by a snake it is not the fault of the snake. It is the man's fault that he was careless. If we are entangled in miseries it is our fault that we are forgetting Krishna.

If a man works according to the laws of nature he is happy. But if he will work against the laws of nature he must suffer. Therefore we should accept the laws of nature as they are. There is no use trying to change them. Do not imitate God. There is no God imitation. If you try to imitate God you become Godless. That is the right position.

The laws of nature are inexorable, and they must be strictly followed. We are in material nature and are subjected to the laws. As soon as we revive our original position as parts and parcels of Krishna, then we are free from all entanglement, and then the glory of God is visible.

We must realize the fact that we are not this body. Soul never dies. A person who knows this science of the soul is glorified in all of the Scriptures. That is the glory of human life.

BACK-TO-GODHEAD

AN INSTRUMENT FOR TRAINING THE MIND AND EDUCATING HUMAN NATURE TO RISE UP TO THE PLANE OF THE SOUL SPIRIT

First Appearance on the Vyas Puja Day 1944

VOL. I. PART II

Edited & Founded under the orders of

His Divine Grace Sri Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupada

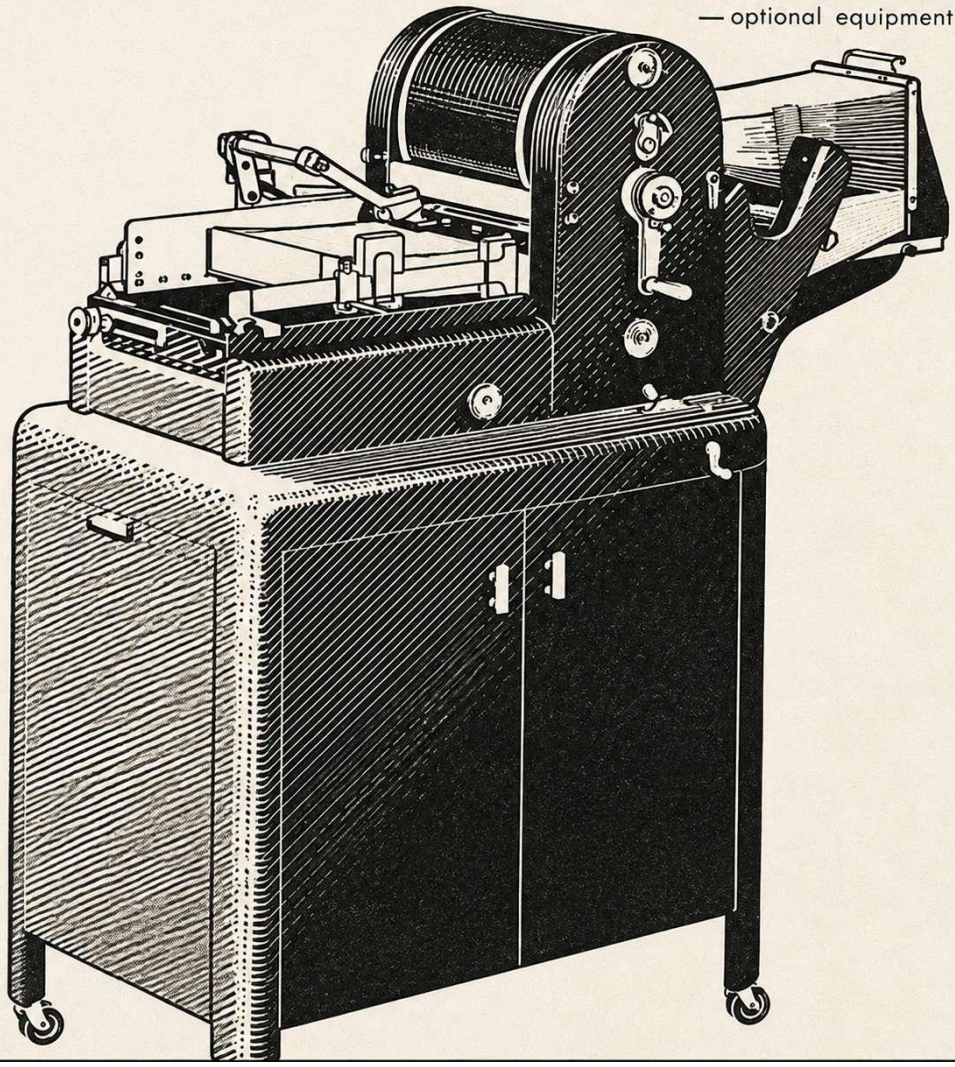
BY

ABHAY CHARAN DE

OCTOBER 1944

THACKER, SPINK & CO. (1933) LTD.
3, ESPLANADE, CALCUTTA

MIMEOGRAPH 92
Shown with Interlayer
— optional equipment



a hundred—and Gargamuni quickly sells them out at Saint Mark's Place for fifteen cents each. Although it is a modest, most unprofessional pamphlet, Swamiji is pleased.

"We have so many literatures to translate," he says. "We have only to distribute the knowledge that is there, already given by Srila Vyasadeva: *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Vedanta-sutra*. And books by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's disciple, Srila Rupa Goswami. And *Chaitanya-charitamrita* by Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami. Oh, there are many volumes we have to publish! We see many different literatures on the newstands, and the crows take delight in them, as crows delight in nasty things. But this *Back To Godhead* is for the swans because it deals with Krishna."

* * *

Rayarama gives Allen Ginsberg a copy of *Back To Godhead* and asks Allen if he has any material to submit. Always obliging, Allen gives us a four page article, "Reflections on the Mantra," and we print it in our third issue.

Unfortunately, Allen's philosophy of the *mantra* is not consistent with Swamiji's.

"People think I'm some sort of *guru*," Allen protests. "That is, people want me to be a *guru*. But I'm not. These are just my reflections, based on my own experiences."

In his reflections, Allen defines *mantra* as a "short verbal formula," and likens it to a Rolling Stones song and a Gertrude Stein poem. Its words are "pure physical sounds uttered in a frankly physical universe."

Although we print the essay, Swamiji points out the discrepancies.

"Krishna is identical with His name," he tells us. "That means that

His name has the same qualities He has—*sat*, *chit*, *ananda*. No mundane vibration is eternal, otherwise why does it grow tiresome and have to be changed every other week? Nor can mundane songs like Rolling Stones or whatever produce real knowledge or bliss unending. Also, this transcendental vibration purifies. Anyone can see how our students are becoming purified, but the chanters of material songs are not."

Above all, Swamiji objects to the phrase, "pure physical sounds in a frankly physical universe."

"This is not true," he says, "because actually everything is spiritual. It becomes material only when we forget Krishna. Therefore, when we hear the name Krishna, which is identical with Krishna, we must remember the Lord. In that way, everything is purified."

There are other minor differences, all stemming from this. Allen mentions that Alfred Lord Tennyson chanted his own name and that the *mantra* widens our consciousness "much as an intense conversation with psychoanalyst or lover or priest." He even likens it to a lover's orgasmic cry.

"Tennyson may have felt something when he chanted Tennyson, but does anyone else?" Swamiji asks. "Does Mr. Ginsberg want to chant 'Tennyson, Tennyson'? But everyone enjoys chanting Krishna. This means there is something different about Krishna's name. He is the center of everyone and everything. And some analyst, or priest, or lover may widen the consciousness from this to that, but only Krishna is without limit and therefore can widen the consciousness infinitely. That is the difference. Nor can Hare Krishna be compared to any sexual cry, because the sexual cry is a call for some partner to come satisfy the caller's desire. That means it is sense gratification. But when we chant Hare Krishna, we are calling to Krishna, 'Please let me serve You.' So, on the spiritual platform it is the service that is desired, but on the material it is sense gratification that is sought."

There are other points, but Swamiji leaves it at that. He then tells us that *Back To Godhead* is meant solely for writings by devotees, and warns that we should be very careful in the future not to print anything by others.

Indeed, we have enough trouble ourselves keeping the philosophy pure. Not knowing where to start, I resort to writing essays comparing Krishna consciousness to transcendentalism in American literature. But Swamiji does not criticize our hybrid attempts. He smiles and thanks us for every new issue we bring him. He is all encouragement.

* * *

"The Department of Immigration will not renew my visa," Swamiji tells us in his room, after evening *kirtan*. "I don't know why they have refused. I have answered all their questions."

Originally, Swamiji entered America on a two month visa, which he has been repeatedly extending every two months for over a year. Now they are finally refusing further extensions.

Allen Ginsberg makes further arrangements with an immigration lawyer to extend the visa. More money is needed, however, and we decide that if each of us can manage to raise thirty-five dollars, all the lawyer fees can be met.

"I am very moved that you want me to stay so much that you will do this for me," Swamiji says. "I am very grateful."

We all set about to get the money. Brahmananda even dresses in a suit and goes to Central Park to beg. "My father is being deported to Israel," he tells people. "Could you please help?"

With a little additional help from Mr. Ginsberg, we manage to meet the lawyer fees, and Swamiji gets another extension. The lawyer begins to petition permanent residence status.

* * *

"You should hold elections," Swamiji tells us. "We require one temple president, one treasurer, a secretary and temple commander." Then: "I think that Brahmananda should be our president, Gargamuni the treasuer, Satsvarupa the secretary, and Kirtanananda the temple commander."

Although we agree with Swamiji's choices, we hold "elections" anyway, and our new officers begin their duties. Brahmananda, physically the largest and most impressive, makes announcements at the end of *kirtans*. Satsvarupa takes detailed notes of all the lectures, although they're taped, and also of *istagostis*, weekly meetings wherein we discuss philosophy and temple business. Gargamuni plops down in the middle of the temple with a suitcase, which he uses for a desk, and announces that as treasurer, he has no other duties to fulfill. Swamiji calls him "Gargamoney." Kirtanananda quickly sets everything in order, both in the temple and in Swamiji's apartment, and makes sure that order is maintained.

Satsvarupa rents an apartment nearby, and some of us live there or just visit to take showers. Sometimes it seems that the whole financial burden of Matchless Gifts rests on thin, little Satsvarupa. He periodically begs Swamiji to let him quit his job with the welfare department and join the other disciples full time, but Swamiji says no.

"Work, but surrender the fruits to Krishna."

Actually, each us of us feels that he himself is carrying the burden of our new Society, for Swamiji makes each of us feel special, needed, important. Our relationship to Krishna is individual and personal. Each part serves the whole. For the entire body to function properly, each limb must do its work in friendly cooperation.

* * *

Mohan Lal Sharma, my old colleague from the Ohio State University English Department, drops by to see us. He offers obeisances to Swamiji, touching his feet.

"There is Ganges water flowing through here, Swamiji," he says.

"Thank you," Swamiji smiles. "It is all by the grace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu."

When Rayarama suggests that we solicit help from some of the Indian societies in New York, Swamiji is not enthusiastic.

"I was thinking like that when I first came here," he says. "I was hoping that my countrymen in America would be the first interested in a Krishna consciousness society. But no. Generally, they are like new crows, new materialists, delighting in unclean things, in stool and nasty places. Because in India there is much poverty, for economic success many Indians come here to work and study. They generally imitate Westerners buy new cars and drink liquors, eat meat, go to night clubs, and keep women. So there is a saying, 'Crows eat stool, but new crows eat more stool.' No. Do not expect any help from them."

* * *

From San Francisco, Harvey Cohen writes that the West Coast is ripe for Krishna consciousness. In January, a "Gathering of the Tribes" is scheduled, and a hundred thousand are expected. Hordes of young people are flocking to San Francisco with flowers in their hair, and the word is out that a new generation is blossoming, the "Flower Children," nurtured on LSD, supposedly attuned to expanded consciousness, and waiting, we hope, to extend this consciousness beyond drugs.

Harvey asks for help. He is already looking for a storefront in the Haight-Ashbury district near Golden Gate Park, an area where "it's all happening."



The slogan "Flower Power" first emerged in Berkeley, California, during protests against the Vietnam War. In 1965, Allen Ginsberg published an essay titled *"How to Make a March/Spectacle,"* in which he urged protesters to bring plenty of flowers to hand out to police officers, journalists, politicians, and others. Using flowers, toys, flags, candy, and music helped turn an anti-war demonstration into a form of street theater, reducing the fear, anger, and threat typically inherent in protest rallies.

In particular, Ginsberg proposed using "Flower Power" to counter the menacing "specter" of the Hells Angels—a motorcycle gang that supported the U.S. military's actions in Vietnam, equated all anti-war protesters with communists, and threatened to violently disrupt planned anti-war demonstrations at the University of California, Berkeley. Ginsberg's approach helped draw positive attention to the protests, and "Flower Power" became one of the recognizable symbols of the counterculture movement.



In late 1966, the "Flower Power" method, used in "guerrilla theater" performances, spread from California to other parts of the United States. The Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco, California, became an iconic hub for the "Flower Power" movement. There, near the intersection of Haight and Ashbury streets in the mid-1960s, fans of psychedelic rock music frequently gathered, and performing musicians lived nearby—including some of the most famous, such as singer Janis Joplin and the bands Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead.

Swamiji is eager. “Yes, we must go,” he says. “We will go as soon as he has found a place.“

Mukunda and Janaki decide to go to India by way of the West Coast. Offering obeisances, they bid Swamiji goodbye, and as they walk out the door, Swamiji tells Mukunda, “Try to open a temple in San Francisco.” It appears that San Francisco is to be the first branch of our young devotional tree.

* * *

Swamiji is not satisfied with the 26 Second Avenue storefront. Matchless Gifts served for the first few months before the newspaper write-ups attracted people, but now it is obvious that we must find a larger building.

We begin searching: abandoned meeting halls, old churches, lofts, empty warehouses. Greenwich Village rents are too high, and midtown is out of the question. Swamiji tells us that he wants to buy a building. But with what?

“Krishna is supplying everything,” he tells us. “He is supplying to the animals and nondevotees. How much more will He supply to His devotees!”

We land in the hands of one Mr. Payne, an elegantly dressed real estate agent.

“You have a handful of stars,” he tells Brahmananda, who, as our president, leads the search for a new temple. “You are incorporated as a tax exempt religious organization,” Mr. Payne goes on. “You’ve no idea how much this will save you. Most people have to vacate just because they can’t pay their taxes. Yes, Krishna is looking after you indeed. And I’ve just the place for you and your spiritual master.”

He shows us a handsome, three-story, red-brick building near St.

Mark's Place, a good downtown location, near the youth movement and yet in an area where uptowners can feel comfortable. There's a small porch, and large double doors open into a meeting hall, ideal for kirtan. The pinewood floors are polished, and the thick interior walnut doors are carved and varnished. Mr. Payne is right: a perfect temple for ISKCON.

Swamiji looks it over approvingly. "Get it," he tells Brahmananda. And Brahmananda begins to negotiate. But how? We have no money. The building is selling for $100,000. None of us has ever approached such a sum.

"If you can just give five thousand down," Mr. Payne says, "I can get the owners to draw up a contract. Five thousand down, and another five thousand within two months. That shouldn't be so difficult."

"Do it," Swamiji tells Brahmananda.

And resolute, big, burly Brahmananda sets out to raise the money.

* * *

Daily now, in the early mornings before any of us awake, Swamiji continues typing out his translation of *Bhagavad-gita*. Months ago, in February, he had recorded a kind of foreword, which Satsvarupa now types up as "Introduction to Geetopanishad." Meanwhile, I continue typing the Second Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, keeping editorial changes at a minimum, correcting only grammatical transgressions. I also continue compiling *Back To Godhead* and writing essays on the nonmaterial Self and the spiritualization of energy. All the magazines sell out. The stencils, unfortunately, won't print more than a hundred copies of each edition. We consider a printer, but prices are beyond us.

* * *

Swamiji shows us how to light small birthday candles and place

them on the little table serving as an altar for Lord Chaitanya. He allows a drop of wax to fall, then sets the candle in it. We repeat this process every evening. When asked the significance of this act, Swamiji says that it is "to increase your devotion," and further explains that it is Rama-vijaya and that we are commemorating Lord Rama's victory over the demon Ravana.

Each evening, after showering, Swamiji sits before the picture of Lord Chaitanya, puts on *tilak*, and silently recites the Gayatri *mantra*, his brahminical thread wound about his right thumb. None of us knows this *mantra*, nor the real meaning of the thread. After this, he rings a tiny bell, lights a stick of incense, offers it to Lord Chaitanya, then offers obeisances.

* * *

To us, this is all very wonderful, very strange. We call it "bells.

Mr. Dey, a 75-year-old Bengali with long white beard and hair, visits Swamiji. Mr. Dey wears lace-up boots and a button-down black frock, and he claims that he is the reincarnation of Ezekiel. He's been wandering the earth all his life. His companion is the Bible. He never bathes.

"Your young men shall have visions; and your old men, dreams," he says. "And from their weapons they will make scythes, plows, and pruning hooks. Get thee to the mountains! Out of the cities! When the sea of fire comes, the cities will be destroyed. To the mountains! Join together in communes."

Swamiji yawns. "The end is always coming," he says. "We are not concerned with this end or that end. Destruction is always going on. We will stay here and execute our duty for Krishna, and whenever Krishna wants, He can take us."

Out of compassion, Swamiji allows Mr. Dey to stay in the temple.

He remains a week. Then word leaks to Swamiji that he is confusing people by preaching that Krishna is a demon and Christ is the only way.

"Tell him that he should leave," Swamiji tells Brahmananda. "He's a serpent. Simply disturbing." And so Ezekiel reincarnate moves out of Matchless Gifts.

"He may believe in his way," Swamiji says, "but his preaching against Krishna—that we cannot tolerate."

* * *

Meanwhile, Brahmananda continues to negotiate with Mr. Payne. Although Brahmananda has miraculously raised the five thousand deposit, the owners want more proof of our ability to meet payments. We have to hire a lawyer to peruse the contracts.

"Mr. Payne is causing us so much pain," Swamiji says. "What is the difficulty?" He doesn't see the necessity for Mr. Payne at all.

"Why don't we purchase direct from the owners? Why all these agents?"

"It's just the way it's done here," we say.

We wait. The building on St. Mark's remains a castle in the sky, and five thousand is tied up with Mr. Payne.

* * *

November 5, 1966. Thirty thousand gather in Washington Square to march up Fifth Avenue for world peace. Allen Ginsberg invites us to join his group amassing in Tompkins Square Park.

"Yes, go with Mr. Ginsberg," Swamiji tells us. (He always pronounces the "gin" in Ginsberg as if it's a drink.) "Go and chant Hare Krishna. That's the real peace formula. *Hari-sankirtanam*."


FREE SPEECH
PEACE


SHORELINE COLLEGE
WAR
ALL PEOPLES
WAR IN VIETNAM
PEACE IN
GOD IS NOT ON OUR SIDE
THOU SHALL NOT

Allen wears a *kurta* and white Indian-style pajama pants, and he plays the portable harmonium he'd gotten in Benares. It is a two hour walk from Tompkins Square to Times Square in midtown. We spread ourselves out in the crowd to lead the chant over a wide area.

"Peace in America!" Allen chants. "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna." He ties the harmonium around his neck and plays a drone. I blow an ooga horn, the kind with a rubber ball used by Calcutta taxis. On Fifth Avenue, intimidated shopkeepers lock their doors and pull iron bars across their windows.

About two blocks of demonstrators take up the chanting. Although some chant "Peace in Vietnam, peace in America," they soon tire of this and return to Hare Krishna. Just as Swamiji said: "Material vibrations soon grow tiresome."

I feel I'm cloudwalking up Fifth Avenue, chanting until I'm hoarse. The very magnitude of the city crowds excites the soul. We join arms to form long lines and dance down the center of the avenue. Police along the blockades stare defiantly. Pink-faced Irishmen hurl insults we can't hear. Italian kids fling ice filled paper cups.

"*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*."

At Times Square, we break into circles, sit down, and continue chanting. I recall Swamiji's injunction: "Just take up Krishna consciousness, and peace in the world will automatically come."

As I see people chanting, I think of Lord Chaitanya's protest march some five hundred years ago in Bengal. Because the local magistrate had forbidden the public chanting of Hare Krishna, Lord Chaitanya had led thousands in protest, all chanting Hare Krishna. Now, in New York, the issues are much different, but they all pivot around forgetfulness of Krishna. As Swamiji said, "My Guru Maharaj used to tell us there is only one problem in the world—lack of Krishna consciousness."

When Allen speaks on the peace issue, I hardly hear him. To me, Vietnam seems secondary to the wondrous effects of public chanting, and the possibilities.

When we return via subway to the temple, some young people follow us back for bread, hot milk, and more Hare Krishna. Everyone's glad to learn that the more people chant, the more potent the *mantra's* effect.

* * *

November 7. In Delhi, 200,000 Hindus riot, demanding an immediate ban on government cow slaughter. The rally is spearheaded by *sadhus*, holymen.

"The government is atheistic," Swamiji says, "but you can see that the people are protesting. They know that *go-mata*, mother cow, is beloved of Krishna and therefore sacred."

Swamiji outlines a letter to *The Times of India* and tells me to write it up nicely. In it, Swamiji cites Vedic injunctions against cow slaughter, pointing out that the cow is one of man's mothers, representative of the earth.

"There are very severe reactions awaiting all of them," he warris sternly. "Cattlemen, cow butchers, transporters, restaurant owners and consumers. Even the dishwasher."

* * *

November 13. A "love-in" at the Gate Theater on Second Avenue and Tenth Street, a zany political benefit for Louis Abolafia, the Lower East Side's candidate for President of the United States. Top billing is given to Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, the Fugs, and "Swami Bhaktivedanta and The Hare Krishna Chanters."

Leary drives about town with a papier-mache statue of Buddha

fastened atop his Volkswagen. Swamiji considers this offensive.

"What does he have to do with Lord Buddha?" he asks. "Lord Buddha was a great prince who renounced everything to meditate. What did Buddha have to do with LSD? This is a mockery."

Some of the devotees are reluctant to bring Swamiji. After all, Leary and Ginsberg are promoting drugs and sex, and our immigration lawyer discourages Swamiji's associating with the counterculture. Yet Swamiji sees it as another chance to spread Krishna consciousness, and decides to go.

While waiting to go on stage, we have to endure loud and untalented rock groups, as well as a Banana Celebration. Some people are claiming that you can get high by smoking banana peels. Swamiji tolerates all this with transcendental reserve.

We chant some fifteen minutes. Acyutananda and I dance vigorously, leaping in the air, whirling about stage in robes, and clashing finger cymbals. The managers don't give us much time, and Swamiji briefly explains the words of the *mantra* on a blackboard. His explanation is concise and memorable.

"Krishna is God, and Hare is the energy by which we reach God, and Rama is God as enjoyer of all. These are not ordinary words but names of God. God and His names are nondifferent. This is not so with ordinary words. If you sit in a corner and chant, 'Water, water, water,' you will go thirsty. But if you chant Hare Krishna, you will have God dancing on your tongue."

We leave immediately after the chanting. Audience reaction is good, and we extend invitations to Matchless Gifts. The managers inform us that there are benefits every Sunday throughout November and that we should continue to attend. Back at the temple, Swamiji bursts into laughter when he learns that Abolafia is seriously running for President.

"Perhaps we should run Brahmananda," he says.

* * *

More money is needed to cement the contract with Mr. Payne and the building's owners. Unfortunately, the young people attending Swamiji's lectures have scanty resources. For monetary success, we need some rich, elderly lady benefactors. Mishra has his, and Nikhilananda has his. Without them, there seems to be no moving out of the slums.

With this in mind, Brahmananda and Rayarama arrange a *kirtan* in midtown Manhattan's Judson Hall, directly across from Carnegie Hall. The rental for the night is $200, Swamiji's monthly rent on Second Avenue. Figuring that contributions will at least cover that, we rent the hall for November 15.

Rayarama posts conservative announcements in midtown. We hope for a crowd, but when we arrive, there are just eight people in the audience.

Our hearts sink. We should have known. We failed Swamiji.

In the dressing rooms, we put on fresh *tilak* and chant *japa* until eight o'clock. Then we follow Swamiji on stage, sit about him in a circle, and look out at the vast hall of empty seats. Although we feel like running out, Swamiji seems unconcerned. Whether the house is packed, or only one person is present, it's the same to him. His cymbals ring out, and he begins chanting prayers to the *gurus*.

We chant Hare Krishna and dance, then Swamiji delivers a short talk, and answers a question or two afterwards. We chant again, and then leave, some $200 poorer and nary a benefactor in sight.

Back on Second Avenue, Swamiji chides Rayarama. "I told you we should have charged money," he says. "In Bengal, there is the story

of a man offering people free mangoes. No one would take his mangoes because everyone thought, 'Oh, why is he giving away these mangoes? There must be something wrong with them.' But when he charged them two or three rupees, they thought, 'Let's see if the mangoes are really worth it.' When people see that something's free, they think it's worthless.

Charge them three or five dollars, and they will value it."

* * *

Stung by our failure, we retreat from making further midtown engagements and decide to remain on our home turf, the Lower East Side. We return to the Gate Theater, but the crowds are so small that we consider it a waste of time. Tompkins Square Park still offers the best recruiting potentials, and its use is free.

But the late November winds put an end to the park *kirtans*. The fall rains come. Swamiji turns on the apartment steam and wears a saffron wool sweater and overcoat when walking through the courtyard to the temple. We begin to think of warmer climes for his health. Letters from Harvey Cohen and Mukunda are encouraging. Some famous San Francisco rock groups have offered to play for a temple benefit, and in a Haight Street head shop, *Back To Godhead* sells out the first day. Now it's just a question of finding a storefront to rent.

"As soon as Mukunda finds a place," Swamiji says, "I'll take an airplane there. Is that all right?" He then confides that he's never flown before.

* * *

Although I've been chanting since July, the cosmos has not unfolded psychedelically before me, as I had hoped. What am I doing wrong? Why haven't I seen that apocalyptic vision witnessed by Arjuna on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra? Where is that *virat-rupa*, the

Universal Form containing myriad eyes, hands, heads, and flaming mouths devouring worlds?

"If hundreds of thousands of suns rose up at once into the sky, they might resemble the effulgence of the Supreme Person in that universal form."

According to Swamiji, Sri Krishna revealed this form to Arjuna as a special favor. What Arjuna saw, of course, is beyond description and human imagination. He saw the entire creation contained within the Lord's body.

"The pure devotees are not eager to see this form," Swamiji tells us. "Devotees prefer the two-armed form of Krishna as a cowherd boy. The *virat-rupa* is exhibited to materialistic men who can be impressed only by the might and opulence of the Supreme."

Well, after all, aren't we Western materialists by birth? Isn't this the form meant for us?

I finally gather the courage to approach Swamiji, waiting until he is alone in his room, sitting behind his footlocker, reading.

"Why can't I see Krishna as Arjuna saw Him on the battlefield?" I ask bluntly.

"You can," Swamiji says. "This is the process, chanting Hare Krishna."

"I've been chanting Hare Krishna more than four months," I complain, "but I still don't see that universal form with all the heads and arms. What am I doing wrong?"

Swamiji looks at me a moment, his eyes magnified behind his glasses. Then he silently hands me the manuscript of his recent translations of Eleventh Chapter verses. I read:

O greatest of all personalities, O supreme form, though I see here before me Your actual position, I yet wish to see how You have entered into this cosmic manifestation. I want to see that form of Yours. If You think that I am able to behold Your cosmic form, O my Lord, O master of all mystic power, then kindly show me that universal self.

"There," Swamiji says. "'If You think that I am able to behold Your cosmic form.' So what does that mean?"

I look at the verse again and think more deeply about it. Then I look up at Swamiji. His eyes are fixed on me, awaiting my reply. Suddenly I begin to feel stupid again, as I had when trying to defend the Buddhists.

"It means that Lord Krishna is the best judge," I say at length. "So Arjuna leaves it up to Him."

"Yes," Swamiji says. "That is the process. Arjuna was a great warrior, a great devotee of Krishna's. He didn't want to see the *virat-rupa* for his personal gratification. He was asking on behalf of the materialists. Yet he says to Krishna, 'If You think that I am able. This is the attitude we should have. Now what do you think?"

Again he looks at me, awaiting my reply, and for a moment I think that if I insist, he might even deliver the vision.

"I don't think I'm ready," I finally say.

"Yes," Swamiji smiles as I hand the verses back. "Yes, my spiritual master used to say, 'Don't work hard to try to see God. But work in such a way that God sees you.' So we should just go on with our chanting, and see Krishna in our service. Carry on devotional service sincerely, and everything will come in time."

* * *

Swamiji continues working throughout December on his

translation of *Bhagavad-gita*. I rarely see him work because of his schedule. He sleeps from eleven at night until about two or three in the morning. Then he gets up, and, using a dictaphone, dictates extensive commentaries on *Bhagavad-gita* while the great metropolis sleeps.

Citing a simile from *Bhagavad-gita*, he has told us that the material world is like a banyan tree with its roots above and branches below. A tree appears this way when pervertedly reflected in water. In the material world, everything is topsy-turvy; what is bad appears desirable, and what is actually desirable appears repugnant. When I see Swamiji taking rest just as most New Yorkers are indulging their senses, and getting up to render Krishna service just when they are taking rest, I'm reminded of the *Bhagavad-gita* verse: "What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage."

At seven, he comes down to the temple to lead morning *kirtan* and to lecture. Then he returns to his apartment, showers, eats a light breakfast, and reads over manuscripts, or advises us. In the afternoon, after eating *prasadam*, he chants some rounds and then rests for an hour, lying on his side on the rug before his footlocker.

Satsvarupa types up the manuscripts from the dictaphone tapes. Sometimes, when he can't understand what is said, he has to consult Swamiji. The manuscript runs into hundreds of pages. Swamiji is a very prolific writer indeed.

"I wrote the introduction one night last February when I was alone," he tells me. "I was just sitting in my apartment and had no one to talk to, and I remembered my spiritual master saying, 'If there is only one person present, that is all right. Preach to him about Krishna. And if no one is present, you can preach to the walls.' So I was preaching to the walls. But I had this tape recorder, and what I spoke can now be heard by you. That was the introduction to this *Bhagavad-gita*."

As Swamiji begins work on the last six chapters of *Bhagavad-gita*, he tells me that I can now start editing it.

"Edit for force and clarity," he says. "We want this *Bhagavad-gita* acceptable for publication, and grammatical precision is important. It must be acceptable to the academic community also, and since you have experience in that field, you know best how to put it nicely. Whenever there is some question about meaning, you can consult me."

Swamiji sends Brahmananda out to try to interest publishers. Daily, Brahmananda draws up lists of publishers and sets out on the subway for midtown, waiting in offices for hours to see businessmen intent only on quick sales.

"There's just no money in *swamis*," one tells him. "Risky. Very risky."

* * *

Swamiji always keeps a small postage scale and stamp sponge on his footlocker. From the beginning, he has been instructing us in cleanliness, very much like any parent. "Wash your hands. Take bath.

Don't put your fingers in your mouth. Wash. Don't bite your nails. Change clothes. Take that pencil out of your mouth. Don't touch leg. Clean nicely."

Thoughtlessly, I lick a postage stamp right in front of him. His eyes open wide in shock. "Oooh! Hayagriva! You have forgot!"

So true! Yes, I am always forgetting, day after day. Forgetfulness is our disease. Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.…

* * *

It's a brisk December morning, and we all sit in Matchless Gifts awaiting Swamiji. He descends from his apartment wrapped in a *chadar*[robe or blanket] and carrying a big brown book. After chanting the prayers to the *gurus* and leading us in Hare Krishna, he opens the

big book. We all sense that something historic is about to happen.

"Today," he says, "we will read from *Chaitanya-charitamrita*."

At last! For months he has been stressing that there are three books we must know: *Bhagavad-gita*, the essense of Krishna consciousness, spoken by Lord Krishna Himself; *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, dealing with the pastimes of Krishna, written by Vyasadeva; and *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, describing the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya, written by Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami. *Chaitanya-charitamrita* is cherished by Vaishnavas because it reveals the highest type of love for Krishna, a love manifested in the divine pastimes of Lord Chaitanya, who appeared on earth as a pure devotee mad with love for Krishna.

"Lord Chaitanya is Radha and Krishna combined," Swamiji tells us. "He is Krishna in the mood of Radha. He is Krishna come to relish love of Krishna in separation. The understanding of this divine *rasa* is most elevated."

Swamiji concentrates on the conversations between Lord Chaitanya and His disciple Sanatana Goswami, concerning Krishna's expansions in the spiritual world and the different types of *avatars*.

"Christianity teaches that there is only one *avatar*," a guest points out. "That is Christ."

"How's that?" Swamiji asks. "Christ said he is the son of God, and we accept him as God's perfect son. But is this to say he is the only son? There are millions and millions of planets, and God appears Himself in countless incarnations on each. This information is there in the *Vedas*. What evidence do you have that God comes only once? None. Just consider. In a bookstore we find a dictionary for the beginning student, and an encyclopedia for the more advanced. The encyclopedia contains all the information in the dictionary, and much more besides. Religions are also like that. These Vedic literatures are encyclopedic and complete. They contain limitless information about

God, His pastimes and incarnations. So Lord Chaitanya advises us to take advantage of *sadhu*, *shastra*, and *guru*. The *sadhu* is a saint of spotless character, and *shastra* is scripture—the *Vedas* —and the *guru* is the spiritual master. Not that we approach *shastra* directly. No. We receive *shastra* from *guru*. And *guru* must not contradict *sadhu* and *shastra*. The three can never contradict. We must evaluate *guru* in terms of *sadhu* and *shastra*. If he contradicts them, he is not *guru*."

"So, what is the relationship between Christ and Krishna?"

"Don't you know? What does it say in your Bible? Christ is called the son of God, is he not?"

"He is also God," the guest says.

"Yes, a father and his son are one. The son serves the father, and they are qualitatively one."

"Then they're the same?"

"Where do you get 'the same'? The father is the father, and the son is the son. If you are the son, then you and your father are one. But if you say, 'I am not only the son, but I am also the father,' then you contradict. How can you be the son and also the father?"

"Well, according to the Catholic position, they are one. It's inexplicable."

"If it's inexplicable, then why did you ask? Anyway, I'm giving you the explanation: Christ is the son of God, and he is one in God the Father. But you cannot say that he is the same. God the Father continues to be the Father, and the son continues to be the son.

* * *

"When Krishna manifested His opulence in Dwarka," Swamiji says, "He expanded Himself 16,108 times to accommodate 16,108

wives in 16,108 separate castles."

Satsvarupa shakes his head in disbelief.

"I just can't understand how anyone can do that," he says.

"Krishna can hold the universe in His mouth," Swamiji says, "and reveal it to Mother Yasoda as a childish prank. So if He can do this, how will He have difficulty maintaining any number of wives quite comfortably?"

Again Satsvarupa shakes his head and stares at the floor in confusion. He has no trouble accepting baby Krishna's holding the universe in His mouth. But how could Krishna multiply Himself so many times to keep thousands of wives in thousands of castles?

* * *

Obviously, we can't learn everything at once, nor expect everything revealed at once. In the summer and fall, Swamiji stressed the primary state of understanding: *Aham brahmasmi*. I am not this body but pure spirit soul. *Bhagavad-gita*, Chapter Two. Now, as we study *Chaitanya-charitamrita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* , the meaning of Krishna consciousness and the beauty of its cosmology begin to exfoliate. We come to realize that basic to the understanding of the reality of Krishna is awareness of the artificiality of the material world. "The unreal never was," Krishna tells Arjuna. "The real never ceases to be."

"Material achievements are like playtoys," Swamiji tells us. "They are modeled after real things, but they are just imitations. A little girl may spend hours imagining that her dollhouse is real, but it is still a toy all the time. Krishna has impregnated this material world with spiritual sparks, ourselves. And we are little children playing with toys, and Krishna is a kind father letting us play to our hearts' content.

The material body comes into being, and it grows, leaves some by-products, gets older, dwindles and vanishes. And this process is repeated over and over. But to avoid all this suffering, we must return to Krishna, to reality. Illusion is always strong and is always saying, 'Look here! Enjoy. You are God.

Why do you worship?'"

Question!" a guest says, raising his hand.

"Yes?"

"If the world is unreal, as the Buddhists also say, then why attach so much importance to it?"

"We do not exactly say that the world is unreal," Swamiji corrects. "The world is a fact, but it is temporary. We Vaishnavas prefer the word 'temporary' as more exact than 'unreal,' or 'dream.' Because the world is temporary, it can be said to be unreal, or like a dream. This means that it passes. But the Vaishnavas look on the world as Krishna's creation and therefore beautiful but temporary. If I create something beautiful, is it nice for you to call it *maya*, unreal, illusory? No. The proper word is 'temporary.'"

"If the reflection of the original is valueless, or temporary, as you say, then isn't revelation also valueless, since it is *maya*, or temporary?"

"Yes," Swamiji says, "if it doesn't go back to the original, to Krishna. People are engaged in the reflection and don't want to go back to the source. That is their problem. We are in the reflection and being baffled. There is a song, 'I thought I was building my cottage safely, but it was burnt to ashes.' Whatever we do here is patchwork. Where can you get happiness? Whatever material thing you get will eventually vanish. This sense of the temporary nature of things should come to us. Our life is defeated unless we develop spiritual knowledge. Fight with *maya*, and return to the reality, the source of everything. That should be the aim of knowledge."

"So, then, what can we perceive through the senses that can aid us in spiritual advancement?"

"Everything, if you can handle it," Swamiji says. "As long as we are embodied, there will be eating, sleeping, defending, and mating. None of these are prohibited, but they should be restricted. Instead of eating nonsense, you can eat Krishna *prasadam*. Eat nonsense, and the duration of sleep will be increased. Five to six hours of sleep is sufficient. We should try to decrease sleep because sleep is a waste of time. If you can control eating, you can control sleeping. Similarly, defending. And married sex life is nice because it is controlled—only for begetting children. Because you cannot control your sex desire, you use it for other purposes. Why not practise voluntary restraint? Have your sex life, have one or two children, and live peacefully. Nothing is to be stopped, but everything is to be controlled. If you can control your senses, you can become a *swami*, even in that dress."

* * *

Just before Christmas, a record producer, Alan Kallman, offers to record our *kirtans* and promote a Hare Krishna record.

"Yes, we must record," Swamiji says, happy with the offer. "It is our duty."

The night before the recording session, a guest appears at Matchless Gifts with a wooden drum resembling a *mridanga* —a two-headed Bengali clay drum used in Vaishnava *kirtans* and reportedly designed by Lord Chaitanya Himself. Swamiji spots it from the dais. Quickly the drum is in his lap, and he is playing it expertly. Everyone looks up, surprised. For us, the sounds seem to come from faraway Bengal, or, perhaps, from other planets, so strange are the rhythms and sweet the echoes.

"We must have this drum for tomorrow's recording," Swamiji says, and Brahmananda convinces the owner to lend us the drum for the

recording session.

The next evening, Rupanuga drives us to Times Square in his Volkswagen bus. When we enter the Adelphi Recording Studio, some rock and roll musicians are recording.

"What's the name of your group?" someone asks.

"The Hare Krishna Chanters," I say. And, remarkably, we're so booked.

Swamiji sits on a mat in the center of the studio and plays the drum. Eyes closed, he sings the prayers to the *gurus*, his voice filled with devotion, absolute certainty, reverence, and ecstasy. Even the recording engineers are impressed. When he finishes singing "Samsara Dava" and "Vande Hum," he leads us in chanting Hare Krishna. Kirtanananda plays tamboura, and the rest of us play cymbals and tambourines. Then, because the engineers must readjust their equipment, Swamiji has to sing all the prayers over again. After singing, he gives a prepared statement explaining the meaning of the *mantra*. When the long session finally ends, Swamiji is extremely tired.

* * *

Too much so. We tend to take his health for granted, mainly because he always seems filled with boundless energy. Although more than twice our age, he exhausts us with endless spiritual challenges, programs, ideas, plans—all for making Krishna known throughout the world.

We have no idea what his mission really means. We are educated to believe that individual men can no longer affect the world in a significant way. The world is too large and complex. What can one man do? We're not living in the age of Alexander or Caesar, nor of Socrates or Christ.

Ominously, the morning after the recording, Swamiji suffers heart palpitations. His schedule is proving overstrenuous. There are digestive difficulties. Kirtanananda nurses him privately, dispensing with unnecessary intrusions, trying to minimize his work.

But this isn't possible. Within a week, Swamiji is talking about going to the West Coast, "whether San Francisco is ready or not."

* * *

December 31. Goodbye, 1966. Hare Krishna and Happy New Year!

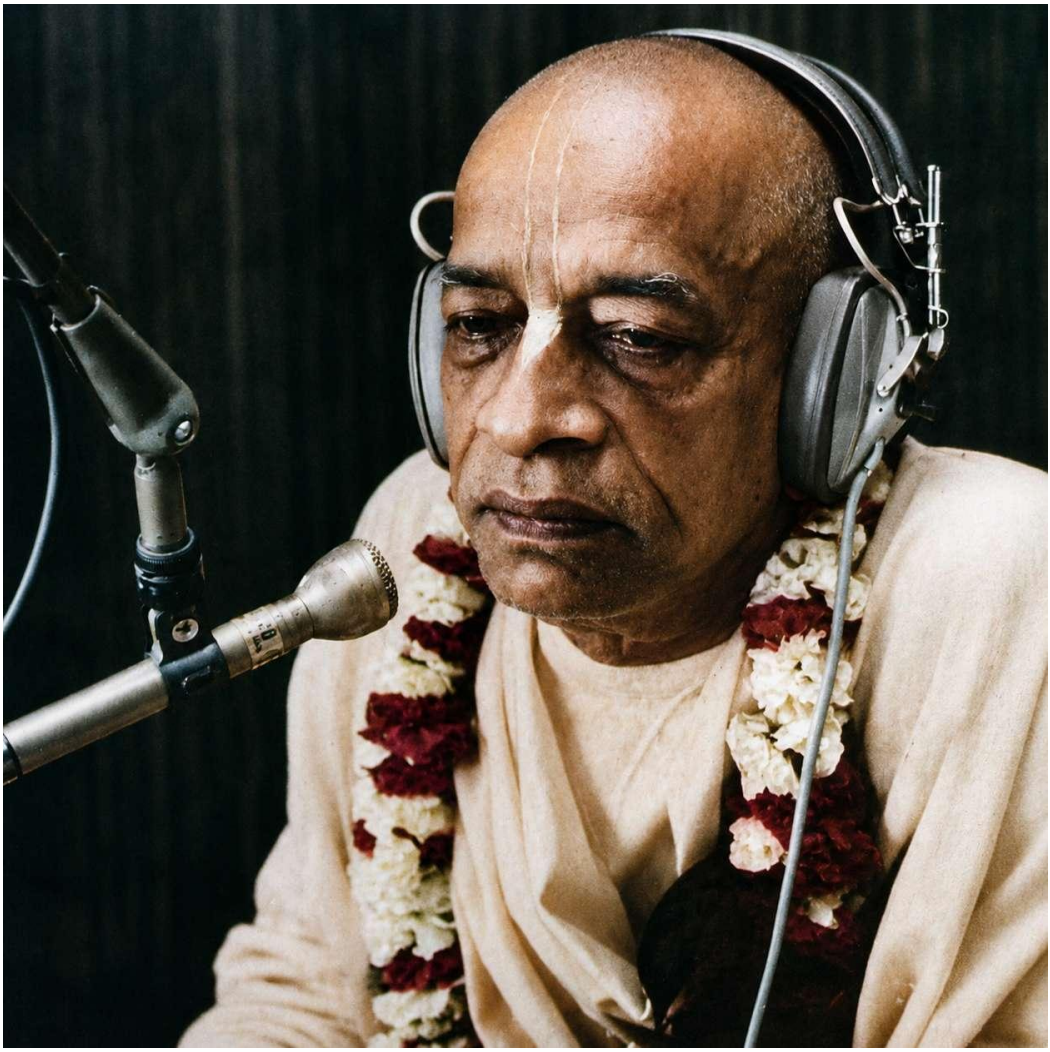
New Year's Eve, Matchless Gifts is crowded with devotees and visitors. Swamiji leads the *kirtan*, and we all chant and dance by candlelight. It is a celebration none of us will ever forget.

"Chant! Chant!" Swamiji tells us, and our chanting drowns out even the drunken revelry on Second Avenue. Again, Swamiji is weaving magic.

A feast follows, and Swamiji eats with us, sitting on his dais and talking amiably. He keeps insisting that Umapati, Satsvarupa, and I take more *prasadam*. There's a bucket of *gulabjamuns*, "ISKCON bullets," and we stuff ourselves.

"For us, every day is New Year's," Swamiji says. "Krishna is always new, always fresh, and we are always celebrating Him. Just see how these people in *maya* are celebrating, drinking poison to forget everything! Because they are frustrated, they want to forget. But for a devotee, it is just the opposite. The devotee wants to remember Krishna at all times."

Then, within the first week of the new year, we receive word from San Francisco that a storefront has been rented near Golden Gate Park, in the center of the Haight-Ashbury district, where "the tribes are gathering."




Krishna
Consciousness
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

"It brings a state of ecstasy." —Allen Ginsberg *New York Times*

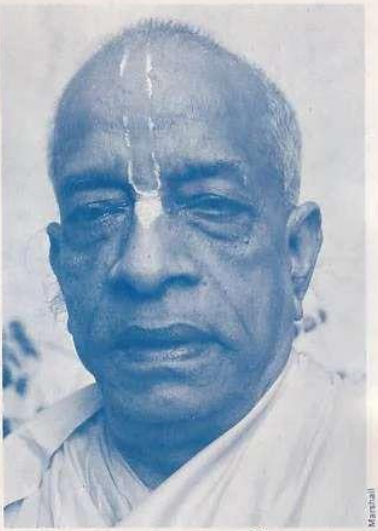
CA2210

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA

KRISHNA KRISHNA, HARE HARE. HARE RAMA, HARE RAMA, RAMA RAMA, HARE HARE.

Attention all eternal wayfarers on the shores of Earth. Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta leads his devotees in an authentic rendition of the Vedic mantra HARE KRISHNA, better known in India as the Maha (Great) Mantra. Narada Muni, a real spaceman with power to travel freely throughout the entire Creation, first brought this chant to Earth from the planet Goloka located in the spiritual sky. In this way it has been sung on the banks of the Ganges for many thousand years. About five hundred years ago Lord Chaitanya proclaimed this chant to be the most effective means to Self Realization available to man in this Age of Kali (Destruction). Today Swami Bhaktivedanta delivers it to the West.

This Transcendental Sound Vibration is called Bhaktiyoga, or the Yoga of Ecstasy. It is easy and can be practised by anyone. Simply sit down, RELAX, and LISTEN! Listen carefully and gradually you will begin to feel like singing too. SING! As you sing, you will feel like dancing. DANCE! Do the "Dance of Ecstasy." Anyone can. There is no question of learning it. You already know it! Simply raise your arms over your head and dance. RELAX, SING, DANCE. A new life of bliss and Cosmic Consciousness await you on the other side of the mirror of the mind. This life is lived in love and can most easily be reached by SINGING and DANCING. This is Bhaktiyoga, the yoga for a New Age. Try it!



Marshall

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

LIST OF BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS BY A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI ■ SRIMAD BHAGWATAM (3 VOLUMES) ■ GEETOPANISHAD (BHAGAVAD GITA AS IT IS) ■ EASY JOURNEY TO OTHER PLANETS ■ ISHOPANISHAD ■ BACK TO GODHEAD (MAGAZINE) ■ KRISHNA THE RESERVOIR OF PLEASURE ■ WHO IS CRAZY? ■ NECTAR OF DEVOTION ■

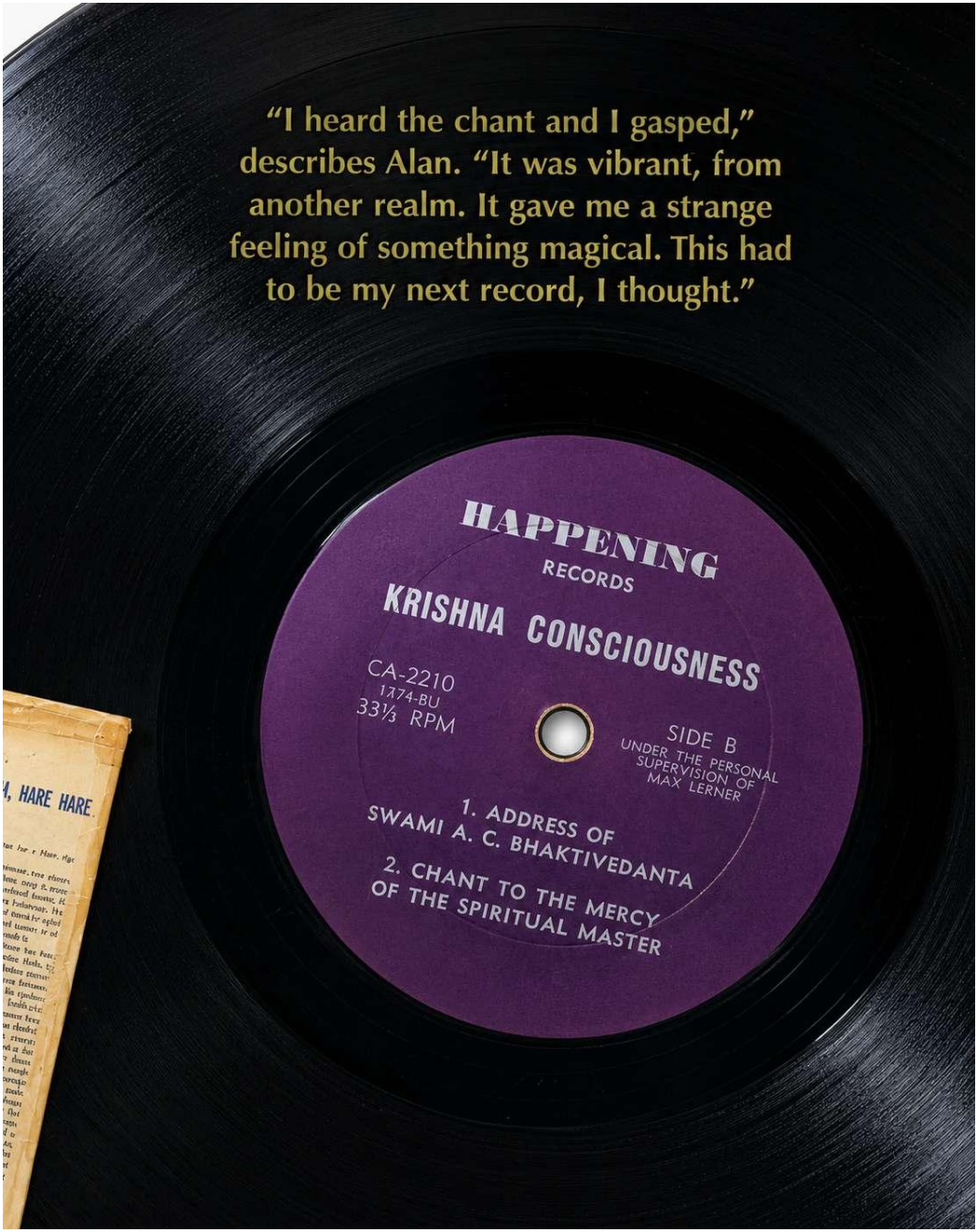
This record also contains two prayers by Swami Bhaktivedanta, sung in praise and adoration of his spiritual master, Sri Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati. The prayer likens this material world to a great forest fire, and the spiritual master to the rain cloud that can extinguish it.

Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta was born Abhay Charan De in Calcutta, India, in 1896. Trained at the finest Indian universities, he was a successful young businessman when, in 1922, he met his spiritual master, Sri Srimad Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati. Just before his departure from this mortal world in 1936, Swami Bhaktivedanta was charged with the responsibility of spreading this movement to the English speaking world. Shortly thereafter an English fortnightly was established and work was begun on a number of books and translations, the most ambitious of which is a proposed sixty volume translation and commentary of the Srimad Bhagwatam still in progress. Finally in 1959 he took up the life of a sanyasin, fully engaged in the duties ordered by his spiritual master. In 1965 the seventy year old swami sailed to the West with the message entrusted to him nearly three decades earlier. He now offers it to every American: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say REJOICE."

Art Director and Illustrator
Simeon Marshall

HAPPENING
RECORDS, INC.
1619 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10019

FOR ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WRITE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA
CONSCIOUSNESS, INC.
1619 BROADWAY NEW YORK CITY ROOM 602


"I heard the chant and I gasped," describes Alan. "It was vibrant, from another realm. It gave me a strange feeling of something magical. This had to be my next record, I thought."
HAPPENING
RECORDS
KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS
CA-2210
1374-BU
33⅓ RPM
SIDE B
UNDER THE PERSONAL SUPERVISION OF MAX LERNER
1. ADDRESS OF SWAMI A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA
2. CHANT TO THE MERCY OF THE SPIRITUAL MASTER
HARE HARE

“We’re busy converting it into a temple now,” Mukunda writes, enclosing a plane ticket. Taking Swamiji’s advice, Mukunda and Janaki abandoned their trip to India. After all, the best India can offer has come to us.

“I shall go immediately, then,” Swamiji announces.

Of course, none of us want to see Swamiji leave New York, but he reminds us that we belong to Krishna, not New York, and that we can expect to spread this movement all over the world. Determined and confident, he excites our imagination. Yes! Krishna consciousness must go West! And, after California, the world!

We make final airline reservations and begin packing his manuscripts in trunks. Ranchor collects enough money to accompany him on the plane as personal assistant. Rayarama and Rabindra-svarupa, contracting a car for delivery to San Francisco, leave three days before Swamiji’s scheduled departure.

We all worry that the initial takeoff might be too exciting for Swamiji’s heart. We all, of course, want to go with him.

“The New York temple must be maintained nicely,” Swamiji tells us. “Now this is Brahmananda’s job.”

“But how long will you be gone, Swamiji?” Brahmananda asks, worried.

“A fortnight,” Swamiji says. Then, laughing: “But you have not reckoned a day of Brahma.”

Still, we reckon the course of things, and a long New York winter without Swamiji is not appealing. After all, isn’t he actually delivering Krishna? And isn’t our place therefore at his lotus feet?

Resourcefully, Kirtanananda contracts a 1965 Chevy coupe for

delivery to California. Chanting Hare Krishna and driving fifty hours nonstop day and night, we follow Swamiji to the land of the Flower Children.

End of Chapter 6

PART 2.
San-Francisco

Chapter 7. Swami in Hippyland

January 17, 1967. When Swamiji descends from the plane and enters the San Francisco airport, he is greeted by a group of about fifty young people. As he is questioned by the press, he extends his usual transcendental invitations.

"We welcome everyone, in any condition of life, to come to our temple and hear the message of Krishna consciousness," he says.

"Does that include Haight-Ashbury hippies and bohemians?" a reporter asks.

"Everyone, including you or anyone else," Swamiji says. "Whatever you are—what you call an acid-head, or hippy, or whatever—what you are doesn't matter. Once you are accepted for training, you will change."

"What is your stand on drugs and sexual freedom?" another reporter asks.

"There are four basic prerequisites for those entering this movement," Swamiji says. I do not allow my students to keep girl friends. I prohibit all kinds of intoxicants, including coffee, tea, and cigarets. And I prohibit meat eating and gambling."

"And LSD?"

"I consider that an intoxicant. I do not allow my students to use that or any other intoxicant."

This announcement provokes the reporters to question Allen Ginsberg, who is first at the airport to touch Swamiji's feet in obeisance. As poet laureate of the beatniks and now acknowledged patriarch of the hippies, Allen presided over the recent "Gathering of the Tribes," when a hundred thousand in Golden Gate Park celebrated the arrival of "the psychedelic age."

"Well, you might say that the Swami is very conservative," Allen answers. "That is, conservative Hindu. You might even say he is to his faith what the hard-shell Baptist is to Christianity."

"Conservative? How is that?" Swamiji asks, concerned. "In respect to sex and drugs," Mukunda suggests.

"Of course, we are conservative in that sense," he says. "That means we are following *Shastra* [scriptures]. We cannot depart from *Bhagavad-gita*. But conservative we are not. Personally Lord Chaitanya was so strict that He would not even look on a woman, but we are accepting everyone into this movement, regardless of sex, race, faith, caste, position, or whatever. Everyone is invited to come chant Hare Krishna. No, we are not conservative."

As Swamiji walks down to the baggage claims, the new devotees strew flowers before him and garland him. While waiting for the luggage, he raises his hands and begins to dance. Ranchor holds an umbrella over him against the sunlight. Allen also begins to dance and chant, and differences are forgotten.

While dancing, Swamiji gives a flower to each person who has come to welcome him. "SWAMI INVITES THE HIPPIES!" the *San Francisco Examiner* headlines. "SWAMI IN HIPPYLAND," the *Chronicle* reports, describing Swamiji's welcomers as belonging to the "long-haired, bearded and sandaled set." San Francisco newspapers are busy creating the hippy image. "Hippy," a word recently popularized by the papers, is big news, guaranteeing good street sales.

* * *

The Frederick Street storefront that Mukunda rented is only two blocks from Golden Gate Park, the world's most beautiful arboretum. It is a small storefront, very much like Matchless Gifts, but brighter, thanks to a large plate glass window. Above the front door, a sign


Swami in Hippie-Land

Holy Man Opens S. F. Temple


His Temple Is Open

Swami Invites the Hippies


Swami Invites Hippies To Hippieland Temple

But They'll Have to Square Up

Newspaper headlines about Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival in San Francisco.



Hippies in San Francisco, 1967.

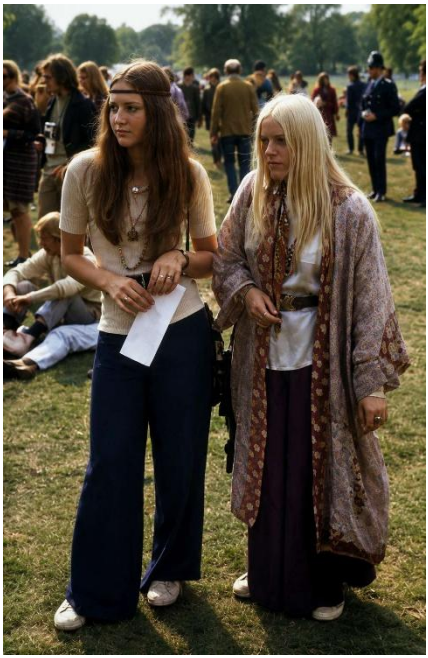




Hippies in San Francisco, 1967.







Hippies — Children of the Flowers.



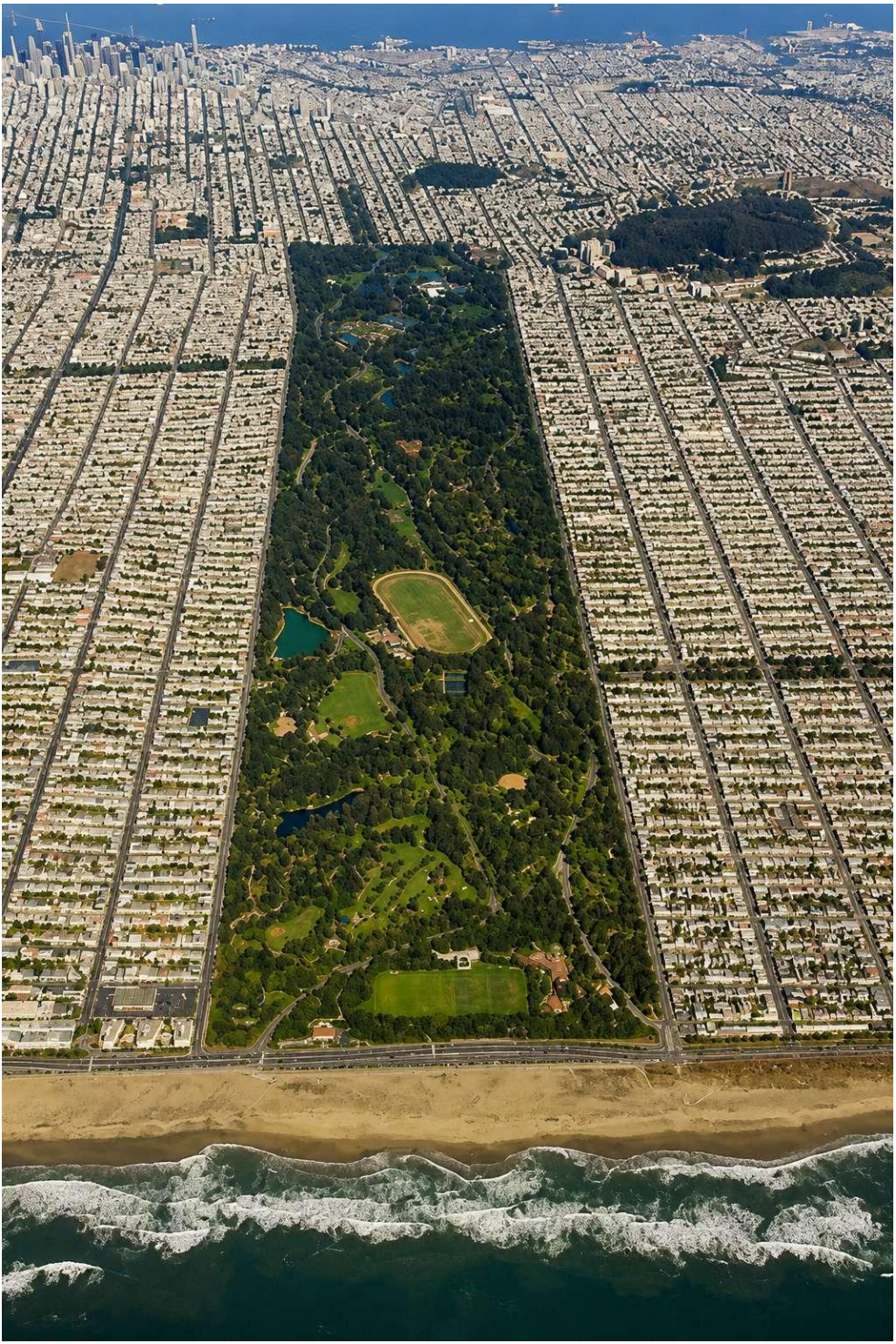




The intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets.



San Francisco, Haight Street. A performance by the rock band Grateful Dead.



Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

announces: RADHA KRISHNA TEMPLE. Incense and candles burn on a small altar at the end of the room. Next to the altar is Swamiji's dais of purple cushions, the *vyasasana*, the seat for the representative of Veda Vyas, elevated a little above the devotees who sit on buff carpeting.

Posted on the walls and in the front window are reprints from *The East Village Other* write-up, and a reprint of the photo of Swamiji standing in Tompkins Square Park. The caption: BRING KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS WEST.

From the beginning, the *kirtans* are more lively than in New York. The dancing is free and vigorous, the temple packed with young people with long hair, beards, exotic clothing, beads, Indian trinkets, paper stars, and skin paint. Chinese papier-mache lightshades cover the bulbs hanging from the ceiling. God's-eye Huichol crosses also dangle from strings. Beside the dais hangs a painting of Lord Chaitanya and His disciples, copied by Haridas last year.

Haridas (Harvey Cohen) is president of the San Francisco temple. In his early thirties, Haridas is a little older than most of us. He has a short-cropped beard and sincere, inquiring blue eyes. He's an artist from New York. Articulate, he suavely manages to keep everyone at peace—hippies, Hell's Angels, straights, and devotees. I tell him that I appreciate his painting of Lord Chaitanya and His disciples.

"Oh, when I first saw the original, I thought they were all women," he says. "And when Swamiji saw my copy, he looked at the breasts and said, 'No. This will never do.' I figured he liked them Rubenesque. So I made them even larger."

"Crazy artists," Swamiji laughs when I mention this.

* * *

Haridas had met Swamiji as early as fall, 1965, when Swamiji was visiting Dr. Mishra's upstate Ananda Ashram.

"I used to go up there on weekends," Haridas tells me. "You know what it's like. Everyone's into his own thing. Well, one night when I was in my room reading, Swamiji walked in and told me that there were higher forms of *yoga* than Mishra's *hatha-yoga*. Now up to this time, I'd been fascinated by this little old man sitting in the corner chanting beads. He never joined the discussions but just sat there, a great presence in the corner, chanting a rosary. Really captured my attention. So you can imagine the impact when he entered my room and said, "*Bhakti-yoga* is the highest. It is the science of God devotion.' When he said this, I realized that he was speaking the truth, and it was as if I'd never heard it before. I felt that he was reading my soul. All my questions were answered without my even asking.

And I thought, 'Here's my teacher.' As if all my life had just been preparing for this moment."

"I know the feeling," I say. "Others describe it very much in the same way."

"It was really strange," Haridas muses. "His words were so simple, yet they seemed to come from the deepest wisdom. I actually lost all sense of place and time. It was life's focal point. After that, for the rest of the weekend I kept looking at him. He sat so calmly and had such dignity and warmth. He asked me to visit him when we returned to the city, and of course I did. His room was a tiny office in the back of Mishra's Yoga Society in the West Seventies, and I began to visit regularly."

"And Mishra?"

"He was always travelling a lot. Swamiji was asked to speak a few times, but it was so obvious that this was a real spiritual master that it became embarrassing. So he rarely lectured. I would just go to his room, and we'd sit there on the floor, facing each other and chanting. He had only a typewriter, a new tape recorder, a box of books he'd brought from India, and a color reproduction of Lord Chaitanya and

disciples. He looked at this picture often, and when he found out that I was an artist, he asked me to paint it."

Reminiscing, Haridas seems wistfully longing to return to those days. I realize that for him, nothing will ever quite equal those intimate moments in New York, when Swamiji was alone and unknown. Now he is surrounded by disciples and guarded jealously by young Ranchor, who is tactless and sometimes even insulting.

"You mean we're going to have to contend with him every time we want to see Swamiji?" Haridas complains.

I mention this to Swamiji.

"Do you expect everyone to be to your liking?" he asks, smiling.

* * *

Swamiji's apartment on Frederick Street, next to the temple, is a little smaller than his New York apartment, but the furnishings are the same: typewriter, dictaphone, books, sleeping pad, and a footlocker full of manuscripts.

"Translating goes on," he says.

Mukunda has also managed to rent an apartment down the hall, as quarters for himself and Janaki. Here, I meet two new San Francisco devotees Shyamasundar and his wife Malati. They talk excitedly about the "*mantra* rock dance" scheduled for the Avalon Ballroom.

"Some big bands have promised to come," Shyamasundar tells me. "Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, Janis Joplin and Big Brother.

The names mean nothing to me. I know only the Rolling Stones and The Beatles.

“There’s a whole new school of San Francisco music opening up,” Shyamasundar explains. “Grateful Dead have already cut their first record. Their playing for us is a great boost, just when we need it.”

“But Swamiji thinks that even Ravi Shankar is *maya*, “ I point out.

“Oh, it’s all been arranged,” Shyamasundar assures me. “All the bands will be on stage, and Allen Ginsberg will introduce Swamiji to San Francisco. Swamiji will talk and chant Hare Krishna with the bands. Then he leaves. There should be about two thousand people there.”

* * *

At night, I sleep on the floor in the room behind the temple. Through the wall I can hear a jukebox blasting rock and roll late into the night. The Diggers—a sort of hippy Volunteers of America—are our neighbors.

The Haight-Ashbury atmosphere is festive, carnivalesque. Hippydom is riding the media crest. Thousands flock daily to San Francisco wearing flowers and bellbottoms and shaking tambourines. “Be-in’s” abound, celebrations of nothing more than “being there.” People are assumed to be high on LSD, or at least pot. Corporate, middle-class America cries out to put an end to it all. Close down the Haight before it happens!

President Johnson sends more troops to Vietnam. More draftcards are burned in protest. More longhairs flock to the Coast, many crowding the temple for morning *prasadam*, looking for a place to eat and crash.

* * *

At seven in the morning, however, there are only six devotees present. “Where’s everybody?” I whisper to Mukunda.

“Oh, they’ll be in later,” he says sleepily.



The San Francisco Diggers were a group of activists and street theatre performers active from 1966 to 1968 and based in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco.





The original name "Diggers" dates back to 1649, when it referred to a group of people who believed in economic equality based on a specific passage from the Acts of the Apostles. The Diggers of that time sought to reform the existing social order by "levelling" the land and adopting an agrarian way of life based on their vision of small rural communities.

Swamiji looks around. The night before, the temple had been packed. “They are sleeping?” he asks. “That is not good. Too much sleep.”

He chants the invocation (*Samsara-dava*) and Hare Krishna, then begins to lecture on *Bhagavad-gita*.

“*Mantra* is a combination of two words,” he says. “*Man* means ‘mind,’ and *tra* means ‘delivered.’ So, the Vedic *mantras* or hymns are meant for delivering us from mental concoctions. Our present difficulties are experienced on the mental and psychological planes. The psychedelic movement is on this platform. They are speaking of expanding the mind, but you should know that beyond the mind is the intelligence, and beyond the intelligence is the soul. So the *mantra* delivers us from this mental-psychological plane and establishes us on the spiritual.”

A half dozen people drift in from the street. They are disheveled and dirty, obviously up all night in the park. They reek of pot.

Swamiji speaks of the Absolute Truth. He stresses the need for *tapasya*, penance.

One boy with long, straight blond hair begins mumbling and twitching. His milk-white skin turns almost as red as his headband bandanna.

Swamiji likens human sex life to that of the animals. He points out the necessity for purification. The boy finally explodes, shouting, “I’m God!” Then screaming, “Iiiiiyam God!”

I look at Mukunda, wondering what to do. Mukunda ignores the boy and keeps his eyes on Swamiji. “What’s that?” Swamiji asks.

I look at Haridas. He’s shaking his head, indicating that the boy is to be ignored. “What’s that?” Swamiji asks again.

“He’s saying that he is God,” Mukunda says.

Swamiji holds his head back, looking down at the boy through his reading glasses. Having observed enough, he returns to the text of *Bhagavad-gita* and his commentary.

“Without accepting and undergoing some penance, we cannot purify our existence,” he says, “and without purifying our existence, we cannot enjoy our nature as Brahman.”

“Iiii’m God!”

“So if we follow the scriptural regulations, our conditioned existence will be purified, and we shall begin our spiritual life of unending happiness.”

“God!”

“Are there any questions?”

“I’m God!”

Everyone looks around, but no hands are raised. The boy sits before me in the center of the temple, his face now more pink than red. There’s a long silence as Swamiji looks about, then picks up his cymbals.

“So chant Hare Krishna,” he says.

Clapping, we start the morning melody. *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*.

The blond boy jumps up. “I’M GOD!” he screams furiously. “I’M GOD!” He beats his chest, and the hard thumps resound like a *mridanga*. “I am! I am!” The chanting almost drowns him out.

Mukunda, smiling, starts dancing, and the boy screams repeatedly, "I'm God, I'm God, I'm God!" The rhythms blend.

He turns and dashes out of the temple, still striking his chest. He runs down Frederick Street, flailing his arms and screaming until he's out of sight and hearing.

* * *

After *kirtan*, Swamiji returns to his quarters with Mukunda and Janaki. Guests are scheduled for nine.

I ask Haridas why he didn't throw out the boy when he interrupted the lecture. Brahmananda would have removed him at the first outburst.

"You have to be careful with the hippies here," Haridas tells me. "Tactful's the word. If someone's high on LSD, people automatically give him all the respect of God. They come in and jump up and down and scream, but we can't lay a hand on them because they're LSD saints. Had we kicked that boy out, the whole neighborhood would be down on us. The Diggers next door are pretty noisy, but they unplug their jukebox during lectures, and they've been giving us clothing and helping decorate the temple.

Sometimes the Hell's Angels go over there and raise a lot of noise, and sometimes they even come in here. If they do, best to humor them. They are always trouble."

As if cued, someone at the Digger's begins to roar like an animal. Thuds, breaking glass and screams follow. Some girls run inside, close the door and lock it.

"Oh, don't go out there!" one girl cries. "It's the Angels! They'll tear you to pieces!"

Harsharani is serving breakfast *prasadam*. She sets out extra paper plates. "There'll be more guests," she says quietly.



"...If someone is tripping on LSD, people automatically treat him with all the honors due to God..."



The Hells Angels are one of the largest motorcycle clubs in the world, with chapters across the globe. Law enforcement agencies in several countries classify the club as an outlaw motorcycle gang and accuse it of involvement in drug trafficking, racketeering, dealing in stolen goods, violence, murder, and other crimes. Club members, however, maintain that they are peaceful motorcycle enthusiasts who have come together to enjoy group rides, hold meetings, and organize social events.



The shouts and thuds continue, ceasing only when the police and ambulance arrive. A big black has just beaten up three Hell's Angels.

The door is opened, and a dozen people drift in, all talking about the fight. Harsharani brings out more *prasadam*.

Harsharani, Janaki, and Jadurani are the first girls initiated in the movement. In New York, people are still asking whether the temple "accepts girls," but in San Francisco the girls take to Krishna from the very beginning. After all, Krishna is eternally young and beautiful. He has nothing to do but sport and play His flute. He loves to dance. He's the heart-breaker in everyone's heart. Girls naturally flock to Him.

The San Francisco temple certainly abounds in pretty girls. Swamiji begins performing weddings weekly.

* * *

"Why have you chosen the center of Hippyland for your temple, Swamiji?" a *Chronicle* reporter asks.

"Because the rent's cheap," Swamiji replies.

Brahmananda phones frequently from New York. He tells us that at first they were wondering whether they could manage without Swamiji, but now they are surprised by how easy it is to carry on.

"The chanting's the focal point," Brahmananda tells us. "We can always sit down and chant." He adds that Swamiji's presence is being felt in a different and even more wonderful way. "We're beginning to understand how worship in separation is more relishable."

* * *

Swamiji likes San Francisco. In the early mornings, he walks past Kezar Stadium, down Stanyan to the entrance of Golden Gate Park. We

follow, chanting softly, down the narrow trails to the rhododendron dell. Some devotees pick a few flowers for the temple, and from time to time Swamiji stops to ask about a flower or a certain tree.

"A tree has to endure so much," he says, "due to very sinful previous lives. Trees are forced to stand many years and suffer."

After the walks, Swamiji receives visitors from an array of societies, including the Haight-Ashbury Cultural Institute, whose members want to make Hare Krishna a prominant part of the new "Hashbury" culture that's about to "change America." Swamiji even attends their roundtable meeting, chanting his beads quietly, eyes closed, enduring the cigarette smoke and lengthy chit-chat. When he's finally called upon to speak, he says, "Make Krishna your center. With Krishna as your center, you're bound to succeed. But if not, then what can you accomplish?"

Zen Buddhists come. And strange new LSD Christian sects. The Brotherhood of the Golden Swan. All the members dress like Franciscan friars and chant, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." They call themselves *yogis*. Swamiji is most gracious; he allows them to speak briefly in the temple. The Buddhists, however, he does not invite to speak.

Swamiji continues translating *Bhagavad-gita*. He is so eager to print it that we begin negotiations with a local printer. Prices are very high. In New York, Brahmananda continues his pursuit of publishers.

"And Mr. Payne?" Swamiji asks. "And the money? And the building? Either we get the building or he should give us our five thousand back. And that Mr. Kallman—where is the record he promised?"

Mukunda explains the importance of the upcoming dance. We discuss the program with Allen Ginsberg. Allen is to introduce Swamiji and then lead the chant.

"The melody you use is difficult for group chanting," I tell him.

"Maybe," Allen admits, "but that's the melody I first heard in India. A wonderful lady saint was chanting it. I'm quite accustomed to it, and it's the only one I can sing convincingly."

Although joyful enough, his melody is too erratic for large groups. We consult Swamiji.

"Don't you think there's a possibility of chanting a tune more appealing to Western ears?" Allen asks.

"Any tune will do," Swamiji says. "That's not important. What's important is that you chant Hare Krishna. It can be in the tune of your own country. That doesn't matter."

* * *

Daily now, more youths crowd outside the temple looking for lodging. The Haight-Ashbury vibrations lure them out of their suburban homes and send them hitchhiking west, often penniless, with backpacks and sleeping-bags and dreams of adventure. What strange amalgamations! Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Anglos, Indians, blacks. And now Hare Krishna. On the wall of the Ashbury Cinema, someone has scrawled, "DOWN WITH THE CASTE SYSTEM!"

What bizarre fantasies! People can become whatever they want in Haight-Ashbury. On the streets, they present a kind of historical pageant, looking at times like characters from the Old West, or princes and peasants from medieval Europe. It is strange to see them enter the temple, strange to hear Swamiji preaching to them, dutifully reminding them that they're not young forever, that the body doesn't abide, that Krishna is awaiting us in the spiritual sky.

* * *

After breakfast *prasadam*—oranges, farina with dates and brown

sugar, and hot milk—Haridas and I check out the stores down Haight Street, concentrated in the half blocks leading to the entrance of Golden Gate Park, their gaudy commercialism in stark contrast to the tranquility of eucalyptus and oak.

We visit The Print Mint, The Psychedelic Shop, The Omen. Every Wednesday evening, we chant in the meditation room of The Psychedelic Shop. Hare Krishna amid black lights, strobes, incense, Oriental tapestries, and dayglow Tibetan mandalas.

Haight Street is a tawdry carnival of psychedelia. It is drugs deified. Yet at its root, there's a basic disenchantment with materialism, the frustration of Sisyphus, tired of rolling his rock up a hill over and over, longing instead to cast aside his burden, break the chain of conditioning, and surmount *karma*.

"Only Krishna can liberate us from *karma*," Swamiji tells us. "Therefore He is also called Mukunda, He who grants *mukti*, liberation. No one else has this power."

So on the racks beside the psychedelic publications, we place *Back To Godhead*. "Where there is Godhead, there is light." Although they urge the hippies to abandon drug taking, they sell out faster than we can mimeograph them.

* * *

Sunday, January 29. The night of Krishna consciousness at the Avalon Ballroom. Haridas, Mukunda, Shyamasundar, Janaki and Malati go early to see that everything's set up. The ballroom is large, surrounded by mirrors. It boasts the latest in strobes and slides. Two movie projectors whir full time, and the sound system shakes the floor and walls. The Avalon and the Fillmore are the two homes of the new San Francisco rock: Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Moby Grape, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Grateful Dead, Steve Miller, Janis Joplin. All young, white, and LSD oriented.



Psychedelic shop and hippies in Haight-Ashbury, 1967.





Mukunda (in the back), Hayagriva (on the left), and Gurudas (on the right).

"I think what you are calling 'hippies' are our best potential," Swamiji says. "Although they are young, they are already dissatisfied with material life. Frustrated. And not knowing what to do, they turn to drugs. So let them come, and we will show them spiritual activities. Once they engage in Krishna consciousness, all these *anarthas*, unwanted things, will fall away."

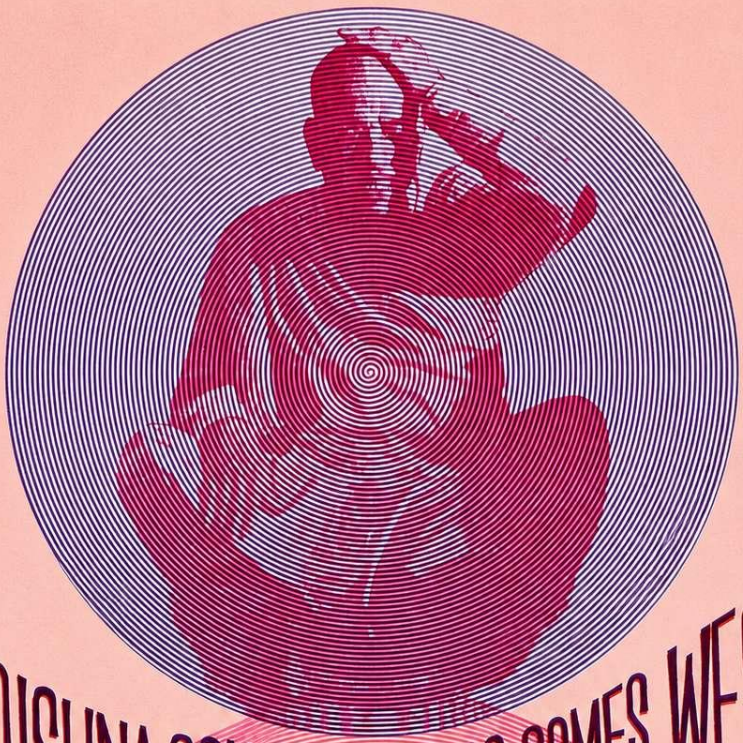
When the Avalon's doors open at seven, hippies, teenyboppers, and Hell's Angels begin pouring in. By eight o'clock, when The Grateful Dead begins playing, the ballroom is packed. A barrage of rhythm, shrieks, and blasts, amplified by speakers bigger than most closets, shake the ballroom. There's a roar of approval, and strobes flash off and on, illuminating a sea of gyrating, pulsating bodies.

Swamiji leaves Frederick Street at 9:30. He is dressed in fresh saffron silks. As he discusses translating *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, the sweet aroma from his gardenia garland fills the car. By ten, he walks up the stairs of the Avalon, Kirtanananda and Ranchor flanking him as he enters through the main ballroom doors. Cigarette smoke mingles with incense. Janis Joplin bellows into the microphone. Steel guitars, voices, drums, and strobe lights bombard the senses. Yet Swamiji floats through it all, making his way along the walls of the ballroom to the stage like a swan navigating through lotuses.

Suddenly Janis ends her song, and the slide show changes. Pictures of Krishna and the demigods are flashed onto the wall. Krishna and Arjuna in the chariot. Krishna eating butter. Krishna subduing the whirlwind demon. Krishna playing the flute.

There's a spontaneous roar of approval, and as Swamiji sits beside Ginsberg on the front center stage, the roar turns into an ovation. The bands also come on stage. Swamiji is garlanded again and again.

Allen begins his introduction, commanding attention with the expertise of a Pied Piper. Swamiji sits quietly, his head held high, appearing like a golden Buddha—regal, transcendental, saintly—a strange contrast to poet Ginsberg.



KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS COMES WEST

SWAMI BHAKTIVEDANTA · ALLEN GINSBERG

THE GRATEFUL DEAD · MOBY GRAPE

BIG BROTHER & THE HOLDING COMPANY

MANTRA·ROCK DANCE

SUNDAY JAN.29 AVALON BALLROOM 8PM

SUTTER & VAN NESS $2.50 BRING CUSHIONS, DRUMS, BELLS, CYMBALS

PROCEEDS TO OPENING OF SAN FRANCISCO KRISHNA TEMPLE

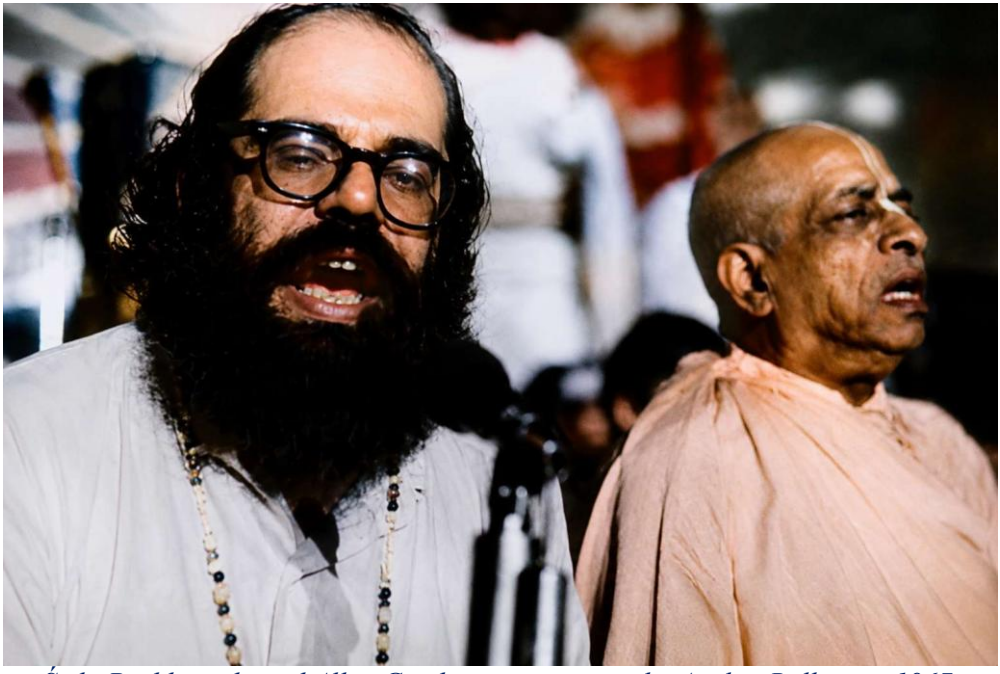
LIGHTS BY BEN VAN METER AND ROGER HILLYARD



The Avalon Ballroom in 1967.



Photo from that very concert at the Avalon Ballroom, 1967.



Śrīla Prabhupāda and Allen Ginsberg on stage at the Avalon Ballroom, 1967.

Allen tells how his own interest in Hare Krishna started in India five years ago. Then he recounts how Swamiji opened his storefront on Second Avenue and chanted Hare Krishna in Tompkins Square Park. "Now, Krishna consciousness has come West, to the Haight-Ashbury," he says, inviting everyone to the Frederick Street temple. "I especially recommend the early morning *kirtans*," he adds, "for those who want to stabilize their consciousness on LSD re-entry."

Although this is hardly devotional Vaishnavism, the audience maintains a reverential silence. After Allen's introduction, Swamiji speaks, giving a brief description of the history of the *mantra*, beginning with Lord Chaitanya. "It is particularly recommended for this age," he says. "Kali-yuga is an age in which men are short-lived, ignorant, quarrelsome and always in difficulties. Yet regardless of our position, we can always chant the *maha-mantra*."

The Hell's Angels stare with mute incomprehension. Wearing denim jackets, caps, leather regalia, chains, tattoos, long, dirty hair, they seem prime candidates for the ghostly hordes of Shiva.

Swamiji doesn't mention the rules and regulations.

"Anyone can chant the *maha-mantra*," he says. "There are only three words-Hare, Krishna and Rama. 'Hare' is the energy of the Lord.

I doubt that very much of his speech is understood, but everyone stands politely and listens respectfully. As Swamiji explains the *mantra*, slides flash the words on the walls. Then the chanting begins with Allen slowly singing his hurdy-gurdy tune into the microphone: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare. The Big Brother band joins in, then Grateful Dead and Moby Grape. Gradually, the chant spreads throughout the audience. People begin holding hands and dancing. Standing in front of the bands, we can hardly hear the audience, but above everything is Allen's voice, shouting, his "Hare" sounding more like "Hooray!" Swamiji stands up and starts dancing, and the chanting builds steadily to a climax. On the wall behind, a slide projects a

towering picture of Lord Krishna, flute in His hands, peacock feather in His hair. A maze of color whirls to the rhythm of the *mantra*, a rhythm that accelerates to a frenetic presto, the words merging, punctuated only by Allen's whooping "Hooray! Hooray!" Through the flashing strobes, I see people dancing and shaking tambourines.

Then suddenly the chanting ends, and all that can be heard is the loud buzz of microphones.

Swamiji offers obeisances to the *gurus*. "Ki jai! Ki jai! All glories to the assembled devotees! Ki jai!" It is all over. As people meander to the soda stand, Allen announces that the rock groups will shortly resume the concert. Swamiji descends from the bandstand and walks straight through the heavy smoke and crowds to the front stairs. Again, Kirtanananda and Ranchor follow.

"This is no place for a *brahmachari*," Swamiji proclaims, leaving.

The dance nets us fifteen hundred dollars, barely enough to resolve the temple debts.

* * *

In the morning, the temple is crowded with celebrants from the Avalon. They never went to bed. Swamiji lectures on the eternity of the spirit soul.

"It cannot be drowned by water, burned by fire, nor dried up by the wind," he says. "And these everlasting souls are to be found everywhere—on the earth, in the air and water, even in the sun. Souls can acquire bodies adaptable to the atmosphere of all planets, but none of these bodies in the material worlds can continue to be fresh. That is the material limitation. The element of time is so strong that it breaks down everything. Whatever you create, though it be very beautiful and fresh now, will eventually fade away just like a flower. In time, flowers grow very beautiful, but in due course they wither and vanish.

Similarly, you are all now young and with such beautiful bodies. And so you say, 'Let us enjoy.' But your bodies will also wither and perish. Nature's course is like that. Therefore Krishna tells Arjuna not to deviate from his duty by fleeing the battle."

* * *

Later in the morning, Kirtanananda and I drive Swamiji to the beach, where he chants a *mantra* we've never heard before.

"Govinda jai jai, Gopala jai jai, Radharamana Hari, Govinda jai jai." He chants slowly, yearningly, in a low baritone mingling with the peaceful falling of the waves.

"Govinda is Krishna, who gives pleasure to the cows and senses. Gopala is Krishna the cowherd boy, and Radharamana is Krishna as the enjoyer of Radharani. These are the words of this *mantra*."

He chants a longing, haunting melody that seems to reach out and then fall short, and so must reach out again, like the perpetual mounting, crashing, and mounting of waves striving to envelop the shore.

As he chants, he walks slowly along the boardwalk. The January breeze is fresh and cool. I peruse some kelp washed up on the beach and decide that the long, hollow whips with their bell-shaped heads would make good trumpets for *kirtan*.

Kirtanananda gets a blanket and puts it over Swamiji's shoulders. Swamiji looks out over the Pacific expanse.

"Because it is great, it is tranquil," he says. 'The image of eternity," I say.

"Nothing is eternal but Krishna," he says. Silence. Then: "In Bengali, there is one nice verse. I remember. 'O, what is that voice across the sea, calling, calling, Come here... come here …. ?'"



Śrīla Prabhupāda gazing at the Pacific Ocean, San Francisco, 1967.



Walking with Śrīla Prabhupāda, San Francisco, 1967.

For a long time, Swamiji sits on a boardwalk bench, looking out across the ocean and singing Bengali songs to Gopinatha, Lord Krishna, Master of the *gopis*. From time to time, he stops to translate a verse for us. “O Gopinatha, please sit within the core of my heart and subdue this mind, and thus take me to You. Only then will the terrible dangers of this world disappear.”

Then he sings another verse, looking out on the ocean as if it were his audience. It is a rare, peaceful moment, beyond everything material, and I wish it could go on forever. But after a while, Swamiji stands up, sighs deeply, as if beckoned by duty, and says, “Back to the temple.

End of Chapter 7

Chapter 8. Flowers for Lord Jagannatha

The days of February are beautiful with perfect temperatures in the seventies, fog rolling off early, skies very blue and clear, sun falling bright and sharp on the lush foliage of Golden Gate Park. The park encloses the largest variety of plant and tree life to be found in any one spot on earth. We are at a loss to identify plants for Swamiji.

"When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu passed through the forests, all the plants, trees and creepers were delighted to see Him and rejoiced in His presence. Plant life is like that in the spiritual sky—fully conscious."

"And these trees, Swamiji? How conscious are they?"

"Oh, spirit soul is there, but consciousness has been arrested temporarily. Perception is more limited."

Swamiji strolls by men playing checkers, passes beneath the tall oaks, past the shuffleboard court, then stops and turns to speak.

"Just see. Old people in this country don't know what to do. So they play like children, wasting their last precious days, which should be meant for developing Krishna consciousness. Since their children are grown and gone away, this is the natural time for spiritual cultivation. But no. They play games, or get some cat or dog and lavish their affection on it. Instead of loving and serving God, they love and serve dog. But love and serve they must." He shakes his head, and again looks at the shuffleboard court. The old men shout as they slide the disks toward the numbered squares. "This is most tragic," Swamiji says. "But they don't want to listen. Their ways are set. Therefore we are speaking to the youth, who are searching."

Walking further into the park, we pass through the rhododendron dell, where the bushes are heavy with clusters of white and pink flowers. We pass a tennis court, then arrive at the park museum. Swamiji suggests introducing a Krishna exhibit. Our artists, Jadurani and Haridas, can be represented. They must paint more pictures.



Shuffleboard is a game played on a marked table or court, using cues and discs (when played on a court), or discs pushed by hand (when played on a table).



"Such a beautiful park," he says. "Here in America you have all facilities. All you lack is Krishna consciousness. If everything here is used in the service of Krishna, that would make a first-class country."

Returning to the temple, we pass "Hippy Hill," a favorite spot where young people sunbathe, chat, sing, make love, and smoke marijuana. The cops have given up on Hippy Hill. It's the one place the hippies can go and be granted peace.

"You Americans are striving so hard for happiness," Swamiji says. "But there is no need to strive. Happiness and distress come and go. Just as distress comes without our searching, happiness comes also. We don't have to search for either. But if we cultivate Krishna consciousness, our distresses will be mitigated."

* * *

We drive across Golden Gate Bridge to Muir Woods, home of 3,000-year-old redwoods. Walking down the path under the tall, blue-green canopy, Swamiji reads the little signs before the largest trees, then looks up reflectively at the boughs.

"These trees are made to stand here for thousands of years because of their attachment to sex," he says. "We do not know what kind of body nature is going to give us next. Perhaps she will put us in a body like this. Then we will have to stand for so many years in one place."

He then tells the story of Nalakuvara and Manigriva, sons of Kuvera, the treasurer of the demigods. These two brothers, although great demigods, fell prey to wine and women, and one day, when drunk, entered the Ganges and sported naked with young girls. While they were thus frolicking, the sage Narada passed by, but Nalakuvara and Manigriva were too drunk to hide their nakedness. Desiring their welfare, Narada turned them into trees, immobilizing them so they could do no further harm. With their full consciousness intact, the brothers stood long years as twin trees in Nanda Maharaj's courtyard,



Hippie Hill, San Francisco, 1967.





Hippie Hill, San Francisco, 1967.



where the child Krishna often played. One day, because baby Krishna had been a naughty butter thief, His mother tied him to a large, wooden mortar. When this mortar lodged between the two trees, baby Krishna, with His superhuman strength, pulled the trees down. Out of these trees the two demigods, suddenly liberated, arose with bodies shining like fire, and praised the Lord with prayers and hymns.

"Being a tree is a kind of curse for those overly sinful," Swamiji says. "But for Nalakuvara and Manigriva, it was ultimately Narada's blessing."

After an hour's stroll, we leave Muir woods, returning along a winding seacoast road. The abrupt curves and dips cause Swamiji to get carsick. When he complains of dizziness, we have to slow down.

"When I first came to America on the Scindia boat, I was seasick," he says. "But on the plane from New York, I felt only a little popping in the ears. The plane is better."

Back at the temple, Swamiji feels quite sick. Kirtanananda and Ranchor tend him in his apartment, where he rests until the evening lecture.

"In this material world, we are captured by sex life and put into prison," he tells us. "Just today I saw one prison in the bay surrounded by water. What was that?"

"Alcatraz," someone says.

"Yes. So many arrangements are made there to keep the prisoners entrapped. Now we are in the prisonhouse of the body. And what is our entrapment? Sex life. As long as we do not know that our happiness is with Krishna, we will try to enjoy this material world, and so be bound by sex life.

Actually, we are suffering, but we think we are happy because of sex. Here we are subject to miseries arising from the mind and body,



The Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco.



Muir Woods Redwood Forest, San Francisco.



Alcatraz Prison, San Francisco.
The island was originally used as a defensive fortress, later as a military prison, and eventually as a maximum-security prison for particularly dangerous criminals and inmates who had attempted to escape from other prisons. As of 2021, the prison is no longer in operation and is open to tourists.





San Francisco, USA.

The bridge at the bottom of the photograph is the Golden Gate Bridge. The small island on the left, between the upper and lower bridges, is Alcatraz Prison. The road leading to the left from the Golden Gate Bridge goes to Muir Woods. The small section of green park in the lower-right corner, which is not fully visible in the photograph, is Golden Gate Park.

from other living entities, and from calamities of nature. These miseries cannot possibly be avoided. Just like this afternoon, when I was coming from Muir Woods, I felt uncomfortable due to some bodily pains. This is going on, and it is always the same: sometimes bodily pains, sometimes mental anxiety, sometimes national disturbance, or someone else giving us trouble. Now you are thinking that if you just end the Vietnam war, you will have peace. But there can never be peace here. This place is meant for misery, and so misery will come in one form or another. That is the nature of this material world.

"The great sage Rishabadev said that this material atmosphere is nothing but sex attachment. That's all. You will find this attraction not only in human society but in animal society, bird society, insect society, every society. And if you go to the upper planets, to the abodes of the demigods, you will also find sex attraction. Even Indra, the king of the demigods, was very sexually inclined. And Lord Brahma, the highest living entity, had a beautiful daughter to whom he was attracted. And when Krishna, playing tricks, appeared as a very beautiful girl before Lord Shiva, Shiva became mad with lust. So when Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva become mad, what is our position? We are cats and dogs in comparison."

The hippies sit quietly, eyes opened wide, surprised not to hear Swamiji advocating sex, drugs, rock and roll, and passivism. They are used to so-called *gurus* from India telling them, "Enjoy! Enjoy!"

"A *guru* is not some pet, some fad," Swamiji says. "He is not a conversation piece. No. One must find the bona fide spiritual master and surrender to him. That is the injunction of *Bhagavad-gita*. *Guru* must be followed."

"Are you an authority on self-realization?" someone asks.

"Yes," Swamiji says. "Of course, I do not know whether I am an authority, but my spiritual master has authorized me to do this. I ... I..." Swamiji hesitates a moment, seeming almost embarrassed. "I don't

think myself an authority. I am just trying to serve the order of my spiritual master. That's all. But being an authority is not very difficult. Simply, if you try to understand *Bhagavad-gita* as Arjuna understood it, you will become self-realized. It is not a very difficult job. Unfortunately, people apply their own scholastic ideas in different ways, and so murder the whole process."

* * *

The more radical hippies and Vietnam war resisters want more than peace in Vietnam. They want a recognition of the "solidarity of man," the institution of a new world state conceived in planetary instead of "tribal" terms.

Swamiji accuses the hippies of placing man before other planetary inhabitants, other citizens.

"You talk of peace while eating meat," he says. "You speak of peace while slaughtering your mother cow. And you are surprised when there are wars.…

"Solidarity means more than talking of universal brotherhood while eating an animal. There will never be universal brotherhood until we recognize a universal Father and all living entities as His sons. That is the real basis for solidarity."

* * *

Once the *mantra* rock dance honeymoon is over, Swamiji escalates his attacks against sense gratification, insisting in every lecture that spiritual progress is incompatible with drugs, laziness, and illicit sex.

"Krishna does not tell Arjuna, 'I will fight. You just sit on the chariot and smoke *ganja*.' No. Although Krishna is God and can easily kill everyone on the battlefield, still He wants His devotee to act on His

behalf 'Just be My instrument,' He tells Arjuna. 'And fight with detachment.' Fighting is Arjuna's duty as a *kshatriya*. By fulfilling his duty, he does not incur sin."

"What about the draft?" someone asks.

"Our students are being trained as *brahmins*," Swamiji says. "They should not be forced to act as *kshatriyas*, or warriors. Besides, a *kshatriya* fights on religious principles. Now, people are just dogs fighting over bones. That's all."

"But *Bhagavad-gita* takes place on a battlefield, and Krishna tells Arjuna to fight."

"Anything done for Krishna becomes immediately spiritual," Swamiji explains. "Arjuna's duty as a *kshatriya* is to fight. If he fights for Krishna, following Krishna's instructions, then his fighting is spiritual. It is his salvation."

"No! No!"

Although some people walk out in protest, a few show more than a passing interest. When the hippies become more serious, Swamiji discourages listening to mundane music and encourages shaving off hair and beards and exchanging bellbottom dungarees for robes.

"So when people see you, they are reminded of Krishna. That is the meaning of *sadhu*—one who reminds others of Krishna."

Still, Swamiji is not insisting on robes and shaved heads. These are mentioned in passing. A few choose to shave and wear robes; most do not. No one is pressured.

"Whatever service you can render to Krishna—that is accepted.

There are more initiations: Gurudas and Janaki's sister Joan, who

takes the name Yamuna-dasi, Subal and his wife Krishna-dasi, Goursundar and his wife Govinda-dasi, Haladar-dasi, Ramanuga, Uddhava, Upendra. They all help Haridas and Harsharani manage the temple. Shyamsundar and Mukunda are always planning some Big Event to surpass the *mantra* rock dance. Rabindra-svarupa loafs around and dabbles in the Ouspensky cults.

I rent an electric typewriter, set it up in the back temple room, and continue typing up stencils for *Back To Godhead*, writing and editing while Harsharani sends people after food, and cooks noon *prasadam*.

We take a poll and discover that all thirty of our full-time members are unemployed. When Swamiji suggests that we get jobs, there is some shuffling. Some members hawk *The Oracle* and other psychedelic newspapers to the tourists on Haight.

Somehow, we feel, the Radha Krishna Temple will survive the whoop and holler, the ephemeral glitter of psychedelia.

* * *

In early February, Kirtanananda returns to New York with instructions from Swamiji to go to Montreal and open the third ISKCON center.

"That boy Janardan is there," Swamiji tells him. "You can join with him and form a temple. He speaks French and can translate nicely, and you can guide the temple. It is not difficult. Just follow the program that we have here, and when you have a place ready, I will come."

When we see Kirtanananda off at the airport, we wish him good luck opening the first center outside the United States. "Maybe we'll become an international society after all," I tell him. We speak of centers multiplying all over the world, like chain letters.

* * *



Śrīla Prabhupāda, Mukunda (on the left), and Gaurasundara (on the right).



Śrīla Prabhupāda, Yamunā (on the left), Jayānanda (the tall one), and Gargamuni (on the right).



Śrīla Prabhupāda and Gurudāsa (on the left).



Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śyāmasundara (on the left), and Mālatī-devī dāsī.

Goursundar and his wife Govinda-dasi, from Texas, are new devotees who have never been hippies. Every morning at six-thirty, they knock on the temple door to awake me. I tie on my *dhoti* and run to let them in. Sometimes there are two or three visitors waiting with them, hippies who have stayed up all night and are just coming down from LSD and following Ginsberg's advice to "stabilize their consciousness on re-entry."

One such "stabilization" occurs at two in the morning, when I'm awakened by pounding and screaming and police lights. As I open the door, a young man with red hair and beard plunges in, crying, "O Krishna! Krishna! O help me! O don't let them get me! O for God's sake, help!"

A cop sticks his head in. "We brought him by here," he smiles, "thinking maybe you can help him."

"I'm not comfortable in this body!" the boy screams.

The police leave, and the boy starts chanting furiously. He turns white and sweats profusely. Sheer terror. I spend the rest of the early morning chanting with him until Goursundar and Govinda-dasi knock.

Re-entry stabilization becomes an ISKCON community service.

* * *

Sometimes, when Swamiji arrives in the early morning, Goursundar, Govinda-dasi, and I are the only ones in the temple.

"Where are the others?" Swamiji asks.

It is embarrassing to try to answer. Haridas, Shyamasundar, and Malati live but a fifteen minute walk away. Mukunda and Janaki live just upstairs. Gurudas and Yamuna are ten minutes away. Where are they?

“All this sleeping is not good,” Swamiji says. “It is in the lowest mode, the mode of ignorance. Life is meant for learning about Krishna consciousness, but most of our time is wasted—the first eighteen years in childishness, the last ten or fifteen in old age. So what does that leave us? Some thirty good years at the most. And if half of that is spent in sleep, what do we have?”

Gradually, morning attendance picks up.

* * *

Being the only person living in the temple proper, and one of the senior devotees besides, I’m naturally looked to as the temple commander, a role I often find myself regretting. Apart from re-entry cases, there are the little black boys hanging around the back of the temple, waiting for a hippy girl to go into a trance so they can snatch her purse. Chasing the boys away is as futile as trying to keep flies from dung. Finally, I have to caution the women to guard their purses.

“People come here to have their consciousness raised,” Haridas protests. “You can’t be telling them that.”

He’s right, of course. I have to stand guard at the door. The Negroes blow smoke rings in.

And the Hell’s Angels occasionally enter like storm troopers, demanding ham sandwiches and beer, threatening to kill me when I ask them to take off their boots.

On the brighter side, I’m in charge of organizing the daily *sankirtan* party. After noon *prasadam*, we walk down Haight Street chanting Hare Krishna, pounding drums, and ringing cymbals. By the time we reach the Print Mint—only two blocks from the park—a dozen hippies are following us, strumming guitars and shaking tambourines. Sometimes I play an old trumpet, and sometimes a horn made from the kelp I’d found on the beach. The kelp horn is my favorite, its be-dooo be-doooo resounding for blocks.

No one on Haight Street is over thirty. The hippies have hardly had time to degenerate. Fresh from LSD visions, they follow us with springy gaits, smiles, shining eyes—all somehow mythic, romantic, naive.

The record we made in December, called "Krishna Consciousness," is finally released, and the Psychedelic Shop often plays it. We stop by their meditation room and chant while the shop fills up. Then we circle back to Golden Gate Park, past the little pond at the entrance, and onward to a big field where boys play baseball and throw frisbees. We set up flags and a rented kettledrum, and the people on Hippy Hill join with flutes and bongos. After the *kirtans*, many return to the temple. And some eventually become initiated devotees.

Apart from *kirtans*, I find myself spending many sunny hours in the park, walking past the tennis courts to large, quiet bowers surrounded with hybiscus and eucalyptus. And at times I sit in the shade beneath the white and pink rhododendrons and edit *Bhagavad-gita*. After editing, I sometimes visit the museum and stroll through the replica eighteenth century gardens, chanting my daily rounds while perusing the curlicues of rococo art.

I generally avoid the Japanese Gardens. They are glutted with out-of-state tourists who look on us as drug-crazed hippies. Defending middle-class America, the cops try to keep the hippies out of the area.

One morning, Rabindra-svarup, Haladar, Subal and Krishna-dasi insist on going there. I join, and am soon shocked to see Rabindra-svarup suddenly fall on his knees and offer obeisances to a bronze statue of the Buddha.

The most excited cop I've ever seen runs up, flailing his club. "What do you think you're doing?" he shouts. "Come on! All of you get outta here!"

A crowd gathers.



Preaching among the hippies.





Gurudāsa and Kṛṣṇadāsa.



Allen Ginsberg on Hippie Hill.

“That crazy man was trying to worship a statue,” a little boy says. “But the policeman got him.” Ravindra-svarup seems to enjoy all the attention, as if it’s a chance to preach.

“You mean it’s against the law to worship Lord Buddha?” he asks.

The cop glowers and checks identifications. His face is fiery red. The people about us are also smoldering.

“The mind is on fire,” I recall the Buddha saying. “Ideas are on fire. Mind consciousness is on fire. Impressions received by the mind are on fire ….”

“Our spiritual master says that Buddha is an incarnation,” Rabindra-svarup continues, intent on being martyred, “and is to be paid all respects.”

The cop swallows his anger and finally escorts us out.

“You Americans are always setting Lord Buddha out on the lawn,” Swamiji comments when I mention the incident. “But you shouldn’t put your superiors where birds can drop stool on them.

* * *

February 27. We drive down to Palo Alto for an engagement in the student lounge of Stanford University. Swamiji sits on one of the lounge’s coffee tables and starts leading the *kirtan*, chanting into a microphone. At first, only twenty students are present, but as we chant and dance, more congregate.

Then something miraculous happens. The chanting and dancing sweep across the room. Students who have never heard the *mantra* before are jumping up and down, shouting the words with abandon.

Again, Swamiji weaves magic. He chants for an hour before bringing the clamorous *kirtan* to an end.

Afterwards, he explains the words of the *mantra* and the basic philosophy of nonidentification with the material body.

"If you want real happiness, you must abandon the illusion that 'I am this body,"' he tells the students. "This Hare Krishna dance is the best process for getting out of this illusion. You did not understand the words, but you still felt the ecstasy of dancing. Language is not necessary. The sound itself will excite the spirit. If you practise this, your life will be perfect. It is not expensive, and you don't have to undergo hardships and exercises. You don't have to put your head down between your knees."

"Why should we do this dance?" one student asks. "Because it's good for you," Swamiji says.

"Why is it good for me?" the student persists. "Keep dancing, and you'll find out."

There are some questions about the philosophy. Then someone asks whether or not students should respond to the Vietnam draft. I brace myself.

"If your country orders you, there's no harm in going," Swamiji says matter of factly.

Faces drop. Icy stillness. Both students and faculty look at one another. "How is there no harm in killing people?" a bearded professor asks warily.

"There is a difference between killing in war and murder," Swamiji says. "If a soldier kills in war, following the order of a superior, he is decorated. If he kills on his own account, he is hanged. So there is a difference. On the Battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna was following Krishna's orders to kill; therefore he did not incur sin."

"No! No!" the students begin to shout. Some walk out. Swamiji looks calmly at his suddenly irate audience.

"On the transcendental platform, nothing is wrong, nothing is right," he says. "When you do what your government orders, then how can you be responsible? You're simply following orders given by your superior. Your superior is responsible. You're responsible only in so far as you elect that superior. When you had monarchy, you had to do what one person told you. But now you have abolished monarchy and have instituted democracy, a government of the people, and now you elect your own officials. So now that you are making your own government, why do you complain when that government tells you to go to war?"

The issue becomes more heated. Students begin to raise their voices in anger. "Nazi!" someone shouts. "Fascist!"

Order degenerates as everyone shouts his opinion at once. Swamiji picks up his cymbals to start another *kirtan*, and we begin chanting. The students and faculty look bewildered. No one takes up the chanting. A few stay and argue, but most leave.

* * *

In the morning, we read Swamiji the front page account in the *Palo Alto Times*: ANCIENT TRANCE DANCE FEATURES SWAMI'S VISIT TO STANFORD

There's a new dance about to sweep the country called *the Swami*. It's going to replace the frug, watusi, swim and even the good old barn stomp. Why? Because you can do any old step to it and at the same time find real happiness. You can rid yourself of the illusion that you and your body are inseparable.

The write-up goes on to describe the *kirtan*:

Before the night was over, the audience of 250 was stomping, swinging and chanting to the beat of Indian instruments and the words of the holy Sanskrit *Vedas*, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama. They chanted this without interruption for seventy minutes.

I've never seen Swamiji more pleased with a news article. Fortunately, there is only brief mention of the war issue.

"Very nice," he says. "You can make copies of this. What are they calling that dance? The Swami?" He laughs. "Yes. Now we must make more engagements at universities. This is our first, and now I'm thinking that there is great potential."

Later, beneath the newspaper photograph of students dancing at the Palo Alto *kirtan*, Swamiji types: "Everyone joins in complete ecstasy when Swami Bhaktivedanta chants his hypnotic Hare Krishna."

* * *

Then, in early March, unannounced and unexpected, Lord Jagannatha, the Supreme Lord of the universe, graces us with His presence, transforming San Francisco into New Jagannatha Puri.

His arrival is most extraordinary. A longhaired, barefoot young man enters one morning with a curious wooden carving tied to a string around his neck. Only two inches high, the artifact cost the boy seventy-five cents at a local import warehouse.

From the viewpoint of Indian art, the carving is an anomaly, more in an African or American Indian primitivistic style. The long, semicircular head is flat, and the arms are but tiny sticks jutting out from the sides. The torso is a legless rectangle, and the eyes are big black disks. Two dots serve for a nose, and the mouth is a curved line drawn upward in a smile. We guess that the carving has something to do with Vaishnavism by the white *tilak* markings on the face.

"There are a lot of them in stock," the boy tells me. "You can have this one, if you like." Curious about the *tilak* marking, I take the carving to Swamiji.

"What is this, Swamiji?" I ask, setting it before him on his footlocker.

Swamiji's eyes widen in surprise, and he smiles. "Oh, that is Lord Jagannatha," he says. "That is Krishna."

"Krishna?" I look hard at the carving, trying to catch some remote resemblance to other depictions of the Lord. I see none, but it somehow seems appropriate for the Lord of the universe to look out on His creation with such a blissful, superhuman smile.

"This is Lord Krishna as He is worshipped in the great temple of Jagannatha Puri, Orissa," Swamiji explains. "There, He resides with His sister Subhadra and brother Balarama."

Swamiji then relates the history: One King Indradyumna of Puri had commissioned Visvakarma, the master sculptor who worked for the demigods, to carve him statues of Lord Krishna, His brother Balarama, and sister Subhadra. Visvakarma agreed on one condition: that he would be allowed to complete his work in seclusion. No one was to look at the Deities before They were completed; if They were seen before completion, he would quit work altogether. When the King agreed, the sculptor began his work behind closed doors. At the end of a month or so, the King became impatient and asked Visvakarma when he would be finished. "A little longer, Visvakarma told him. Months passed, and again the King received the same reply. A year passed, and the same reply. Finally, after waiting for such a long time, the King's patience ended, and he burst into the sculptor's room. Visvakarma, who was an incarnation of God, immediately vanished, leaving three incompleted statues in the center of the room. Although unfinished, the statues were so esteemed by the King that he had Them placed in the temple and worshipped opulently.

"They were carved in wood?" I ask.

"Yes. And every year the Lord leaves the temple for the beach, and in Jagannatha Puri there is a great procession. People come from all over India to see the Lord travelling to the beach in His car.

"Car?"



Śrīla Prabhupāda tells the story of Lord Jagannātha.



"...The king's patience finally ran out, and he burst into the sculptor's room."

"A kind of car. Great carts. It is a yearly procession that thousands and thousands come to see. When Lord Chaitanya first walked into the temple and saw Lord Jagannatha, He said, 'O, here is Krishna!' and fell down in a trance of ecstacy, and did not come out for days."

"Can we have Lord Jagannatha here?" I ask.

"Oh yes! We must! We must welcome Him. After all, He has come of His own accord. We did not have to search Him out. This is most auspicious. It is Krishna's will that we have Lord Jagannatha in San Francisco."

Swamiji also notes that this is most appropriate because of Lord Jagarmatha's special benefits: His compassion extends even to those addicted to bar and brothel, and His worship does not entail all the elaborate strictures of Radha-Krishna Deity worship, a worship, he says, that he will one day teach us when we are more advanced. But for now, Lord Jagannatha is the perfect Deity form for Kali-yuga America, and especially hedonist California.

Of course, the two-inch carving is too small to serve as anything but a model; therefore Swamiji asks Shyamasundar, a very competent sculptor, to carve a much larger Jagannatha. Hoping to find a better model, Shyamasundar and I search through the stock of the import house and are delighted to discover a more detailed sixteen-inch Jagannatha. We also find two similar Deities. We rush them to Swamiji.

"This is Subhadra, Krishna's sister," Swamiji explains, "and that is Balarama, Krishna's brother. So, Shyamasundar, you can carve all three and make a special altar in the temple. Then I will install Them."

Shyamasundar buys three wooden blocks, each three feet high, and begins carving on the roof of his Haight Street apartment. I stop by daily to watch the progress. His work goes remarkably fast. In a very short time, by mid-March, the Deities are ready and brought to the temple. Above Swamiji's dais, Shyamasundar constructs a plain

redwood altar. At night, we raid Golden Gate Park and return with boxes of flowers for the installation.

The Jagannatha Deities are beautiful indeed, and amazingly accurate reproductions. Swamiji is pleased.

"Krishna has given you the intelligence," he tells Shyamasundar. "You have done it so nicely." At the installation, Swamiji performs a new ceremony in which he offers incense, fire, water, cloth, and flowers to Lord Jagannatha, circulating these items while ringing a small bell.

"This is called *aratik*," Swamiji explains, passing the candle around. Following his example, we briefly feel the flame's heat with our hands, and then touch our hands to our foreheads. "In this ceremony, we take the heat of the flame. This is the advent of Jagannatha Swami, and now the temple is ready for this worshipping process. Krishna is a person, and we have to make friendship with Him. Just like we have to make connections if we want to see someone very great, we have to introduce ourselves in a friendly way, a loving manner, to Krishna. If we want to transfer ourselves to that supreme planet, Krishna-loka, then we have to prepare ourselves to love Krishna. Love of God. We must be intimately in touch with God by love. We cannot claim any favor from the Supreme unless we are in love with Him. There are six loving reciprocations by which we can understand that we love someone. First, you must give something to one you love. And then you must accept something from him. Then you must give him something to eat, and accept what he gives you to eat. Then you must disclose your mind to him, and then listen to what he has to say. According to *Shastra*, these are the six loving exchanges between Krishna and His devotees.

"So I request you devotees, when you come to the temple, to bring one fruit and one flower to offer Lord Jagannatha. It need not be costly. Whatever you can afford. Now, distribute *prasadam*."

Harsharani, Malati and Janaki hand out paper plates. It is a

candlelight feast, and Swamiji insists that we give *prasadam* to spectators on the sidewalk.

"Very nice preparations," he says. "All glories to the cookers!"

Lord Jagannatha Himself is an instant success. In the morning, devotees run out to buy the two-inch version to make into a necklace. Soon Lord Jagannatha is dangling about everyone's neck. The problem, however, is attaching the string. A small eye-screw in the top of the head is soon nixed.

"You must not put holes in the Lord's head," Swamiji tells us. We finally resort to glue.

Swamiji teaches us a new *mantra* especially for Lord Jagannatha, chanting it to a beautiful melody:

jagannātha svāmī nayana patha gāmi bhavatu me

Translation: "Lord of the universe, kindly be visible unto me." Late at night, when the temple is empty, I sit happily before Lord Jagannatha chanting this *mantra*.

The next day, thinking that everyone would like to see Lord Jagannatha, we carry Him to Golden Gate Park for a *kirtan*. The hippies love Him. Within minutes, just below the shadow of Hippy Hill, hundreds are dancing about Him and chanting. Jagannatha's large, round eyes stare out at the bizarre American spectacle. His smile seems even more amused. Seeing the large crowd He has attracted, I run back to get Swamiji.

"We've taken Lord Jagannatha to the park," I say, "and everyone's chanting."

"You've what!?"



An impromptu program on Hippie Hill.





An impromptu program on Hippie Hill.





New Jagannātha Purī Temple in San Francisco, 1967.



Swamiji hurries with me to the park. When he sees Lord Jagannatha on the grass, surrounded by hippies dancing, he offers obeisances, touching his forehead to the ground. Seeing this, we also offer obeisances. Then Swamiji sits on the grass beside Lord Jagannatha and starts chanting with us. More people come. Shyamasundar and Mukunda rush back to the temple and return with an amplifier and speakers, kettledrum, our array of colorful flags on poles, and a cushion for Swamiji to sit on. Leading the chant, Swamiji strikes his cymbals loudly and sings into a microphone: "Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!" Dancing around Swamiji and Lord Jagannatha, we chant into the late afternoon.

Back at the temple, Swamiji tells us that Lord Jagannatha is *arca-vigraha*, the Lord manifest in the material world for our worship, and therefore should not be treated like an ordinary statue made of wood. His chastisement is mild but final.

"The Deity should never leave the temple," he says. "The Deities don't go out to see the people except on special occasions. If you want to see the Deities, then you have to visit Them."

* * *

Lord Jagannatha's presence quickly beautifies the little Frederick Street temple. Garlands are made for Him daily, and also for Subhadra and Balarama. Vishnu paintings by Jadurani arrive from New York, and Govinda-dasi paints a large portrait of Swamiji, which we hang beside the dais. We also hang up Krishna prints distributed by India's Brijbasi Company and sold at Haight Street psychedelic shops.

I personally consider the Brijbasi popular religious art somewhat garish, but Swamiji tells us that the technique doesn't matter. What is important is that the pictures are of Krishna and consistent with scriptural descriptions. Although they may be imperfectly drawn, they are beautiful for the devotee because they remind him of Krishna.



Murali Manohar

One print, a special favorite called Murli Manohar, depicts Krishna as a dark cowherd boy, holding His flute to His lips, standing in his famous *tribunga* posture, one leg crossed in front of the other. In the background, the River Jamuna flows in the moonlight, and peacocks sport along the river banks.

When Swamiji sees this picture, he smiles and quotes a Sanskrit verse:

smerāṁ bhaṅgī-traya-paricitāṁ sāci-vistīrṇa-dṛṣṭiṁ
vaṁśī-nyastādhara-kiśalayām ujjvalāṁ candrakeṇa
govindākhyāṁ hari-tanum itaḥ keśi-tīrthopakaṇṭhe
mā prekṣiṣṭhās tava yadi sakhe bandhu-saṅge 'sti raṅgaḥ

"My dear friend, if you still have an inclination to enjoy material life with society, friendship and love, then please do not see the boy named Govinda, who is standing in a three-curved way, smiling and skillfully playing on His flute, His lips brightened by the full moonlight."

Although a theologian may call this a super-romantic conception, Krishna certainly appeals to California youth. His boyish sports contrast sharply with the asceticism of Buddha and sufferings of Christ. While Christ suffers, and Buddha fasts and meditates, Krishna dances with a hundred and eight cowherd girls in the Vrindaban forests. For many in the Haight-Ashbury, Lord Krishna—with His adolescent good looks, long hair, peacock feathers, garlands, bare feet, rings and beads, flute, girl friends and companions—is none other than the Ultimate Hippy.

End of Chapter 8

Chapter 9. Mad After Krishna

Golden Gate Park is redolent with March flowers. The morning fog disperses early, and the days are cloudless and blue. Thousands continue to flock to San Francisco from the midwest and east, and our Sunday *kirtans* attract big crowds.

Sunday is always a day for strolling in the park, and as soon as we start ringing cymbals and chanting, people follow. Christian, Moslem, Jewish, Buddhist and ISKCON banners, flying from long poles, proclaim our ecumenism. We stake these in the field below Hippy Hill and set up the kettledrum.

Haridas, Mukunda, Shyamasundar, Subal, and Upendra sit in a circle on the grass. We beat the rhythm slowly on the kettledrum, the cymbals clash, and the kelp horn announces the beginning of *kirtan*.

After we chant about an hour, Swamiji walks over from his apartment and enters the center of the circle, clapping his hands and dancing, appearing wonderfully bright in his saffron robes. He leads the chanting, playing his own personal set of cymbals, a large pair with slightly flared rims that resonate loudly. Although he is a half century older than everyone around him, his presence is dynamically youthful. As the *kirtan* soars, Swamiji is a child amongst children, dancing with hands upraised to the blue sky, placing one foot before the other, dipping slightly, encouraging everyone to dance.

Then something remarkable happens.

The boys and girls clasp hands and form a large circle around us. Another circle encloses this circle, and suddenly Swamiji is in the center of two circles of dancing, chanting youths. As the rhythm increases, the circles begin to move more rapidly in opposite directions, everyone holding on tightly, arms and hands joined, the circles jerking and bouncing like great wheels rolling out of control, everyone short of breath, laughing and trying to chant.

And Swamiji urges us on.

"*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*"

As the circles rotate, around us pass kaleidoscopic images: pennants, bongos, guitars, horns, cymbals, harmonium, sitars, tambourines, flutes, happy faces, silver stars, dazzling sun, crescent moon, children, grass, flowers, barking dogs, the ka-whoom of timpani, and Swamiji, dancing gloriously in the middle.

"The way those boys and girls were dancing in the park this afternoon," Swamiji tells us later, "that is the way Krishna was dancing the *rasa-lila*. Because every *gopi* wanted to dance with Him, Krishna multiplied Himself and danced like that in a circle beside each *gopi*, and each and every *gopi* thought that Krishna was hers."

* * *

After the Sunday park *kirtans*, we return to the temple for the four o'clock feast. Usually people stand outside waiting with paper plates; inside, it is always packed. We receive little money from donations, but Harsharani always manages to prepare enough *kitri* and *halava*.

The girls often have difficulty serving everyone before people return for seconds. I usually take my plate outside just to breathe fresh air. Indians (from India) sometimes visit and stare in amazement at the hippies accepting a culture that they themselves have rejected.

* * *

Do you know who is the first Eternal spaceman of this universe? The first to send his wild vibrations To all the cosmic super-stations?

For the song he always shouts Sends the planets flipping out.

He sings to Virgo and the Pleiades, For he can travel where he pleases…

But I'll tell you before you think me loony, That I'm talking about Narada Muni.

"Narada Muni never stays any place longer than it takes to milk a cow," Swamiji tells us. "He carries a *vina* and is always chanting Hare Krishna all over the universe. He is the first class, topmost devotee."

Inspired by this roving Vaishnava, Mukunda and I write a song that Swamiji enjoys—"Narada Muni." O Narada Muni, eternal spaceman,

Can travel much further than spaceships can, Spreading sounds of love and joy vibrations To all the cosmic incarnations,

Singing with bliss upon his *vina*, The whole cosmos is his arena.

…Singing, "*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*"

At this time, a shipment of cymbals and *mridangas*—the Bengali clay drums—arrives by air from India, ordered express by Swamiji, who inspects every box carefully while unpacking.

"These drums were designed by Lord Chaitanya Himself," he tells us. "They are meant especially for this *sankirtan* movement. And they give the sweetest sound, a sound that can be produced by no other drum, with no other material, because they are transcendental."

He then unpacks each *mridanga*, brushing off the excelsior, and inspects the straps and heads minutely. When he plays one at *kirtan*, we all instantly understand that a new and supramundane element has been added. The *mridanga* punctuates each Hare Krishna with an echo sounding like a soul calling out for deliverance.

Afterwards, Swamiji begins to teach Mukunda to play. "Tee-ka tee-ka tee. Teo-ti-nak-tah, de tah de ta TAH."



Because it is a simple rhythm, one is tempted to speed up too soon.

"No," Swamiji says. "Slowly. Very slowly at first. You must play slowly and listen to master it."

No one really masters *mridanga*. We all fumble in our own ways; only Swamiji can play it properly.

* * *

On Tuesday evenings, we go to the beach with Swamiji and hold unforgettable Pacific Ocean sunset *kirtans*. Sitting on the sand, we watch the tide roll in, or chant and wait for the sun to dip below the horizon.

"Pacific means calm," Swamiji says. "That is because it is so big and great. When something is so great, it will naturally be calm because it has nothing to fear."

Haridas builds a fire beside a sand dune, and we dance and chant around it. Swamiji wears a scarf about his head, an old overcoat, and claps his hands and chants, "*Govinda jai jai, Gopala jai jai, Radharamana Hari, Govinda jai jai.*"

Holding hands in a circle, we dance about the fire. Mukunda, Janaki, Shyamasundar, Malati, and Haridas play cymbals and tambourines. I play trumpet. Swamiji also dances, sometimes raising his arms in the air, sometimes clapping. As the stars begin to shine bright over the Pacific, and the foam and spindrift of waves recede in the dark, we sing "Narada Muni."

"You must write more such songs," Swamiji tells us, "songs praising the *acharyas*, great saintly persons. The *bhakta* in love with God wants to sing to Him and His representatives. And Hare Krishna, of all songs, is the supreme. It is the call of a child for his father, a call of pure love. Oh, there are many songs in the Vaishnava tradition, songs of Bhaktivinode Thakur, and songs of Mirabai."



Walking along the ocean, San Francisco, 1967.





San Francisco, USA. The large rectangular area is Golden Gate Park.



After chanting, we roast potatoes and smear them with melted butter. Swamiji eats with us, sitting on a big log. And after potatoes, we roast marshmallows, and red apples stuffed with raisins and brown sugar.

As Orion and the Big Dipper shine brightly and the waves crash in the dark, we gather about the fire for warmth, and one last Hare Krishna. After this, we bow down on the sands, and Swamiji acclaims, All glories to the assembled devotees! All glories to the assembled devotees! All glories to the Pacific Ocean!"

And we all laugh, Swamiji the loudest.

* * *

"But don't marshmallows have eggs in them?" Kirtanananda writes upon hearing.

Despite initial difficulties, Kirtanananda opens a temple on Avenue du Parc in Montreal. ISKCON now has three temples. Swamiji considers Montreal auspicious because of the International Exposition there.

Before Kirtanananda arrived, the temple was an abandoned bowling alley. He was helped by Janardan, who has been claiming wide interest amongst discontented French Catholics.

In triumph, Kirtanananda mails us a feature article in Montreal's *Le Nouveau Samedi*. Headlines, in French: "THEY CLAIM THAT THE HINDU GOD KRISHNA IS THE FATHER OF JESUS CHRIST AND THAT THE INHABITANTS OF THE MOON ARE INVISIBLE."

"Who says they are invisible?" Swamiji asks. "In the *Vedas*, the moon is considered a higher planet. There are demigods dwelling there for thousands of years, and there they drink *soma*. You cannot go there by artificial means, by rocket or space suit. No. You must qualify to receive the proper body to take birth among the demigods."

Kirtanananda maintains the Vedic view before the smiling French Catholics, dismissing Copernicus and Newton as mere material scientists bewildered by a mechanical universe.

Kirtanananda writes that he is managing to pay the rent by holding rock dances in the bowling alley and taking in some boarders. Since he questioned the propriety of marshmallows, I ask about holding such dances in the temple.

"Well, there would be no temple without money," he writes. "Besides, the *mantra* is an integral part of the dance, and the Vishnu altar is well lit with many candles and incense. Altogether the atmosphere is really magical, and I think it will even improve. The bands are most enthusiastic, and though they have yet to perfect a good *mantra* rock style, I think they will."

Krishna, the father of Christ. Invisible moon men. Mantra rock. The Montreal temple is off to a good start.

* * *

"Isn't Krishna the eighth incarnation of Vishnu?" someone asks during a question period.

"Krishna is the original Personality of Godhead," Swamiji says. "By Vishnu, we mean Krishna. The four-armed Vishnu form is a special form manifested by Krishna. Brahma creates, Vishnu maintains, and Shiva destroys. These are all aspects of Krishna. But Krishna Himself has nothing to do but enjoy. Therefore we see Him dancing with the *gopis*, in pure, blissful, eternal pastimes."

"And Rama?"

"He is also the Supreme Lord, an expansion of Krishna who defeated the demon Ravana. Hanuman was His servant, a monkey servant, who utilized his wrath against Ravana. But when we chant *Hare Krishna, Hare Rama*, we do not refer to this Rama but to

Balarama, Krishna's brother and His first expansion. '*Hare'* refers to Radharani."

"And why is Radha included?"

"She is Krishna's spiritual pleasure potency. It is not that Krishna is alone. He is always with His beloved, the most elevated of the *gopis*. When Krishna enjoys Himself, He expands as Radha-Krishna. Here in the material world, what we call sex life is a perverted reflection of that enjoyment potency. We should not consider Radha-Krishna in that light. That is an offensive mistake."

"What about the demigods?" someone asks. "According to *Bhagavad-gita*, by sacrificing to the demigods, man will receive all necessities.

"Yes. "

"Well, in India, where these demigods are honored, people are poverty-stricken. But here, no one believes in them, but there is plenty for all."

"Just wait."

A ripple of laughter. Swamiji looks around, inviting more questions.

"Of course, there is no need to worship the demigods separately, he adds. "Since Krishna is the origin of the demigods, we worship Him, and the demigods are automatically satisfied. Demigods are generally worshipped by the less intelligent. 'Those who worship the demigods go to the demigods,' Krishna says. But that is a temporary situation. The devotees worship Krishna and reach His supreme, eternal planet. India is in difficulty now because we are turning from our Vedic culture and worshipping Western technology. But you should also understand that your present prosperity is due to pious activities in previous lives. There is a point where the fruits of these activities run out.

* * *

Many Indians visiting the Frederick Street temple tell us that they've never seen such fiery, enthusiastic *kirtans* in India—nay, not anywhere else in the world. A combination of magic elements is at work.

First of all, Swamiji's presence. But remarkably enough, his presence is felt even when he does not descend but stays in his upstairs apartment writing his books. The unison *kirtans* intensify as new instruments are added—flutes and tenor sax, trumpets and kettledrum, cymbals and kelp horn, tambourines, *mridangas*, guitars and bongos, sitars and castanets. Often we join hands and dance around the walls of the temple, bounding on the floor and daring it to collapse. *Kirtan* always begins with a rousing Hare Krishna. Then, after Swamiji's lecture, we chant "Gopala, Gopala, Devakinandana Gopala." We first heard this *mantra* sung by poet Ginsberg, and for a week Swamiji tolerates it. Then he calls me in.

"That is not a valid Vaishnava *mantra*," he tells me. "You may change Devaki's name for Yasoda's. Yasoda and not Devaki is accepted as Krishna's real mother because those *matya-rasa* pastimes were carried on with her. But best not to chant that *mantra* at all because it's not authorized." Still intent on some variety, we chant "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*."

"One Hare Krishna is worth two thousand Jai Ram's," Swamiji remarks. "So why are you wasting time?"

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, Mukunda gives music lessons, teaching different melodies for Hare Krishna. And there's also "*Govinda jai jai, Gopala jai jai, Radharamana Hari, Govinda jai jai,*" which Swamiji sings so beautifully at *kirtan* and upstairs alone, playing harmonium, his voice full of devotion, alone with all the time in the world, time no more a factor than space.

Even on the nights that he does not descend, he listens to the *kirtans* in his room. Afterwards, he smiles and asks, "It was a good *kirtan*, yes? The hippies? They are appreciating? Yes, if they take up this Hare Krishna, they will become transformed. And they will transform the world. America is such a powerful country that all the world is imitating. So just take up this chanting, make your country Krishna conscious, and all the world will follow."

* * *

Not all our members are hippies or renegades from the hippy movement. There's Jim, the taxi driver, a very quiet, self-controlled young man who had gone to Ohio State University.

"When driving my cab, I was getting these headaches," he tells Swamiji. "I'd get real nervous driving. But then I started chanting Hare Krishna, and now the traffic doesn't bother me at all."

He takes initiation and is renamed Jayananda Das. He continues driving his taxi, chants *japa* intensely, donates money to the temple, and contributes every spare minute to Swamiji.

Another non-hippy member is Mr. Morton, who is just completing his law degree. He's a little older than most devotees and seems to feel out of place, but he continues attending, often wearing a hangdog expression because he worries about his home life.

Poor Mr. Morton. He can't tear himself away from the chanting. Yet back home there's the wife and kids, and the wife disapproves of his consorting with hippy cults. She also keeps reminding him that in the fall, they have to return to Omaha to set up law practise.

Mr. Morton buys big, red beads and strings them. He wears them around his neck and chants sixteen rounds daily. At *kirtan* , he stands in the middle of the temple, swaying back and forth, eyes closed, beatific smile, enraptured.



"There is no problem," Swamiji tells him. "You can be a lawyer for Krishna. You can be anything. But do it for Krishna. That's *bhakti-yoga*."

Mr. Morton dons his hangdog expression again.

"But my wife," he says. "She's already threatening to divorce me. And she refuses to stop cooking meat."

"Bring her to *kirtan*," Swamiji tells him. He does. She leaves after two minutes.

Mr. Morton stays with the temple until his career and wife finally pull him away to Omaha.

"He'll always remember these as the happiest days in his life," I tell Haridas. "And he'll always wonder why."

Then I stop, hesitate, and think sadly that the same is possibly no less true for myself. For all of us.

* * *

I got those Samsara Blues,
Thinking, Good or bad?
Win or lose? All that smokin' and takin' meth,
Just turn the wheel of birth and death.
I'll never attain liberation
By mere sense gratification.
LSD and marijuana
Just won't get me to nirvana.
And meditatin' on the void,
Only gets me paranoid.
Remembering I'm not this body,
I tell her that I'm brahmachari.
So forget that Uncle Sam thing,

Just keep chanting, chanting, chanting.
...Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare.
In material entanglement, what calms me?
Why, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.
Krishna, chase away those Samsara Blues!

A sincere statement written by Haridas. For us, there is always the lure of sex, milkshakes and chocolate bars, doughnuts, frivolous games, Bach and Mozart, rock and roll, poetry and novels, travel, pot, peyote and acid, and long, aimless talks over coffee or a glass of beer. Are these forever to be denied?

Being somewhat older—late twenties and early thirties—Haridas, myself and a few others marvel over the apparent ease with which teenagers renounce these common drives, inebriants, habits. "*Maya* is but Krishna's smile," I try to remember.

"It should be easier for you," the younger members say. "You've been partying since 1958. We've hardly had a taste."

Swamiji supports another viewpoint.

"Best to be trained up *brahmachari* from the beginning," he says. "It's easier to renounce what you have never tasted. Once you are habituated to intoxication, sex, gambling, meat eating, or whatever, it is very difficult to give them up. Habits are hard to break. The urge for sense enjoyment is the very cause of our conditioning. We forget that our real enjoyment is in serving Krishna, and in being enjoyed by Him. In ignorance, we become habituated to so many undesirable things. Now our younger members are finding it easier to give up so much because they've not had the chance to become addicted. But even addicted, you reach a point where you see that there's no happiness in sense gratification. Frustrated by *maya*, you may turn toward Krishna. But that is not the desirable road. The best way is not to forget Krishna for a moment."

“But Krishna says that 'all roads lead to Me',” someone says. “Where does He say that?” Swamiji demands.

Swamiji’s translation of the “roads” verse from *Bhagavad-gita* is precise: “All of them—as they surrender unto Me—I reward accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pritha.”

“That does not mean that all roads lead to the same place,” he tells us. “Yes, they are all Krishna’s roads, just as all the roads in America belong to the government. But is that to say that all roads lead to San Francisco? The devotees attain the person Krishna, and the impersonalists attain the Brahman effulgence that emanates from Krishna. The roads are all Krishna’s, but the goals are not the same. In the material universe there are 8,400,000 species of life and roads leading to each of them. They are all Krishna’s roads because He is the Father of all living entities. But does this mean that we aspire to be a cat or dog? Our aim should be to serve Krishna, that’s all. We do not aspire to be demigods or whatever. Lord Chaitanya had but one request: causeless devotional service life after life, regardless of the type of body. Hanuman served Lord Rama very well in a monkey body.”

Yet many of us stumble on the road of Krishna consciousness and fall back into our old ways. How can we channel everything to the person Krishna? There’s music, fast cars, intoxicants, and golden California lasses calling, “Fun, fun, fun!”

Srila Prabhupada tells the story of a young prince who became attracted by a beautiful girl who happened to be a devotee. Just by seeing this girl once, the prince fell in love with her and made arrangements with her father for marriage. But since the girl was devoted to Krishna, she refused him. “Oh, your beauty has captivated me,” the prince said. “If I cannot have it, I will kill myself” Understanding the situation, the girl said, “Come back in two weeks, and my beauty will be yours.” The prince went away, but when he returned after two weeks, he hardly recognized the young girl.

Because she had taken a very strong purgative that had flushed her body of all liquids, she was shrivelled and emaciated like an old hag. “You want my beauty?” she asked the horrified prince. “You will find it there in the corner.” And she pointed to a pot full of stool and vomit. “There is the beauty you desired,” she said. “Take it and be happy.”

* * *

Ramanuja-das-brahmachari automatically turns to admire a pretty girl.

“That’s just a combination of blood, pus, and stool,” I remind him. “Of bile, urine, flesh, phlegm, bone, and guts.”

“Yes,” he says, “but it’s all in the right place.”

* * *

“Miss Maya is so strong,” Swamiji tells us, “that when she sees you trying to become Krishna conscious, she’ll knock you down.” He shakes his head and smiles, as if facing an unconquerable foe. “She is so strong, and we are so weak. Like fire and butter. We should never think that we are stronger than Maya. We have only one recourse Hare Krishna. When Mayadevi attacks, we must cry, ‘Krishna! Krishna! Please save me!’ Since only Krishna is stronger than *maya*, only Krishna can protect us. When the pure devotee conquers Krishna through love, then Mayadevi stands before the devotee and says, ‘How may I serve you?’ Only then does maya cease to be a foe. Only then is *maya* seen as Krishna’s smile.“

* * *

It seems that the girls have less trouble surrendering. They just throw themselves in, crying, “Krishna! Krishna!”

“Women are soft-hearted,” Swamiji says, “but unfortunately they

are fickle, too. They are quick to accept and reject. They come to Krishna consciousness quickly, out of sentiment, and then some boy comes along, and they reject everything. Men are not so quick to accept, but once they have accepted, they are more reluctant to reject. So the male is considered a higher birth because a man is more likely to understand Krishna consciousness and therefore remain steady. In Vedic culture, the woman is considered weak. Soft-hearted. She should be protected, not given freedom to roam about, like in this country. Therefore we are marrying our girls to nice Krishna conscious boys."

Someone suggests that perhaps it is easier for girls to surrender to a male God.

"That is a material consideration," Swamiji says, "because the soul is neither male nor female. All-attractive means that Krishna attracts all. But Krishna is always the male, the enjoyer, and in respect to Him, the *jiva-atma*, or individual soul, is always female, the enjoyed. When the female attempts to imitate the male, the result is topsy-turvy, is it not?

"So, devoid of Krishna consciousness, the conditioned soul is enjoy-less. Lots of zeros add up to zero. We must put the one before the zeros. Krishna is the missing one giving joy to all the infinite zeros. '*Aham bija-pradah pita*.' I am the seed-giving father."

* * *

A society columnist from *The San Francisco Chronicle* interviews Malati and her "*gopis*."

"These *gopis*," the columnist writes, "are cowherd girls. They wear *saris* and will be glad to perform *kirtan* anywhere."

Apparently, the lady's column is widely read. We are bombarded by phone calls from socialites who want Malati and her *gopis* to perform in their homes. When we are invited by one of the richest families in San Francisco, the Thompsons, Malati accepts.



Student programs in San Francisco, 1967.



Malati and her gopis.

I suggest that since it appears a ladies' affair, she can take the *gopis* herself, but Malati informs me that the girls are afraid to go alone. Somehow twelve of us manage to pile into Shyamasundar's old Chevy. En route, we're pulled over and ticketed for an overloaded vehicle.

We're met at the door by bewildered servants; the columnist had written nothing about the male hippies accompanying the female *gopis*. There's much scurrying about and whispering amongst the Thompsons and their servants before we're allowed in.

From the beginning, the evening is disastrous for everyone. It seems that we were invited to a party of wealthy, drunken, middle-aged socialites mainly to entertain while the rock and roll band refurbished their drinks.

Not knowing what to do, I give a little talk about Swamiji' s mission in America, his founding of ISKCON and the New York and Frederick Street temples, and the meaning and purpose of the *mantra*. We then start chanting, but after a minute we're interrupted by a drunk and belligerent old man.

The Thompsons are too drunk to be embarrassed. Mrs. Thompson gives Malati a hundred dollar donation, telling her that everyone appreciates "the good work you're doing, reforming the drug addicts down there." We then fold up the harmonium, gather our cymbals and leave quickly.

"You should not chant or explain the *mantra* before such people," Swamiji tells us afterwards. "Actually, Krishna tells Arjuna that *Bhagavad-gita* should be explained only to the pious. Of course, now in Kali-yuga people are mostly in passion and ignorance, so if we preach just to the pious, we'll have no audience. It is Lord Chaitanya's desire that this chanting be preached in every village in the world, and His desire is the purpose of ISKCON. So we are preaching to the hippies. But we need not attend the parties of drunkards."

* * *

Swamiji calls me into his room. I bow and sit facing him, sensing something special.

"I am thinking it will be nice if you write a play about Lord Chaitanya," he tells me. "I will give you the whole plot complete. Then all you will have to do is execute it."

For two days, I sit in Swamiji's room listening to his account of the life of Lord Chaitanya. At this time, Swamiji is also lecturing on the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*. There is also a translation of *Chaitanya-charitamrita* going about, translated by Nagendra Kumar Roy. Swamiji reads a bit of this translation and quickly finds a discrepancy. It is over one word, "rheumatism," which has been translated incorrectly from the Bengali. Swamiji immediately brands Mr. Kumar Roy a sentimentalist. The translation is inaccurate. Throw it out.

"I will give you all you need to know," he tells me.

I tape record the outline and interrupt only when the action isn't clear.

On the second day, Swamiji tells of the passing of Haridas Thakur, one of Lord Chaitanya's principal disciples. Recounting the details, Swamiji becomes strangely indrawn, as if it were all happening before him.

"When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited Haridas on the last day of Haridas's life," Swamiji says, "the Lord asked, 'Haridas, what do you desire?' They both could understand. Haridas said, 'It is my last day. If You would kindly stand before me…'" Swamiji suddenly falls silent a moment and looks down at his hands. "So Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stood before him," he continues, speaking softly, his eyes filling with tears. "And Haridas left his body."

Then Swamiji sits there crying silently within. It is a silence I can hear above the street noises and hum of the tape recorder. I stare at the floor, then look up, embarrassed, feeling I shouldn't be in the room. As I begin to ask a question, Swamiji again speaks.

"After his departure," he says, "the body was taken by the Lord to the seashore, and the devotees dug his grave, which is still there, Haridas Thakur's *samadhi*. And Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took up the dead body and began to dance with the body at *kirtan*. Thus Haridas's funeral ceremony was conducted by the Lord Himself."

And Swamiji continues outlining the play as though nothing had happened, his sudden, silent weeping passing with the wind.

* * *

Although I write on the Lord Chaitanya play through the spring days, my primary service is helping Swamiji with *Bhagavad-gita*. He continues translating, hurrying to complete the manuscript but still annotating each verse thoroughly in his purports. Daily, I consult him to make certain that the translation of each verse precisely coincides with the meaning he wants to relate. "Edit for force and clarity," he tells me. "By Krishna's grace, you are a qualified English professor. You know how grammatical mistakes will discredit us with scholars. I want them to appreciate this *Bhagavad-gita* as the definitive edition. All the others try to take credit away from Krishna."

I am swamped with editing. Since much of the text is equivocal due to grammar, I find myself consulting Swamiji on nearly every verse. It seems that in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Bengali, phrase is tacked onto phrase until the original subject is lost.

No one has yet asked Swamiji the language in which he thinks. Bengali, I presume, but for all I know it may be Hindi or Sanskrit. He often says that Sanskrit is the language of the demigods, the original language, and that all other languages descend from it. Indeed, it was the very language used by Krishna when He spoke *Bhagavad-gita*

millions of years ago to the sun god Vivasvan, and then five thousand years ago to Arjuna at Kurukshetra. All seven hundred verses sung in Sanskrit.

Swamiji sweeps away archeological and philological pronouncements with a disdainful sweep of his hand.

"What do they know? Great civilizations were existing on this earth hundreds of thousands of years ago. They are thinking that everything begins with them, with cavemen or monkeys. But in ages past, Maharaj Bharat ruled the entire world, and there were great civilizations everywhere. Who can deny that Sanskrit is the mother of languages? So-called scholars are simply concocting nonsense, proposing theories. Their business is: 'You propose a theory, and I propose a greater theory.' But *Bhagavad-gita* is not theory. It is fact. Therefore I am presenting it as it is. Not as it seems to me, but as it is spoken. Radhakrishnan says that we are not to worship the person Krishna, and Gandhi says that Kurukshetra is a symbol for this or that, but these are all opinions. Mental speculations. To expose them, we must quickly publish *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Someone has told me that the purports are very lengthy, but that is the Vaishnava tradition—constantly expanding. The purports are intended to bring the meaning back to Krishna, to rectify the mischief done by these rascal commentators. Factually, this is the only authorized translation. So I am eager to see our *Bhagavad-gita* published complete."

In New York, Brahmananda continues negotiations with publishers. Swamiji consults more private printers in San Francisco. Since it is turning into such a lengthy book, it will be expensive. Swamiji also wants to include the Sanskrit Devanagari, which will cost extra. Prices are way out of our reach. We are still trying to scrape together rent for the temple and Swamiji's apartment. In New York, it's the same. And Kirtanananda might get kicked out of the bowling alley any day. None of us really wants to count the assets of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Really, we have only one asset—His Divine Grace himself.

* * *

March 21. Swamiji has been discussing *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. His lecture ends, and he asks for questions. No one speaks, and he asks again and waits.

"There must be questions," he says.

Govinda-dasi timidly raises her hand, and Swamiji acknowledges her.

"Can you explain about Lord Chaitanya asking the whereabouts of Krishna in the forest? Or would that not be a good thing to discuss?"

"Yes, Yes," Swamiji says happily. "Very nice. Your question is very nice. I'm very glad. Lord Chaitanya was the greatest devotee of Krishna, and we should think about His life. He never said, 'I have seen Krishna,' but He was mad after Krishna." Swamiji stresses the word "mad," prolonging the single syllable until we have visions of Lord Chaitanya dancing and trembling in ecstasy. "He was always thinkng, 'When shall I see Krishna? Where is Krishna? Where is Krishna?' He was so mad after Krishna. And that is the main point of Chaitanya philosophy. This is called worship in separation. The devotee thinks, 'Krishna, You are so wonderful, and I am such a fool and rascal that I cannot see You. I have no qualification to see You.' In this way, we should feel the separation of Krishna, and these feelings will enrich us in Krishna consciousness. It's not, 'Krishna, I've seen You. Finished.' No. Perpetually think of yourself as unfit to see Krishna. That will enrich you."

Swamiji nods thoughtfully and looks at each of us. We do not speak, nor do our eyes leave him.

"Yes," he continues, "when Krishna left Vrindaban for His father's place, Radharani was feeling in that way, always mad after Krishna. So Chaitanya Mahaprabhu displayed these feelings of Radharani, and we

should understand that this is the best way for worshipping Krishna and becoming Krishna conscious."

He stops again, waits, thinking, then goes on.

"You know that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu threw Himself in the sea, crying, 'Krishna, are You here? Krishna, are You there?' And Lord Chaitanya's direct disciples, the Goswamis, Rupa and Sanatan Goswami, also worshipped Krishna in that feeling of separation. There is one nice verse about them."

He begins to chant ecstatically, his voice rich and full.

he rādhe! vraja-devike! ca lalite! he nanda-suno!
kutaḥ śrī-govardhana-pādapa-tale kālindī-vane kutaḥ
ghosantav iti sarvato vraja-pure khedair maha-vihvalau
vande rūpa-sanātanau raghu-yugau śrī-jīva-gopālakau.

"I offer my respectful obeisances to the six Goswamis—Srila Rupa Goswami, Sri Sanatana Goswami, Sri Raghunatha-bhatta Goswami, Sri Raghunatha-dasa Goswami, Sri Jiva Goswarm and Sri Gopala-bhatta Goswami—who were chanting very loudly everywhere in Vrindaban, shouting, 'O Queen of Vrindaban, Radharani! O Lalita! O son of Nanda Maharaj! Where are You now? Are You on Govardhan hill, or under the trees on the Yamuna's banks? Where are You?' These were their moods in Krishna consciousness."

He pauses, closes his eyes, then speaks again.

"Later on, when the Goswamis were very mature in devotional service, they were daily going about Vrindaban, just like madmen, crying, 'Krishna, where You are?'...

After this, Swamiji says no more but sits cross-legged on the dais, hands folded, eyes closed in sudden, unexpected, rapt meditation. It's as though he's been struck by a bolt from the blue. As we sit watching him,

we all suddenly feel an electric, vibrant stillness settling over the temple. This is something very unusual, we all sense, yet dare not speak, dare not look at one another, dare not take our eyes from him. Perceivable spiritual phenomenon! We can actually see him withdraw deep within himself and leave the body, the temple, the city, the world far behind, so deep is his communion. We bathe in this intense silence for only three or four minutes, but, as in earthquakes, those minutes seem eternal for us all. But unlike earthquakes, there is no tumult. Just an awesome stillness prolonging those minutes more than tumult ever could.

We see his consciousness return to his body. He clears his throat, slowly opens his eyes, and reaches for the cymbals beside him.

"Let us have *kirtan*," he says quietly, and begins chanting "*Govinda Jai Jai*".

* * *

Afterwards, Subal runs up to me, his blue eyes popping. "Did you see that? Did you see it?"

We all begin speculating on what had happened. We call it "the *samadhi* lecture." It's the subject of whispered conversation for days.

* * *

It looks as though Mr. Payne, the real estate agent, absconded with the $5,000 temple deposit. Swamiji talks to Brahmananda long distance.

"Get Mr. Goldsmith, our lawyer," he tells him. "We must retrieve the money."

Brahmananda admits that it is his fault; he gave Mr. Payne the money without a proper contract. Suddenly he must pay the balance or lose the $5,000.

“These young boys have been tricked,” Swamiji says. Then he shakes his head. “Money is such a thing! Once money is out of your hand...” He waves his hand in the air, as if flicking off water. Then he laughs. “It’s gone.”

But this, among other matters, presses Swamiji to return to New York. Unfortunately, Mukunda has only one speaking engagement for him at Berkeley, April 6. Beyond that, nothing. Brahmananda writes of scores of engagements lined up in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. And there’s the new Montreal temple to visit.

“Perhaps Brahmananda can arrange for me to speak to your President Johnson,” Swamiji laughs. “That is very difficult, no? And yet people are talking of speaking to God. What does a man think he is that God should come before him? And rascals are saying, ‘I am God.‘"

Brahmananda mails a tape recording of all the New York devotees telling Swamiji how much they miss him. It is a desperate plea for him to return. Mukunda and I flinch as Swamiii listens sympathetically.

“It’s Brahmananda’s plot to get him back,” I tell Mukunda afterwards.

The same evening, Swamiji informs us that he is flying to New York April 9. Make reservations immediately.

* * *

A bread truck passes down Frederick Street and turns up Stanyan. Swamiji sees it from his apartment window. “Simply Delicious!” is painted in large letters on the bread truck.

Swamiji laughs. “Simply dangerous,” he says. “This material world is simply dangerous. Death is always standing beside us, waiting. For the nondevotee, Krishna comes as death. But for the devotee, death comes as Krishna.”

* * *

April 6: The Pauley Ballroom on the University of California's Berkeley campus, center of student Vietnam war resistance. About five hundred students come to hear Swamiji discuss the nature of the soul and give his peace formula.

The format is the same as always—chanting, lecture, question period, more chanting. A very loquacious, effeminate Negro dominates the question period.

"Swamiji, what's my name?" he asks.

Swamiji cannot see him; he's just a voice in the crowd. "Your name is Krishna-das, he says.

"What does that mean?"

"Servant of Krishna."

"Why servant?"

"Because in relation to Krishna, it's our constitutional duty to serve. The fingers serve the hand; the parts serve the whole. As eternal parts of Krishna, it's our duty to serve. But how? That you must find out."

"But I'm not serving Krishna."

"Then you are serving *maya*. But serve you must."

"I serve myself."

"Yes," Swamiji says patiently. "You serve your senses. Your tongue says, 'Take this nice food,' and you eat. The eyes say, 'See this nice girl,' and you look. So how are you not servant?"

No reply.



Program with students.



Śrīla Prabhupāda and Jayānanda.

"You must serve. Either *maya* or Krishna. If you master your senses, you become *goswami*. And with purified senses, you can serve Krishna. That is your perfection."

"But why serve at all? Why all this emphasis on service in the first place?"

"Because it is our nature to want to serve someone we love. We want to do something for our beloved. Is that not natural?"

"Yes. I guess so."

"Why guess? You must know. If love for a person is there, some form of service follows. It must! That is our happiness, that service, our eternal happiness. Therefore we must cultivate love for Krishna."

The students join in the chanting but afterwards leave the auditorium shaking their heads. They are skeptical. For them, Vietnam is life's main problem, the only thorn in the side of happiness. So how is Hare Krishna really going to end the Vietnam war?

"Wars are always going on. In Kali-yuga, men fight over nothing," Swamiji says.

Press coverage of the meeting is most offensive. A *Berkeley Barb* reporter writes that "the female devotees in their exotic costumes reminded me of harem dancers from a forgotten Hollywood epic." The reporter also admits spending most of his time watching "a decidedly uninhibited young lady successfully levitate her miniskirt by means of vigorously erotic calisthenics." And so on.

Worst of all, Swamiji's peace formula is criticized: "Easy things are nice, but easy things don't work." We don't dare show the article to Swamiji. Enraged, I phone *The Barb*.

"We're really offended," I tell the editor. "Our *brahmacharinis* certainly don't look like harem dancers."

“The writer has the right to his subjective opinion,” the editor says.

I agree to this, but catch them on a philosophical error. When the Negro asked who he was, Swamiji is reported as saying, “You are God.“

“This is impossible,” I say. “He said, ‘You are a servant of God.’”

Yielding to this point, the editor prints a retraction, adding: “In this way the Swami’s religion differs from that of Timothy Leary. Leary likes to tell humans, ‘You are God.’”

* * *

April 9: Swamiji leaves for the airport. Before entering the car, he stops, cane in hand, and gives a long look at the little storefront temple. It is a look that says a great deal. Gurudas snaps a photo at that very instant.

“That’s a farewell look,” I think to myself.

At the airport, the girls cry. Swamiji quiets them by assuring us that he will return for Lord Jagannatha’s Rathayatra festival on July 9.

“You must arrange a procession down the main street,” he tells us. “Do it nicely. We must attract many people. They have such a great procession yearly in Jagannatha Puri. At this time, the Deity may leave the temple.”

We watch him disappear down the passenger corridor to the plane.

Back at the temple, I clean his upstairs apartment and keep his bedroom as an altar room. Although wanting to return to New York, I must follow his instructions to maintain the temple nicely and negotiate with a San Francisco printer.



That famous "farewell glance" photograph, taken by Gurudas on April 9, 1967.

Since the environs of the temple and its atmosphere remind us of Swamiji, we cannot properly say that we are without him. His presence is felt even more intensely, and for the first time we begin to understand what is meant by worship in separation being the most ecstatic *rasa*.

Haridas, Mukunda, Shyamasundar, Gurudas, Jayananda, Subal, Upendra. And the weeping girls: Janaki, Malati, Yamuna, Harsharani, Lilavati.…

We all have to console one another and see that the little storefront stays afloat in the Haight-Ashbury. After all, Swamiji promised to return in three months.

"Chaitanya Mahaprabhu showed the way of the perfect devotee," Swamiji's words remind us. "Worship in separation. When Krishna left Vrindaban, the *gopis* were maddened in His absence. For the rest of their lives, they shed tears for Krishna. They acted in many strange ways; this is told in the *Shastras*. Rendering service in the *rasa* of separation elevates us to the highest level of perfection, to the platform of the *gopis*."

End of Chapter 9

Chapter 10. Soul Struck

During April and May, tourism and hippy fantasy soar to rare heights in the Haight-Ashbury. Like a Mardi Gras carnival, the celebration is cresting, rushing toward some indefinite Ash Wednesday.

Kirtans are wild and uninhibited. We often chant at the Fillmore and Avalon ballrooms, during intermissions between rock groups. A "Summer of Love" festival is organized, and we chant at be-in's in Golden Gate Park, at the YMCA and Psychedelic Shop, and with hippy sun worshipers at Morning Star Ranch.

The spring passes so quickly, perhaps because its days are filled with long hours of sunshine and festivity. Youths from all sections of the nation roam and lounge throughout the park, barefoot and dungareed, leisurely creating what they hope is a new community of love and peace, a world where no one is over thirty, where there is no violence, ignorance or death. And they chant Hare Krishna because they see ISKCON as an exotic flower in the hippy bouquet, something even further removed from twentieth century America, from the political activists and their endless strife. Generally, activists and Negroes shun us, considering us on far-out trips, dabbling in the cultures of undeveloped nations.

But what do they know of Krishna? Or of Swamiji? What do any of us really know?

* * *

April 23, Swamiji writes me:

I am so pleased to learn that you are all feeling my separation. And so I am feeling the same here. These feelings have very great significance—namely that we are being gradually posted in real Krishna consciousness. I am receiving many other letters from the devotees in San Francisco and telephonic calls indicating their feelings

of separation, the basis of Lord Chaitanya's mode of Krishna consciousness. The more we feel like that, the better for our advancement. However, from the physical point of view, as there is now difficulty in going to Montreal, I may return to San Francisco sometimes in the next month.

Swamiji points out that any good typist can learn the art of Varitype very quickly. If I will type *Bhagavad-gita* and *Back To Godhead*, he will get the machine. Satsvarupa, Rayarama and I would solve the "printing problem." He is prepared to invest $4,500 in a Varitype.

Simultaneously, he is looking into opening branches in Baltimore and Boston.

"Brahmananda, Rayarama and Mahapurusha, three boys, have already gone to Boston last night," he writes, "to see the situation, and we shall act accordingly."

* * *

Again and again we run into dead ends searching for a publisher or reasonable printer. Then, as I feared, Swamiji writes me May 10: "I beg to inform you that it has now been arranged to print *Bhagavad-gita* in India, and therefore you are requested to send me back all the corrected manuscripts on receipt of this letter."

We consider this disgraceful, to our eternal shame that our spiritual master has to send to India to have his book published. But there's no getting around the fact that commercial presses in the States want too much money for our budget. Brahmananda pleads with Swamiji to give us a little more time. Surely we will find some publisher who is interested.

* * *

In late May, Kirtanananda leaves Montreal to visit Swamiji in New

York. “I hear he’s a little sick,” he tells me on the phone. He and Janardan plan to stay only a few days, but once there, Kirtanananda decides to remain. He phones me again on May 30.

“Swamiji’s not feeling well,” he tells me. “He looks tired. He’s lost a good deal of weight and looks quite exhausted.”

Not knowing what to make of this, I tell no one.

* * *

June 1: Kirtanananda phones again. I answer on the receiver behind the temple. He is most distressed. Swamiji is in the hospital. He has had some kind of stroke.

Bit by bit, as Kirtanananda talks in a strained voice, the pieces fit together. We should have seen it coming. Swamiji had been having heart palpitations since our recording session in New York before Christmas. He was also drinking more water, indicating high blood sugar, diabetes.

“The other day, he was having palpitations,” Kirtanananda says. “He didn’t look at all well, so I kept everyone out. He was disturbed by a twitching in his arm. It was terrible.”

As I listen, frightful images of Swamiji in pain arise. Dear Krishna, help us! I recall Swamiji saying, “If anything happens to me, don’t call a doctor. Just give me my beads. I just want to chant Hare Krishna and go to Krishna that way.”

Kirtanananda continues: “Well, we phoned a doctor, who gave him a shot of penicillin and diagnosed a nervous condition complicated by the flu. The doctor said that maybe he’s praying too much.”

“Praying too much?!”

“Then yesterday, when I was sitting in Swamiji’s room…”

Kirtanananda's voice breaks. "While *kirtan* was going on downstairs, … the twitching began again, and Swamiji's face began to tighten up, and his eyes started rolling. Then all of a sudden he threw himself back, and I caught him. He was gasping Hare Krishna. And then everything stopped. I swear, I thought it was the last.… But then the breathing started up again, and with it the chanting. He didn't regain control of his body, though. We called an ambulance. Now he's in Beth Israel Hospital."

Weeping, almost inaudible over the long distance, Kirtanananda promises to keep us posted. I hang up the phone and stand dumbly for a moment, wondering what to do. In the temple, a few people are chanting. Lilavati is making garlands for Lord Jagannatha. Harsharani is scooping flour out of a barrel to make the evening's chapatis.

"Where's Haridas?" I ask.

No one knows. I run out to Stanyan. The sun is bright. Some hippies are tossing frisbees across Frederick Street. I dash from apartment to apartment until I find Haridas and take him aside.

"Kirtanananda called," I tell him. "Swamiji has had a stroke and is in the hospital. He's asked us to spend the night chanting."

Haridas looks as if he's just been struck in the face. Worse—soul struck. He stands, looking at me with silent disbelief, then shakes his head sadly. "I knew it," he says. "I could sense something horrible was going to happen. Just look at that picture."

He points to a photograph taped to the wall, the photo of Swamiji's last look at the temple, his farewell look of infinite sadness. As we look at the photo, we cannot weep. Weeping in itself is a finite, inadequate release for an interior emptiness, the sense of terrible, premature loss. We feel that a whole spiritual atmosphere is leaving us.

"We'll never see him again," I say. "I know it. I just feel it."

“Have you told the others?” Haridas asks.

“No. I couldn’t. They’re chanting in the temple. So happy.”

“Well, don’t tell them yet,” he says. “We’ll try to find out more. Then we’ll tell them tonight before the *kirtan*.”

* * *

Stunned, Haridas and I wander to the park. I don’t want to see any of the devotees. My face must tell all.

We sit at the park entrance on a bench and chant quietly, alone with our awful secret and countless unspeakable fears. Foremost, we fear that with Swamiji’s passing, the Hare Krishna movement will disintegrate. We have just begun; the very foundation has yet to be completed. Swamiji’s teachings may be lost. There are no books published apart from the few he brought from India, and even *Bhagavad-gita* is unfinished.

I fear personally for myself. What will I do without his words, the *kirtans*, the little storefront temples, the quiet moments in his room, the casual conversations, the constant presence of Vrindaban and Lord Krishna? I fear return to chaos and lonely searching.

How strange! I recall that Swamiji’s horoscope predicted this attack. Years earlier, an Indian astrologer had discerned some break there in his seventy-first year, some inevitable climax. In fact, that is to be his normal hour of death, the time fixed for him to leave the body.

En route aboard the freighter Jaladhuta, a palmist told Swamiji that if he survives his seventy-first year, he will live many more years.

The death crisis is in his palm and in the stars.

“I will always be with you,” I recall him saying. “The spiritual master is always with the disciple. I am always feeling the presence of

my spiritual master."

But we are so young, so green, on such foreign ground for Vedic culture. *Maya* will surely absorb us like a sponge. We are now in no position to lose our spiritual father.

Looking up from the park bench, I see children playing in the sprinkler and sunlit grass and wonder at the audacity of life to go on so blithely.

* * *

I try to phone Kirtanananda in New York, but he's at the hospital. I talk instead to Rayarama.

"All I can really say is that Swamiji is very, very ill," he tells me. "He's asking all of us to chant all night for his recovery."

Haridas and I assemble everyone in the temple and try to think of the least shocking way to put it. Haridas looks at me and nods.

"I got a call this afternoon from Kirtanananda," I say finally. "Swamiji has fallen sick."

Janaki and Lilavati immediately burst into tears. This quickly spreads to the other girls. Sighing, I sit quietly, recalling that Socrates banished women from his deathbed in order to die in peace.

Some of the boys begin asking details. There's very little to say except that we've been requested to chant all night and pray to Lord Nrishingadev for Swamiji's health.

Lord Nrishingadev is a fierce incarnation of Krishna—half-lion, half-man—who descends to save His devotee Prahlad from Prahlad's demoniac father Hiranyakashipu. After Nrishingadev kills Prahlad's father, Prahlad recites the following prayer to pacify Him. It is a prayer

we immediately begin chanting.

tava kara-kamala-vare nakham adbhuta-śṛṅgaṁ
dalita-hiraṇyakaśipu-tanu-bhṛṅgam
keśava dhṛta-narahari-rūpa
jaya jagadīśa hare

"O my Lord, Your hands are very beautiful, like the lotus flower, but with Your long nails You have ripped apart the wasp Hiranyakashipu. Unto You, Lord of the universe, I offer my humble obeisances.

* * *

We turn on the dim altar lights behind the Jagannatha Deities, light candles, and chant in the flickering shadows. It is solemn chanting and even more solemn dancing. The news quickly spreads down Haight Street, and soon the temple is crowded with visitors come to join our vigil and chant through the night.

Mukunda and Janaki phone New York. No additional information. Kirtanananda is spending the night in the hospital beside Swamiji's bed. No one else is being allowed in. Hospital regulations. Yes, there's a vigil also in New York. Everyone's chanting through the night.

We chant past midnight. Most of the visitors leave, but none of us yet feel sleepy. The chanting overtakes us in waves. My mind wanders to Swamiji, to New York, to the future, to the past. I have to force my errant mind back into the temple to confront the present, to petition Sri Krishna to spare our master a little longer. And through the chanting we all feel Swamiji's presence, insistent, purely spiritual.

By two in the morning, we begin to feel sleepy. I change instruments just to keep awake, sometimes playing *mridanga*, sometimes cymbals or harmonium. Many dance to stay awake. The girls serve light *prasadam*—sliced apples and raisins. It is dangerous to sit next to the wall, an invitation to doze off.

We are so frail. Only Arjuna, the pure devotee, is Gudakesa, conqueror of sleep.

Between three and four, the most ecstatic hour, the *brahma-muhurta* hour before the dawn, we sense that if Swamiji is still alive, he will surely pull through.

We sing. We chant on beads. We chant through the usual seven o'clock *kirtan* and into the late morning. Chanting fourteen hours nonstop, we cleanse the dust from the mind's mirror. We sense Krishna and Swamiji everywhere. Surely now he is well!

* * *

Just before noon, Kirtanananda phones to tell us that Swamiji is still living but is very, very weak. We should continue chanting. The doctors are running all kinds of tests.

"It's terrible," he says. "They're shooting him with needles and taking blood. They want to stick needles through the skull to check out the brain waves. He doesn't want all this, but he's submitting because of us. He's simply putting himself in our hands."

"What does he want to do?" I ask.

"It's hard to tell. He's still so weak. But he hasn't indicated that he'll be leaving his body."

I seize on this as good news and tell Haridas and Mukunda. There is some guarded optimism. But within we know that his body is old and has suffered a stroke. He can go at any moment. We still await the call that tells us.

* * *

June 3. Swamiji has been in the hospital two days.

"He seems to be responding to massage, Kirtanananda tells me. "He's talking some, talking about going to India to consult an Ayurvedic physician. He just dictated a letter to a Godbrother in India requesting Ayurvedic advice."

"That sounds good," I say.

"He wants out of the hospital," Kirtanananda adds. "He's still saying that we never know when death will come, but he's not concerned. He's saying that Krishna allowed him to survive his major attack because He wants him to carry out his spiritual master's orders to spread the *sankirtan* movement in America."

This news elates us all. The next day, Kirtanananda tells me that Swamiji is definitely gaining strength.

"His facial expression is picking up," he says, "and his chanting is strong again. He's not sleeping as much. Chanting all the time. This morning, he was even able to put on *tilak*."

But in the evening, Rayarama phones to say that Swamiji passed a bad day. Now it is touch and go. At times, he seems right on the brink of death. At times, he's about to leave the hospital. Reports continue to conflict.

June 6. "Swamiji wants to move to the country or seashore," Kirtanananda tells me. "He definitely wants out of the hospital. He's concerned about the money—a hundred a day here. And he says that they're not helping him, just sticking him with needles."

Rayarama informs us that they've rented Swamiji a little bungalow in Long Branch, near the water. "Swamiji wants to be near the sea," he says. "He just wants a place to rest in peace. The hospital isn't helping him much."

We speculate: if he's considering leaving the hospital, surely the

worst must be over. But how extensive is the damage? Will he ever be able to lecture again, to write, to dance at *kirtans* in the park, to lead us on spiritual marathons until we drop? To be without him now is what we have tacitly feared from the beginning. He has been singlehandedly sweeping us along, rapidly transforming our lives with daily revelations.

Yet so much is but intimated! *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* still sits incomplete, and much remains untold: the twelve cantos of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, *Vedanta-sutra*, *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*. He had planned to translate and annotate them all.

"I have so much to tell you," he's often said. "We haven't even scratched the surface. In our tradition, there are such wonderful literatures! We must work quickly and publish."

Will his dream for a Vedic America dissolve like Don Quixote's dream of Spanish chivalry? It is sad to think of those spiritual epics remaining hopelessly buried in the past, in old dusty tomes, stored on bookshelves labeled "occult."

But hasn't he sent Krishna vibrating through the air? Rolling off our tongues? Hasn't he brought Krishna Himself, the Person, to Second Avenue? Tompkins Square? Golden Gate Park?

And now, after giving us a glimpse of Krishna, will he leave us?

* * *

Despite protesting doctors, Swamiji checks out of the hospital June 8. Brahmananda and Kirtanananda immediately drive him to Matchless Gifts, where he pays obeisances to his spiritual master and Krishna and then leaves for the ocean bungalow in Long Branch.

Now Kirtanananda writes that Swamiji "seems to be indestructible." When he hears our recording of "Narada Muni," he sits up in bed and starts to clap his hands.

"Is that an American tune?" he asks.

Swamiji wants to see a temple opened in Vancouver. “There’s one gentleman there.…”

June 10, I receive a letter from Swamiji himself:

Although I am practically on the path of death, still I cannot forget about my publications. I wish that if I live or die, you will take very serious care of my publications. Immediately I want to send Bhagavad-gita to Japan for publication. The complete fair copy has to be submitted. I hope you have completed fair copies of at least seven chapters. The balance is typed from the dictaphone, and there does not appear to be any possibility of editing here, so I think you have to do it.…I am thinking of going to San Francisco just after getting some strength, which I hope I will get by the end of the month; but in case I cannot go, you have to do it carefully and send it to Japan. Please let me know whether you’ll do it. If you say yes, then I will send you the dictaphone copies for doing the needful. This will give me great relief, and I am expecting a reply as soon as possible.…

The books! He is on the brink of death, and his only concern is printing *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. His only reason for being in the material world is to spread Krishna consciousness, and books are the “big *mridanga*,” self-contained *kirtans* that defy both time and space, that endure and travel far.

* * *

“Something very wonderful happened today,” Kirtanananda tells me on the phone. “We arrived at the bungalow around noon, and of course Swamiji hadn’t had his lunch. I was trying to prepare it as fast as possible, but by two o’clock it still wasn’t ready. Then he came into the kitchen. ‘Where’s my lunch?

Bring me whatever there is immediately.’ He was furious. I made some excuse, which I shouldn’t have done, and finished up whatever I had—*dal*, some *chapatis* and vegetables. Then he sat down in the kitchen and ate voraciously. It was really wonderful to see.”



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, INC.

TWENTY-SIX SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003 TELEPHONE: 674-7428

ACHARYA: SWAMI A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA

TRUSTEES:
LARRY BOGART
JAMES S. GREENE
CARL YEARGANS
RAYMOND BALDWIN
ROBERT LEFONOWITZ
RAYMOND MARAIS
STANLEY MOORCROFT
MICHAEL GRANT
HARVEY COHEN

10 June 1967

My dear Mayapūriya,

Please accept my blessings. Although I am practically on the path of death, still I cannot forget about my publications. I wish that if I live or die you should take very serious care for my publications. Immediately I want to send Geetopanished to Japan for publication. The complete fair copy of Geetopanished has to be submitted. I hope you have completed fair copies of at least seven chapters. The balance are typed from the dictophone, and there does not appear to be any possibility of their being edited here, so I think you have to do it. After sending fair copies of what you have done already you will have to edit the dictophone copies. The original verse (sanskrit) is to be taken from Dr. Radhakrishnan's edition, and the word to word English equivalent, as well as the translation and purport is to be found already on the dictophone copies. The only think you have to do is to place them properly and to make the complete fair copy.

I am thinking of going to San Francisco just after getting some strength, which I hope will be by the end of this month; but in case I cannot go, you have to do it carefully. and send it to Japan. Please, therefore, let me know whether you'll do it. If you say yes, then I will send you the dictophone copies for doing the needful. This will give me great relief, and I am expecting a reply as soon as possible.

Your ever well-wisher,

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

Such news elates the temple. But the next day, we are discouraged by conflicting reports. “Swamiji had a bad night and is feeling very bad. We just don’t know what’s wrong.”

Only one diagnosis is certain: He has diabetes. The doctors have given him pills to try to control this, but he doesn’t want to take them. He wants to cure himself by diet.

“He’s managing this fairly well,” Kirtanananda tells me, “but he still varies a great deal from day to day. Some days he’s well; other days he feels bad. When he’s up, he’s making plans to return to San Francisco, to go here and there. Then on bad days he just says, ‘Let me go back to India.’ So we don’t know what we’re doing from one day to the next.”

Depending on the latest reports from New York, the spirit of the San Francisco temple vacillates. The Rathayatra Car Festival is coming up July 9, just a few weeks away. We plan a parade down Haight Street to the park and ocean, but what specifically are we to do?

“Swamiji says that you should stay there and help organize the Rathayatra,” Kirtanananda tells me. “He says that if you will organize it nicely, he will come.”

“I don’t even know what Rathayatra is,” I protest.

“Just organize a procession,” Kirtanananda says, “from the temple to the beach. You can get all the hippies to pull the Deities in large carts. And afterward, distribute *prasadam*.”

More confusion. Large carts? Haridas and I search through the public library and manage to find a book with photos of the Rathayatra cart used in Orissa, India. It is a large cart all right, made entirely of wood, with enormous wooden wheels dwarfing the man standing beside them. According to the book, people throw themselves under the wheels to be crushed and instantly liberated. The cart itself, as big as a galleon,

is large enough to hold a hundred people. It has balustrades and a flower garlanded throne for the Deities. It would take hundreds of people to pull it, and the cops would no doubt consider it far too dangerous to let loose on San Francisco streets.

Besides, we could never construct such a thing in three weeks.

* * *

With great joy I receive a long letter from Swamiji dated June 25.

I am scheduled to come to San Francisco on July 5, but everything remains on the supreme will of the Absolute Person; man proposes, God disposes. As for my health, generally it is improving, but sometimes I feel too weak. I hope that by another week, however, I will get sufficient strength to fly to San Francisco.…

We send Swamiji a Rathayatra announcement to encourage his coming. The New York devotees report that he is looking well and is even playing *kartals*, chanting, and lecturing a little.

Perhaps the worst is really over!

"Swamiji says that he's definitely coming to the Rathayatra," Kirtanananda announces. Everyone clusters about the phone. "He's coming!" Shyamasundar shouts.

"Swamiji's coming to Rathayatra!" Mukunda tells everyone. The next day, another phone call, and a somber Kirtanananda.

"Now he says he's going back to India," he tells me. "He's not feeling well. He wants to see an Ayurvedic doctor."

This ping-ponging continues through June while we wonder what to do about Rathayatra. On weekends, Jayananda and I drive along the coast looking for a cottage where Swamiji can rest in the ocean air.

At the end of June, Swamiji leaves the Long Branch bungalow and returns to the New York temple. After a scheduled hospital checkup, Kirtanananda phones us. For the first time, he sounds really happy.

"The doctors were amazed," he says. "They can't understand it. He's had a major stroke, and now, only three weeks later, he's checking out fine. When I asked if he could fly to San Francisco, the doctor said, 'No reason not to.' So we've made reservations for July 5."

We act fast. Mukunda rents a beautiful beach house at Stinson Beach, a little resort just north of San Francisco. The estate, called Paradisio, is complete with palms, flora, enclosed patio, sliding windows and a lawn Buddha covered with bird droppings.

Mukunda had to plead with the owners to get them down to two hundred a week.

In New York, Swamiji remains in his apartment. Although still not attending *kirtans*, he is steadily recovering. We hear that he has initiated a new pastime—morning walks. At seven in the morning, he walks with devotees down Second Avenue to Fifth Street and then to First Avenue, where he sits on a bench to chant beads or just relax in the early morning air. He then walks back to Matchless Gifts.

These walks become as much a ritual as any other.

* * *

Wednesday, July 5, Kennedy Airport. Swamiji and Kirtanananda board Delta Airlines flight 621. Something is wrong with one of the wheels, and the plane is delayed about an hour.

We wait in San Francisco with baskets of flowers.

End of Chapter 10

Chapter 11. San Francisco Rathayatra

As the passengers file through the gate into the terminal, we all wait anxiously, wondering how Swamiji will look. Somehow, we cannot imagine him gaunt, disabled or feeble. It is difficult for us to accept that his body, the medium for his teaching, could in any way break down, in defiance of the great spiritual personality within.

He is the last off the plane, accompanied by Kirtanananda. Despite the severity of his stroke, he looks virtually unchanged, only a little weary. The girls rush toward him and burst into tears. We throw flowers taken from Golden Gate Park: rhododendrons and hibiscus. He smiles appreciatively, but says nothing, and this is strange. Instead of giving his usual airport talk, he looks to us to show him the direction out. He chants Hare Krishna softly, his fingers incessantly caressing the *japa* beads in the beadbag, counting the rounds.

As we make way for him, he passes through the crowd onto a moving ramp that glides him swiftly through the terminal. We hurry to keep up. Following his example, we say nothing, but chant quietly and intently. His presence is enough. He is intact and in control, and we are satisfied that he is with us at last.

Outside, Swamiji gets into Jayananda's station wagon. We suggest driving directly to Stinson Beach, but Swamiji wants to stop by the Frederick Street temple first. Not waiting for the baggage to unload, Kirtanananda gives the claims ticket to Upendra.

Visitors from Haight Street, hearing of Swamiji's arrival, crowd the temple. Swamiji stays just long enough to offer obeisances to the Jagannatha Deities. Without speaking, he returns to the station wagon, and Jayananda drives off to Stinson Beach and Paradisio.

The road to Stinson Beach passes by Muir Woods, and remembering that Swamiji had gotten sick on that winding route, Kirtanananda suggests driving slowly and encourages Swamiji to lie

down in the back and relax. Still, Swamiji feels a little nausea. We are all relieved to arrive at the beach house.

Swamiji immediately notices the statue of Buddha beside the lawn furniture. He shakes his head and smiles slightly, as if to say, "You have yet to begin to learn."

Now more than ever, we sense in his presence that indefinable something—illusive, magnetic, unique, majestic. Walking slowly and quietly into the beach house, he evokes love and reverence. But it is strange now to see him silent, to be in his presence without hearing him talk endlessly of Krishna, to watch passively while Kirtanananda tends him. Yet now, every moment with him seems more precious and relishable. Within, we all know how close we've come to losing him forever, and how little time remains.

Janaki breaks the silence and tension of the reception by crying. Mukunda tries to quiet her. Swamiji smiles and looks out the sliding window at the ocean.

"Very nice," he says quietly. "You have arranged a very nice place here."

Materially speaking, Paradisio is just what the doctor ordered. But sadly I sense that Swamiji will not stay long. Although he has just arrived, there is a look of departure on his face.

Jaya Oṁ Viṣṇu-pāda paramahaṁsa
parivrājakācārya aṣṭottara-śata
Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta gosvāmī Mahārāja
— kī jaya!

Parivrajakacharya: the wandering mendicant, always arriving, always departing. Somehow he reconciles opposites. Sitting on the floor behind his tin footlocker, he seems eternally there. Yet his presence has something of the swiftness of the thunderbolt. You have to move quickly to touch his lotus feet.



Śrīla Prabhupāda is welcomed by Allen Ginsberg and Jayānanda, San Francisco, 1967.

* * *

Now Swamiji talks to no one. He goes at once to his room to take rest. The flight has been a great exertion. Kirtanananda explains clearly that Swamiji is still convalescing. There are to be no visitors besides Upendra, for serving, and me, for editing. Swamiji is most anxious to complete *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Now it is his prime concern; it is to be the Bible of the Krishna consciousness movement.

Without it, we would be in a ship adrift without charts or compass. So we must give Swamiji all facility for recovery.

* * *

While Swamiji rests, Kirtanananda sets about converting the beach house into Vaikuntha. He has brought a dozen paintings from New York-paintings of Nrishingadev, Narada Muni, Radha Krishna, the Jagannatha Puri temple. Jadurani's art has improved. We hang the paintings throughout the house.

Since the Jagannatha Deities must disappear from the temple for a number of days before Rathayatra, we bring Their Lordships to Paradisio and set Them up on the living room piano.

Rathayatra is scheduled for Sunday, only four days away. We are still confused about procedures. Swamiji's instructions seem impossible to carry out; we have been charged to organize something on the order of the Rose Bowl parade. Shyamasundar and Jayananda work feverishly to build a canopy over the back of a flatbed truck loaned by the Diggers. The police start giving us trouble.

They want to know exactly how long this "parade" is going to take.

"And what's this all about anyway?" they demand.

"A religious festival," we explain.

The cops shake their heads, complain about hippies, and stamp more forms. Haight-Ashbury, hippies, *swamis*, cults, acidheads, be-in's, long hair, rock groups—it's all the same to them.

"Just make sure nobody gets hurt," they say. "And hurry it up.

* * *

Saturday, July 8, three days after Swamiji's arrival, we drive up to Stinson Beach to fetch Lord Jagannatha. For the past three days, no one has been permitted to visit Swamiji. Kirtanananda and Upendra have been attending him, and I've consulted him only on the most pressing editorial problems. As we place the Deities into the station wagon, Swamiji stands at the door and watches, obviously longing to go with the Lord. We say nothing, knowing that if he could, he would joyfully lead the procession.

"This festival is the major event of the year in Jagannatha Puri," he tells us, talking slowly, his voice barely audible. "So do it nicely. The Lord should not be hurried but should be taken royally to the beach. Actually the cart should be pulled by hand. We understand that once, when the cart was stuck, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself put His head against it and pushed it, and so displayed His superhuman strength. And before Lord Jagannatha, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would chant and dance and fall to the ground in ecstasy. These pastimes are there in the scriptures, and one day we will translate them.

Anyway, this is the first Rathayatra in America. Do it as well as you can, and Lord Jagannatha will be satisfied."

* * *

From Stinson Beach, we take the Deities to Shyamasundar's apartment on Haight and Lyon. There we place Them in a corner and drape Them. Their Lordships are in hiding.

Although we want to proceed down Haight Street through Golden Gate Park, the police insist that we take the Frederick Street route to the south. The park officials fear that the hippies might trample the flowers.

All day Saturday, the girls cook and butter *chapatis*. Jayananda constantly runs here and there, transporting boxes of apples and bananas and running last minute errands. Without Jayananda's enthusiasm, we would be helpless. With taxi-driver expertise, he wheels his station wagon up and down the San Francisco hills, transporting *prasadam*, posters, flowers, instruments, amplifiers and speakers. His excitement is contagious; he even inspires the most spaced-out hippies to help.

Although Haridas's Rathayatra posters are our only official announcements, everyone in the Haight-Ashbury is talking about the festival. A Krishna parade to the beach! A love feast! Bring flowers, wear bells, paint yourself up, chant, get high! Celebrate Sri Jagannatha, Lord of the universe!

* * *

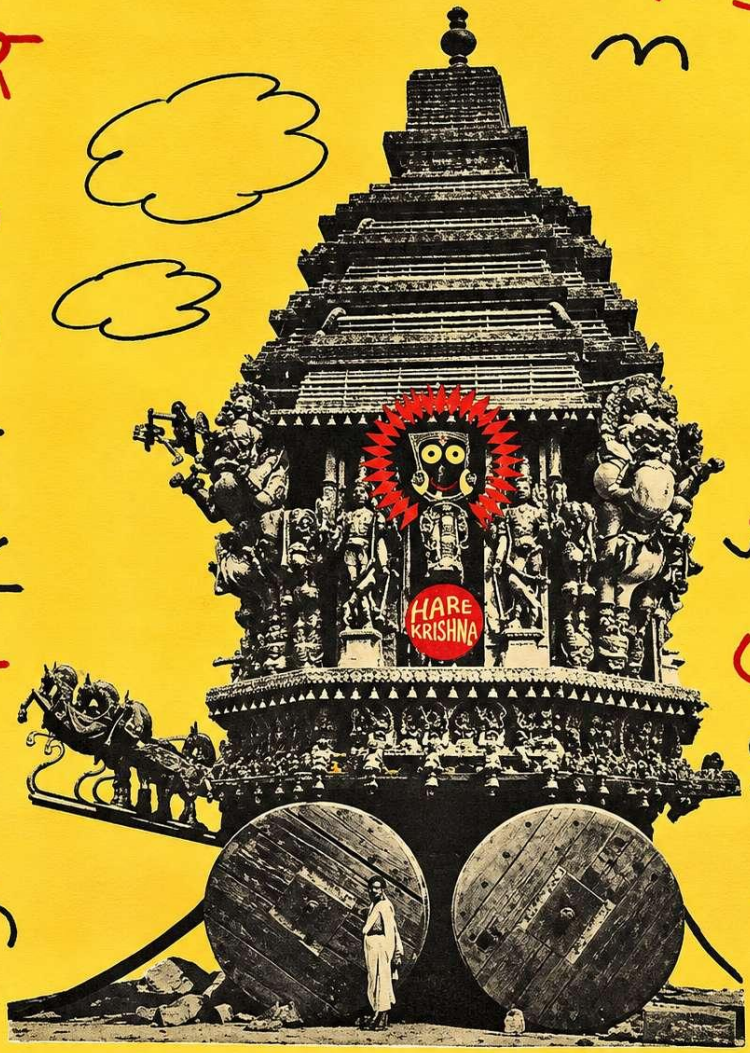
Sunday morning, July 9. Shyamasundar drives to the Diggers to pick up the flatbed truck, which for today will be the Rathayatra chariot of Lord Jagannatha, the supreme controller of the universe. On the truck's open bed, we have nailed five-foot high wooden posts that support a red canopy. Along this canopy, we string flowers and bells, and on the wooden posts we staple prints of Krishna. On the broad bumper, we paint Hare Krishna in Sanskrit. Subal and Ramanuja unload boxes of flowers from the park, and Harsharani and Yamuna bring baskets filled with *chapatis*. Jayananda arrives with bushels of apples, oranges, and bananas.

When the Rathayatra cart is ready, Jayananda drives it to Shyamasundar's apartment, where Their Lordships are waiting. After undraping the Deities and garlanding Them with hibiscus, we carefully carry Them down to Their chariot.

CAR FESTIVAL

SAN FRANCISCO

SUNDAY, JULY 9



THE DEDICATION RITUAL OF ISKCON'S NEW JAGANNATHA TEMPLE, LOCATED AT 518 FREDERICK STREET, BEGINS JULY 9. THE HARE KRISHNA "RATHA-YATRA" (CART FESTIVAL) TAKES PLACE AT 2 P.M. ON SUNDAY, JULY 9TH. THE PROCESSION OF THE BIG, HAND-PULLED CAR WILL WIND THROUGH THE STREETS, BRINGING THE LORDS JAGANNATHA, BALARAMA AND SUBHADRA TO THEIR NEW TEMPLE, WHERE A FEAST OF "PRASADAM" WILL BE SERVED FREE TO ALL.



"*Jagannatha-swami nayana pathagami bhavatu me*," we sing while placing Lord Jagannatha on the right-hand side of the cart beneath the canopy. "Lord of the universe, please be visible unto me." Subhadra looks out from the rear, and Lord Balarama is seated on the left. On the cart's four corners, we stake Christian, Moslem, Jewish and ISKCON flags. Our ISKCON flag consists of a Sanskrit Om and a drawing of Radha and Krishna dancing.

"Actually, each Deity should ride in a separate cart, Swamiji had told us, "and the carts should be pulled with ropes by the crowds through the streets. But that is all right. Maybe in the future you can arrange that."

All in all, Lord Jagannatha looks very happy staring out at the universe from His flatbed truck. As we round the corner to Haight Street, the bells on the canopy jingle. Their Lordships rock a bit, as if dancing. We make sure They are better secured.

At one o'clock, the police arrive on motorcycles to lead us down Haight. Hippies begin congregating, and the street is cleared of traffic. Haridas, Mukunda, Janaki, and I ride on the cart. Mukunda shouts through a microphone, asking everyone to chant Hare Krishna. As Lord Jagannatha smiles benevolently, the cops rev their motorcycles. They are in a hurry.

Haridas plays *mridanga*, and I blow apocalyptic blasts on the kelp horn. Shyamasundar drives. Seeing some startled Indians, we invite them onto the cart. We lurch forward. Subal, with shaved head and robes, walks in front of the cart, hands upraised, chanting. We tell him to walk slowly and disregard the cops. Yamuna, Gurudas, Upendra, and others also walk, surrounding the cart. The girls are dressed in *saris*, and even some of the hippies are wearing robes. The drums, cymbals, and tambourines strike the rhythm, and the crowd starts chanting Hare Krishna. Always ready to join some festivity, hippies descend from side streets, apartments, coffeeshops, the clouds. The girls hand out oranges, apples, bananas, *chapatis*, *puris*.


DIGGER YOU

As Shyamasundar drives down Haight, people line the sidewalk and flow out into the street to follow the cart. Lord Jagannatha keeps smiling.

“Move it on! Move it on!” a motorcycle cop shouts to Shyamasundar, then roars off.

“Slow down!” Mukunda shouts at Shyamasundar through the window. “We can speed up on Frederick.”

We pick up the largest crowd down Haight to the entrance of the park. Subal, now transformed into a whirling dervish, dances crazily before the cart, sometimes stopping and swirling in circles. Jayananda jumps straight up and down and clashes cymbals. Frequently the cart slows to a halt as people cluster around our dancing Subal and bouncing Jayananda.

The motorcycle cop roars back and shouts again at Shyamasundar to move it on. “I can’t run people down,” Shyamasundar protests.

Finally, when we reach the park’s entrance on Stanyan, the crowds surrounding us have blocked the streets. We turn left toward the temple, and the cops zoom about like angry wasps. Hippies latch onto the back of the cart. I throw out flowers. Mukunda throws apples. Haridas throws kisses. When we reach Frederick Street and pass by the temple, cheers go up.

“Radha Krishna Temple ki jai’! New Jagganatha Puri ki jai!”

Shyamasundar shifts to low gear as we pull up a steep hill. Again, dancing Subal and Jayananda force us to a halt. When the engine momentarily dies, we slide back about ten yards. I fear that we’ve run over people, but everyone manages to scramble out the way, laughing. Lord Jagannatha is protecting us. As we pass a wealthy residential area, people run out on their lawns to watch. Their faces are blank.

Some glare angrily. “Crazy hippies.“ “What next?”

“It’s the international society of nuts.” Home-owners wave down the cops and demand explanations. We drive on, now followed by hundreds of hippies, all chanting Hare Krishna, the crowd now extending for three blocks.

When we arrive at the beach, we jump down off the cart, run down the sands, and stand before the Pacific. Hare Krishna. It’s not possible to go further. The hippies wander about like confused lemmings, looking at us and waiting for something. We wonder what to do next. Swamiji hadn’t given us further instructions, and now all the *prasadam* is gone. I confer with Haridas.

“What now?”

“You know as well as I,” he says.

“Swamiji said to have *kirtan* and distribute *prasadam*,” Subal says. “We’ve done that.”

I look back at the cart. Lord Jagannatha smiles on. Traditionally, He’s to be thrown in the ocean and new Deities carved, but Swamiji told us that wasn’t necessary.

“I guess we’ll just keep chanting,” I suggest.

“Let’s drive Lord Jagannatha up to the mountains,” Subal says. “Sure. Why not? Later.“

Although we’re out of *prasadam*, some hippies run about distributing rock candy from paper plates. Haridas and I take a couple of handfuls, suck on the sweet crystals, and look out at the ocean. Gurudas and Mukunda sit on the sands and continue chanting. A crowd gather around them. Everybody’s grabbing for the candy.

“Swamiji wants to see the Deities,” Shyamasundar says. “Let’s chant about an hour and then head for Stinson Beach.”



Jayānanda helping build the first Ratha cart.



Ratha-yātrā, San Francisco, 1967.

We build a bonfire and chant until four in the afternoon. When we stop, all we can hear is the roar of waves and the persistent ring of cymbals.

Suddenly Yamuna jumps to her feet and looks out to sea. “Where’s Gurudas?” she asks.

I look about but don’t see him. Then as I turn back to her, I see Gurudas sitting at her side. Still, Yamuna, as though blind, starts running down the beach calling for Gurudas. Janaki tells Mukunda that she feels a little ill. Mukunda laughs. Rabindra-svarup disappears. The hippies continue milling about, and I suddenly realize that Swamiji is expecting us. I turn to Haridas, who continues to stare out over the distant waves.

“We’d better get to the truck now, I say, breaking his reverie. “Ye gods, that chanting really spaces you out,” he says.

We walk down the boardwalk and try to round up the devotees for the trip to Stinson Beach, but everyone seems to be flying off in different directions. Finally Jayananda, Haridas, Harsharani, and I get in the station wagon. The others ride with Shyamasundar, chanting to the Deities in the cart. We agree to meet at Shyamasundar’s apartment and from there drive together to Stinson Beach.

As we ride along Golden Gate Park, I’m startled to notice that the station wagon is transparent. When I look up, I see the sky through the red plastic top. The park trees and stop signs seem visible through the station wagon itself. I suddenly feel that everything I’m seeing is glued to my retina. I bend down and close my eyes.

“Is something wrong?” Haridas asks.

“I feel strange,” I say. “I guess it’s from all the chanting.”

“You didn’t eat any of that candy, did you?” Harsharani asks. “I hear it was loaded with acid.”

I should have known. Rock candy! Of course! I look at Haridas and watch his face change shape. “No wonder!” he laughs.

“So that explains Yamuna and Janaki!”

“A lot of people got sick,” Harsharani says. “Krishna-dasi and a couple of others.”

“O dear Krishna!” I realize that the effects are just starting. By the time we reach Shyamasundar’s, I see everything colored blue. I run upstairs and fall on the bed. It’s a very long fall indeed. I jump up, go to the bathroom, and in the mirror watch myself become different people. Haridas and Shyamasundar ask if I’m ready to go to Stinson Beach.

“I can’t see Swamiji like this,” I say. “It’ll wear off.”

“We should wait, at least.”

“The festival was great,” Shyamasundar says. “Everyone’s talking about it.” I sit and watch him metamorphose into a multitude of people.

This isn’t Krishna consciousness, I think. This is chemistry, voodoo, black magic. I repent my carelessness in eating *bhoga*, non-*prasadam*. Knowing that the physical effects will wear off, I bide time until Shyamasundar will wait no longer. Fortunately, I had not eaten very much.

We crowd into the truck and ride up to Stinson Beach in the early twilight. Swamiji comes out of the house to see Lord Jagannatha seated on His chariot throne. He is very pleased. We take the Deities inside and place Them back on the piano.

It is the first time that many of the devotees have had a chance to see Swamiji since his arrival. Gathering in the living room, we tell Swamiji all about the festival.

“It was wonderful! Everybody loved it.”

Swamiji eagerly listens to all the details. When Shyamasundar tells him about the truck stalling on the hill and rolling backwards, Swamiji smiles.

"Yes," he says. "That is a pastime of Lord Jagannnatha. Once, when the cart was stuck, not even the king's elephants could move it. Only Lord Chaitanya Himself could push it. So, Lord Jagannatha has kindly brought His pastimes to America."

Kirtanananda distributes *prasadam*, and we all eat heartily. Everyone is elated, for Swamiji appears much improved. As we partake of *prasadam*, we listen to him talk of Jagannatha Puri and the Vaikuntha planets. His speech is now much stronger.

"As long as we are in the ocean of material nature," he says, "we will feel anxiety. But not in Vaikuntha. That is what Vaikuntha means, freedom from anxiety. Everyone in the material universe—from Lord Brahma down to the tiny ant—is anxious about something. If you see a bird and make a sudden move, that bird will fly away from fear. He is anxiously thinking, 'Oh, what will catch me and eat me?' The *Padma-purana* says that the smaller living entities serve as food for the larger. So all are in anxiety—even Brahma himself, for although his years are incalculable by our system, there is finally annihilation."

As we listen, we forget the rock candy and temporary intoxication, that all seeming childish and artificial. But when Swamiji asks the whereabouts of Janaki and Yamuna, Subal mentions the incident.

"They're recovering, Swamiji," he says. "Some hippies passed out candy with LSD in it. Nobody knew."

Swamiji's eyes open wide. "Oh? Just see!" he says. "You cannot just go eating whatever people offer. You must eat only Krishna *prasadam*. Let that be a lesson. The reactions were minimized because you were trying to serve Lord Jagannatha."

Then again Swamiji resumes talking of Krishna and the wonderful effects of devotion to Him, and for us it seems that he was never ill, that he will go on talking forever.

"When I came from India," he says, "I was floating on an ocean of water. And when I came from New York, I was flying above an ocean of clouds extending as far as you could see. Above the clouds was the sun, but when we came down through the clouds and landed, everything in San Francisco was dim and clouded. But the sun was still shining.

"Those clouds cannot cover the whole world, not even the United States, which is but a speck in the universe. From an airplane, we see these skyscrapers as very tiny. Similarly, from God's position, all this material nonsense is insignificant. As a living entity, I am very insignificant, and my tendency is to come down. But the sun doesn't have the come-down tendency. It is always above the clouds of *maya*."

"Swamiji" a new disciple says. "Why does one soul rise and another fall?"

"Why is one soul in the beer halls?" Swamiji asks in return. "And another in the Krishna temple?" No reply.

"Because one wants to be here and another doesn't," he says, answering himself. "That is independence. Misuse it, and you're down. Use it properly, and you're up."

* * *

After a while, Kirtanananda suggests that we let Swamiji take rest. The Deities are to remain some days at Paradisio before returning to the temple.

As the night fog begins to settle, we again board the flatbed truck. It is no longer the transcendental chariot of the Lord. The Jagannatha thrones are removed and canopy taken down. San Francisco Rathayatra

1967, the first in the Western world, is over. Returning to the temple, we chant and huddle together against the night wind. We are happy because Swamiji is pleased. Our march to the Pacific Ocean with the Supreme Lord of the universe was victorious.

"That was but the beginning," Swamiji says the following morning. "We will inaugurate many such celebrations all over the world. One by one, I will show you."

End of Chapter 11

Chapter 12. Passage to India

Paradisio isn't quite paradise. The birdstool on the Buddha was no doubt portentous. There is very little sunshine. Behind the beach house, to the east, a mountain range blocks out the morning sun, and by midday, clouds and fog roll in. The temperature is also rather cool for July.

To fully recover, Swamiji needs lots of sun. He especially misses the morning sun. He feels that if he can just get enough light and heat, his condition will improve. Because of this, he begins talking of returning to India, and this upsets us. We've supplied the nicest place possible near San Francisco, but we can't supply the sun.

Moreover, Swamiji regrets having no close temple contact. He wants to visit a temple at least twice a week, but the winding road into San Francisco is too arduous.

He speaks more frequently of India. He wants to consult Ayurvedic doctors, who generally prescribe natural herbs recommended in certain Vedic writings. And then there's Indian massage, another art unknown to us. Swamiji complains that Western doctors know only how to cut with knives and stick with needles. We don't know what to suggest. We feel inadequate, helpless.

After the Rathayatra festival, Swamiji tells me that I should live at Paradisio and work full time on the final manuscript of *Bhagavad-gita*. In New York, Brahmananda continues to negotiate with publishers. The books must be printed at all costs. My job: prepare the manuscript nicely.

"It must be well stated in the English language," Swamiji insists. "If there are any questions about the translations, you may ask me. Remember, edit for force and clarity."

Daily, I try to clarify and strengthen the sentences without

changing the style or meddling with the meaning, and, needless to say, this is very difficult. I soon find myself consulting Swamiji on every other verse, and occasionally he dictates an entirely different translation. The verse translations themselves are most problematical because they often differ from the word by word Sanskrit-English meanings accompanying them. What to do?

"Quit bothering him," Kirtanananda tells me. "Whenever anyone's in his room, he talks to the point of exhaustion."

True. He talks sitting up. Then he leans back and talks. Then rests on one elbow. Then lies on his side, still talking, still clarifying, still praising Krishna.

At this time, he tells Haridas: "I no longer have a physical body. It is all spiritual."

Haridas leaves his room almost in tears. "Swamiji's more beautiful than ever," he tells me. "Is it possible for your spiritual master to make spiritual progress?"

"I don't know," I say. "He says that spiritual life is always dynamic."

"He seems to be vibrating on a much higher platform now," Haridas insists. "Others are saying the same," I say. "But it could be just our perception."

"He's chanting more now," Haridas insists. "Even more than at Mishra's, more than I've ever heard him chant before."

"I wouldn't want to speculate about it," I say.

* * *

Swamiji finally tires of my consulting him about *Bhagavad-gita* verses.

"Just copy the verses from some other translation," he tells me, discarding the whole matter with a wave of his hand. "The verses aren't important. There are so many translations, more or less accurate, and the Sanskrit is always there. It's my purports that are important. Concentrate on the purports. There are so many, nonsense purports like Radhakrishnan's, and Gandhi's, and Nikhilananda's. What is lacking are these Vaishnava purports in the preaching line of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. That is what is lacking in English. That is what is lacking in the world."

"I can't just copy others," I say. "There is no harm."

"But that's plagiarism."

"How's that? They are Krishna's words. Krishna's words are clear, like the sun. Just these rascal commentators have diverted the meaning by saying, 'Not to Krishna.' So my purports are saying, 'To Krishna.' That is the only difference."

* * *

At ten or eleven, when the sun sometimes appears over the hills, Swamiji walks out to the beach, sits on a little carpet, and chants Hare Krishna. Chanting in a very soft voice, hardly audible, he sits cross-legged and wears a towel wrapped about his head like a turban. At any moment, we expect to look up and see the carpet flying west, across the sea, to India.

Under persistent clouds, the days at Stinson Beach pass quickly. About five in the morning, Kirtanananda awakes and listens for Swamiji to stir, and as soon as he does, Kirtanananda goes into his room and opens a window to let in the early morning breeze. Swamiji expresses a special fondness for early morning breezes. Unfortunately, at Stinson Beach, there are no early morning sunrises.

On his morning walks, Swamiji is accompanied by Upendra, an eighteen-year-old *brahmachari*, solicitous and devoted, who quietly

follows Swamiji as he walks down the beach. Swamiji often walks a short distance, sits on a log or some driftwood, and watches the ocean roll in. Sometimes he sits silently, and sometimes he recites verses in Bengali and Sanskrit, or talks about Krishna and the importance of spreading the movement. These are quiet, peaceful, beautiful, intimate moments. Then later, if the sun appears, he sits outside on a carpet or a folding chair, trying to absorb as much light and heat as possible. He continues telling us that he needs more sun. And this, of course, brings up plans for returning to India.

"I will take some of you to India for training," he tells us. "Now Kirtanananda may accompany me. And you, Hayagriva, may also come. And Mukunda and Shyamasundar."

"But none of us have passage money," I say.

"That I will arrange. The owner of Scindia Steamship Company, Sumati Morarji, may help. You have been on their boats; you know they are quite adequate. Maybe she will give free passage for my disciples to come to Vrindaban."

"You will go back to Vrindaban?"

"I don't know when death will overcome me," he says gravely. "I wish to die in Vrindaban."

"Please don't speak of leaving us now, Swamiji," Kirtanananda says.

"The spiritual master never leaves his disciple," he says. "I have never once felt that my Guru Maharaj has left me. But now this body is old and may go at any moment. Of course, it doesn't matter whether I die in America or Vrindaban. To think of Krishna is to be in Vrindaban."

"Then stay with us here, Swamiji," I say. "You can train us up here. If you want, we can go down to Los Angeles where there's more sun.



“Yes, more sun is required,” Swamiji laughs. “But Vrindaban is special. You will see. Vrindaban is the only place in this universe where Krishna consciousness is automatically revealed.”

* * *

Every morning, a different devotee comes up to Paradisio to visit Swamiji for a day. Although there is no formal initiation ritual or fire sacrifice, Swamiji chants on the initiates’ beads and bestows spiritual names: Aniruddha, Uddhava, Murari, Devananda.

One day, when Janaki visits, she takes exception to the painting of Lord Nrishingadeva tearing out the entrails of the demon Hiranyakashipu. “It’s really ghastly, Swamiji, she says, making a face.

“For the devotees, it is beautiful,” he says. “The devotee praises Lord Nrishingadev: *dalita-hiraṇyakaśipu-tanu-bhṛṅgam*. ‘With the nails of Your beautiful hands, you have torn apart this wasp-like demon.’ Hiranyakashipu was such a great demon that he even tried to kill his small son, Prahlada Maharaja, just because he was a devotee. So the Lord killed Hiranyakashipu to protect His devotee and liberate the demon.”

“But there are no such demons now, Swamiji,” Janaki says. “Oh yes,” Swamiji says. “Demon means nondevotee.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t call them demons,” Kirtanananda suggests. “People will never come if we call them demons.”

“But they are demons,” Swamiji says. “If you are not a devotee, you’re a demon.”

“Aren’t most people somewhere in between?” Kirtanananda persists.

“‘In between’ means demon,” Swamiji says.

“But most people never heard of Krishna,” Kirtanananda says. “How can they be called demons?”

“Everyone has heard of God,” Swamiji says. “Krishna is God. Anyway, they may be innocent; therefore we are informing them. But actually, because they’re here in this material world, they are not really innocent. Somehow, they’ve chosen to forget Krishna, and are therefore demons.”

“I thought that in Krishna consciousness, you see Krishna in everyone,” Kirtanananda says.

“Yes,” Swamiji says, “Krishna is also in the demon. But does this mean that we aspire to be demons? Unless you distinguish between demons and devotees, you cannot progress in Krishna consciousness.”

“Can demons become devotees?”

“Of course—by chanting Hare Krishna and agreeing to serve Krishna. And devotees may temporarily fall down and act like demons. That independence is always there.”

* * *

After a week at Paradisio, Swamiji’s health fails to improve, and he finally decides that he must leave. Since there is little sun and a persistent fog, this is understandable. There is only one other decision to make—whether to go west via Japan, or east via New York. Since his money is in a savings account in New York, he decides to head east. Kirtanananda will accompany him.

“When Kirtanananda sees Vrindaban,” he says, “he will not be able to understand how I could have left to come here. Vrindaban is so nice. There are no motor cars rushing everywhere and smoking so. There is only Hare Krishna, and everybody is always chanting. There are no less than five thousand temples. I will show you, Kirtanananda. We will walk all around there, and I will show you everything.”

He tells me that I must remain and work with Brahmananda to see that *Bhagavad-gita* is published. Brahmananda is big, impressive, talkative, assertive. He will convince by his stature. I will convince by diction. Meanwhile, Swamiji himself will recover in India and return upon regaining full strength.

During our last days in Stinson Beach, a number of boys from the San Francisco temple continue to visit, coming one by one for initiation, or just to get Swamiji's precious association. As people come and go, Kirtanananda is always careful to see that Swamiji doesn't overexert. Throughout the day, I remain on the patio revising *Bhagavad-gita* and seldom disturbing Swamiji for questions. In the afternoons, when Swamiji sits on the beach, Upendra and I swim briefly in the chilly Pacific.

"Careful not to catch cold," Swamiji warns like an anxious parent.

The most enjoyable moments are in the evenings when we hold *kirtans*. We play the Hare Krishna record on a portable phonograph and chant along. Swamiji sits on the living room couch and claps his hands; his eyes remain closed in intense meditation. In order not to tire him, we keep the *kirtans* from getting too loud. There are never more than three or four of us present. At times, when I look out the window and see the ocean rolling in, then turn and see Swamiji sitting on the couch, and the picture of Jagannatha Puri temple hanging on the wall behind him, it seems that we are actually in Jagannatha Puri. Swamiji always transports his own atmosphere.

After chanting Hare Krishna, we read from *Bhagavad-gita*, then chant and dance to "Govinda jai jai, Gopala jai jai, Radharamana Hari, Govinda jai jai." Sometimes Swamiji also gets up to dance, and although we worry that he is straining himself, it is wonderful to watch.

* * *

Swamiji makes reservations to leave for New York and from there to India. He continues to speak of the Indian sun and Ayurvedic

physicians.

Some of the devotees, worried that Swamiji has decided to go to India to leave his body, ask him whether, during his absence, one of his God-brothers should come to America to assume ISKCON leadership.

The minute this question is presented to him, we sense that it is offensive. Swamiji becomes very grave, closing his eyes, and for a moment he seems to consider it. Then suddenly we see tears falling down his cheeks.

"My Guru Maharaj... he was no ordinary spiritual master," he says, wiping away the tears. "He... saved me.

Later, Swamiji tells us what we should have always known: There is no one to replace him. The very idea is insulting.

"If someone comes and tells you something different," he says, "you will be confused." The subject is dropped forever.

* * *

On the day of departure, Shyamasundar and Malati drive out to pick up Swamiji and Kirtanananda. Haridas, Upendra, and I follow them to the Frederick Street temple. There are dozens of boys and girls waiting before the temple, begging for initiation. They all feel that they will never see him again.

In his apartment beside the temple, the scene is chaotic. Not even Kirtanananda can keep order. The new initiates come up in groups of four, and Swamiji chants on all their beads. As at Stinson Beach, there is no fire sacrifice—just the chanting of beads and the bestowal of spiritual names.

Against our advice, Swamiji descends to the temple in the evening. It is packed. When he enters, we bow down, and the *kirtan* halts. Everyone senses a dramatic change since Swamiji's illness.

Before, he was sometimes taken for granted; now he is regarded with constant veneration. In his presence, there is an awesome attentiveness. When he sits on the dais, every eye watches him. He indicates that we are to continue the chanting.

After the *kirtan*, instead of leaving as planned, Swamiji asks for the microphone. “I thought he’s not supposed to talk,” I whisper to Kirtanananda.

“There’s no stopping him now.”

At first, Swamiji begins to talk slowly, speaking of the importance of Lord Chaitanya’s *sankirtan* movement and then of his good fortune in coming to America.

“I left home thinking that I was giving up my children,” he tells us. “In India, I had only five children to take care of. Now I’ve come to your country, and suddenly I have hundreds of children, and you are all taking care of me. So, this is Krishna’s grace. Krishna promises that when you enter His service, He will preserve what you have and in addition bring you everything you need.

“Now I am going to India for a little while, but I will return here when I have fully recovered. There may be some separation materially, but when we chant Hare Krishna, there is no question of separation. On that transcendental platform, we are all one. We are one in Krishna’s service, just as the parts of the body are one.

“There may be attacks by *maya*. *Maya* is very strong. But we must stay firm in our Krishna consciousness. This is purely spiritual. Please do not take it lightly. You are all young boys and girls and have your lives before you. In this material world, everything comes and goes, but I beg you not to waste your lives with these material things....

Then, for the first time in a lecture, we hear his voice break, and see tears in his eyes.

“Don’t throw away your lives. Human life is such... an opportunity. I beg you... to take to this process. It is most sublime. It is... eternal.“

Although Swamiji quickly regains his outward composure, we all remain shaken—the boys on the verge of tears, the girls openly crying.

“We may come and go,” he concludes, “but this chanting of Hare Krishna remains.”

* * *

He sits on the dais a long time in silence, contemplating the conditioned souls before him, souls clad in young American bodies, souls confused and bewildered but somehow fortunately in his presence.

“This Krishna consciousness is so nice,” he says at length, “that once you are established, you will see Krishna everywhere. Not just in the temple but as Paramatma, Supersoul, in the heart of every living entity. You’ll see Him in every atom of the creation. Then you will say, ‘Oh! Krishna is the proprietor of everything!...

“Do you see the Supersoul in my heart now?” someone asks.

There is a moment’s hesitation, as if the question were offensive. Then: “Yes.”

“Is He sitting or standing?” the questioner persists.

“Standing,” Swamiji says.

Hands are raised. Everyone wants to receive the ultimate answer before he leaves. “Why is the symbol of Christianity the cross?” someone asks.

Swamiji again hesitates. Usually he does not like to discuss Christianity. Then his eyes suddenly look watery and sad.

"When I think of Lord Jesus on the cross..." He shakes his head. "No. That is not a symbol for devotees. Devotees do not want to concentrate on that, on their master's suffering. But actually the body of Christ was spiritual. He felt nothing therefore. Like Krishna and Bhisma on the battlefield. When Bhisma's arrows struck the Lord's body, they were feeling like kisses. The Lord's body is never material. It is a great offense to think like that. There is one Aquarian Gospel saying that Christ went to India, I believe.

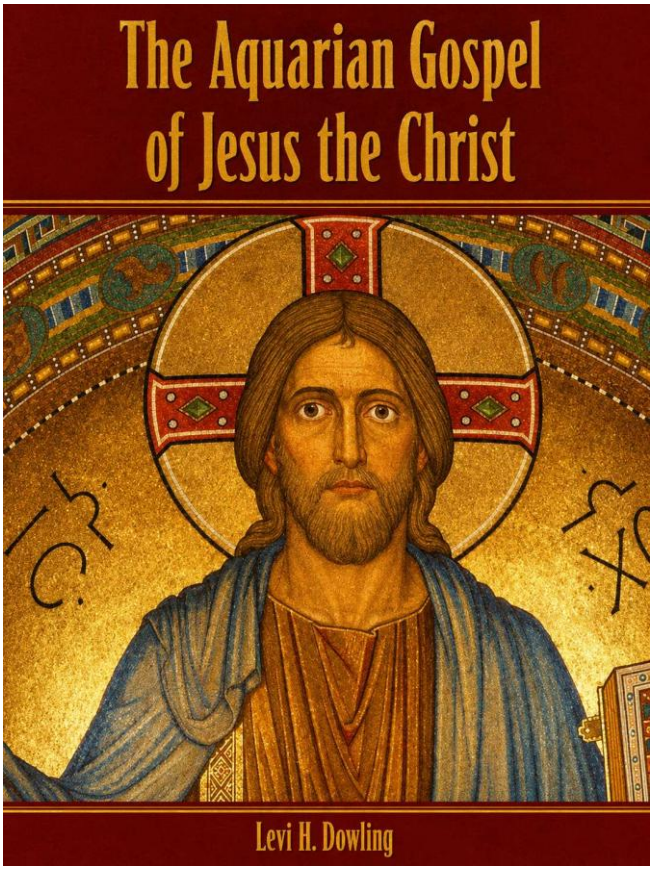
He lets the subject drop. More hands are raised. "Do you know *yogi* Kriyananda?" someone asks. "I have met him once here."

"He says that you should listen to no one but yourself, that the truth is in yourself and that it's a mistake to look elsewhere."

"Then why are you listening to him?" Swamiji asks. No answer. "No, you must understand that when people say, 'Don't listen to anyone,' they really mean, 'Just listen to me.' So he is simply trying to set himself up as ultimate authority, as God. In Kali-yuga, all this is going on."

More hands are raised, but Swamiji indicates that he must be leaving.

"I just want to tell my initiated disciples to please try to open more temples to spread this chanting of Hare Krishna. Try to understand the philosophy of *Bhagavad-gita*. Krishna will help you from within. Chant Hare Krishna, study and preach *Bhagavad-gita*, distribute *prasadam*. Establish temples along this line. In Vrindaban, there were a hundred and eight *gopis* who danced with Krishna. So I want a hundred and eight centers of Krishna consciousness established around the world." He smiles. "Now we have temples in New York, Montreal and here. So there is much work to be done."



The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ. Author — Levi H. Dowling.

This book is about the birth of Jesus, his training in the sanctuaries of Truth, and his many years of travels through India, Tibet, Assyria, Greece, and Egypt.

The book's author, Levi H. Dowling, was born in 1844 in Belleville, Ohio. The son of a minister of Scottish and Welsh descent, he began contemplating the deepest questions of human life from an early age. At sixteen, Dowling began preaching; at eighteen, he became the pastor of a small church; and at twenty, he served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army.

In his youth, Dowling had a vision in which he was commissioned to build a "White City." He understood the concept of the White City as a symbol for chronicling the life of Jesus Christ and began carefully preparing to write a chronologically accurate account of the Savior's earthly path. This preparation took forty years spent in meditation and prayer.

In Levi's sole work, one can find accounts of Jesus's life from the age of twelve to thirty-nine. The book received its title because it was written shortly before the dawn of the astrological Age of Aquarius. It contains a description of Jesus's long journey across the Himalayas into Tibet, where he dedicated himself to studying the scriptures of ancient sages preserved in a temple in Lhasa. Afterward, he returned to India via Lahore, and from there traveled to the Middle East.

Subal raises his hand.

"Krishna-dasi, Harsharani, Jivananda and I are thinking of going to Santa Fe to open a temple," he says.

"Very good," Swamiji says.

"Nandarani and I would like to try Los Angeles," Dayananda says.

"Yes, you must," Swamiji says. "That is a very important city, no? So you must go there and to as many cities as possible. By spreading this movement, you render the greatest service to mankind."

Swamiji then picks up his cymbals, leads a final, brief chanting of Hare Krishna and returns upstairs to his apartment.

* * *

Some people still remain to be initiated, and Swamiji stays up late chanting their beads. We suggest that he rest, but he insists that all rounds be completed before he leaves in the morning.

He sleeps little during the night, and he is up early chanting. He descends from his apartment at about eight o'clock, taking to the road once again, wearing a Vaishnava hat that resembles a World War I aviator's cap, or a Narada Muni space helmet. He is accompanied by Kirtanananda. Mr. Morton follows, looking as glum as ever, still unable to renounce his wife.

We ride in Jayananda's station wagon to the airport. When we arrive, a crowd of devotees is chanting at the entrance. Airport officials run about, wondering what to do, their loudspeaker announcements drowned out by drums and cymbals.

Snatching Swamiji's ticket, Janaki tries to make him promise to return. He laughs, pats her hand and says, "That's all right."



Mukunda and Jānakī bid farewell to Śrīla Prabhupāda.
Jānakī tries to steal Śrīla Prabhupāda's ticket.
In the background, Jayānanda is on the far left, and Kīrtanānanda is looking towards the camera.

Then Swamiji looks at me and asks for his pills. I search his bag but can't find them. He holds out his hand, waiting. I start taking items out of the bag in a frantic search, envisioning him having an attack while waiting. The pills are nowhere. Who packed the bag? Kirtanananda? I empty the contents on a seat. Janaki starts to cry. Kirtanananda blames me for losing the pills. The devotees continue chanting loudly while airport officials run for security officers.

At this moment, Swamiji begins to laugh at the weeping Janaki. He breaks into a beautiful, wide smile, and Gurudas takes a photo. Swamiji keeps laughing, amused by it all.

Passengers begin boarding at the gate. The flight to New York is six hours, nonstop.

"I don't think he'll be staying in New York very long," Kirtanananda confides. "Just a few days."

Kirtanananda already holds the tickets to India. Thinking of reasons to keep Swamiji in America, I recall all the negative aspects of India: the squalor of congested cities, the rampant diseases, oppressive heat, flies and open sewers, and lack of modern medical facilities. How can Swamiji's health improve there?

"I still think India's a big mistake," I tell Kirtanananda.

"It's all Swamiji's idea," he says. "He wants to see the Ayurvedic physicians."

After the other passengers have boarded, Swamiji walks through the gate, followed by Kirtanananda. On the ramp, he turns to say, "Hare Krishna!" The girls try to enter the passageway but are barred by the ticket agent. Then Swamiji passes from our sight.

We stand helplessly before the soundproof plate glass window, watching the plane until it starts to taxi down the runway. For a second,

we glimpse Swamiji's hand in his beadbag, waving to us behind one of the windows. Then he is gone, headed for New York, then Delhi, and finally back to a little holy town called Vrindaban.

* * *

After Swamiji's departure, the Frederick Street temple nearly disbands, as half of the initiated devotees leave for other cities. Subal, Krishna-dasi and Jivananda take off for Santa Fe. It seems someone has promised them residence in an old castle. Dayananda and Nandarani leave for Los Angeles.

Goursundar and Govinda-dasi return east to New York. Haridas, our temple president, announces that he's going to the Yucatan to find a little cottage on the beach and paint. Mukunda suggests that I assume the temple presidency, but I assure him that I'm going to try to follow Swamiji to India. "Jayananda should be president," I suggest.

Jayananda protests, but we consider this symptomatic of his natural humility. He is obviously the most serious initiate, stable and advanced, and, being a little older, capable of negotiating with groups outside the Haight-Ashbury. We can't forever remain in Hippyland.

Besides, Hippyland is quickly degenerating. Throughout July, the streets become more congested with tourists from the east and midwest. Somehow the carefree, youthful, innocent optimism is lost. Haight-Ashbury turns into a Greenwich Village honky-tonk nightmare. Sidewalks teem with college kids, runaway teenagers, sailors, soldiers, middle-aged tourists on two-week vacations, pushers, prostitutes. "What's happening, man?"

"Wanna buy some dope?" Mainlining amphetamines replaces LSD. Fewer people talk of mystical experiences or a new consciousness. Life has boiled down to sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

The fragile San Francisco mystical dream has shattered. The

pretty, multicolored psychedelic bubble has burst. On Frederick Street, we were in the middle of it, but never part of it. May the spirit of New Jagannatha Purl survive. May Lord Nrishingadev protect His Radha-Krishna Temple.

* * *

As before, in his absence, Swamiji's teachings console us.

"There is no question of separation," his departing words echo. "The sound vibration fixes us up together, even though the material body may not be there. What do we care for this material body? Just go on chanting Hare Krishna, and we will be together. You will be chanting here, and I will be chanting there, and this vibration will encircle the whole planet. We might be on the other side of the globe, but Hare Krishna circles the globe faster than you can say it. I may be going, but Guru Maharaj and Bhaktivinode are here. They are your spiritual grandfathers, and I have asked them to take kind care of all of you, my transcendental children. So there should be no disturbance. The grandfather always takes care of the children much better than the father. Do not worry."

End of Chapter 12

PART 3.
New Vrindaban

Chapter 13. Enter, Srila Prabhupada

In his long absence, Swamiji's words haunt me: "Although I am practically on the path of death, still I cannot forget my publications. I wish that if I live or die, you will take very serious care for my publications."

We are bewildered trying to keep the ISKCON ship afloat, subsisting on the only supplies left—the holy names, the words, the taped lectures, the few books and pamphlets, the memories and photographs.

"Although I am practically on the path of death"

(Swamiji always said "practically" for "actually.")

His publications! The Word in English! Before me sits the first complete draft of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, ready for final English revision. "It must be published at once," he told us repeatedly. "Either get some publisher, or we print it ourselves. Complete it quickly."

Leaving San Francisco, even revising the manuscript on the plane, I return to New York to work with Brahmananda, who is still hounding publishers.

In Matchless Gifts, we carry on, keeping silent vigil for reports on Swamiji's condition. Every day, we wait for a letter from Swamiji himself, signed in a large, firm hand, "Your ever well-wisher, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami."

* * *

Soon letters from Kirtanananda begin to arrive. Word spreads. Swamiji and Kirtanananda were detained overnight in London because someone on the plane was infected with smallpox. A twenty-four hour quarantine. They were accomodated in a hotel by the airline. In the

morning, Swamiji was feeling much better, and they were in Moscow in three hours.

Swamiji was not impressed by the stark silence of the Moscow airport. Nor by the peasant women mopping the floor, nor by the Marxist tracts. Women should be protected, and in every society there exists the four castes. How can the *sudras*, the working class be expected to dominate government? The four castes were proclaimed eternal by Krishna Himself. Mr. Marx cannot arbitrarily abolish them.

Such is the illusion of demons.

"We stayed in Moscow about an hour," Kirtanananda writes, then reboarded and were in Delhi by midnight. We arrived in the middle of the monsoons, so when we got off the plane, the hot and humid Indian air hit us. It was like walking into a scorching brick wall."

* * *

Throughout the smoggy New York August days, we wait for more letters, chant Hare Krishna, and keep the Matchless Gifts storefront open. Although Brahmananda takes charge with the determination of Cortez, we do not expand. We just hold on.

"As soon as Swamiji arrived in Delhi," Kirtanananda writes, word spread quickly. Obviously he is highly respected. One of the boys living in the temple just told me confidentially that the people look on him as something like an incarnation."

The climatic change was too much on Swamiji's weakened system. "The very next day," Kirtanananda writes, "he began coughing a great deal of phlegm. He's caught pneumonia. He had come such a long distance to recover, and now he's caught pneumonia."

An Ayurvedic doctor came and gave Swamiji pills. Jungle herbs. Finally, Kirtanananda called in a Sikh doctor who injected penicillin.

In two days, Swamiji was better.

"But he is so weakened that he is constantly subject to attack," Kirtanananda writes. "Pray for him constantly, for it is only Krishna who can save him for us."

Other letters convince us that Swamiji has returned to India just to leave his body. After ten days in Delhi, he was finally able to depart for Vrindaban. Kirtanananda writes:

When he said he was ready, we took the Agra Express and were in Mathura in two hours. From there we took a tonga to Vrindaban. Lots of temples, peacocks and monkeys. I give Swamiji massage and help prepare his food As for his health—he's been improving steadily since we've reached Vrindaban. He contacted a well known Ayurvedic physician who prescribed some simple compounds, such as sandalwood paste and haritaki, a medicinal herb. A number of his God-brothers come by to visit. In their rituals, they chant to Lord Chaitanya a great deal, and Hare Krishna seems to get lost in a maze of mantras, but if you ask them what they consider most important, they will of course answer "Hare Krishna."

Considering a teaching job again to earn money for passage to India, I write Swamiji for advice, and in early September receive the reply. My first letter from Vrindaban! It is postmarked August 29, 1967.

Radha Damodar Temple, Seva Kunja, Vrindaban, Mathura, U. P., India.

"I am very glad to receive your first letter to me in India," he writes. "So far as Bhagavad-gita is concerned, please complete it as soon as possible; it must be published now, either by a publisher or by ourselves."

The same message: Complete it! Publish! "Although I am practically on the path of death. ... The letter continues:

Regarding separation, you may know that I am also feeling that way, and it is all Krishna's design that we cannot separate any more. In the transcendental field, the feeling of separation is more valuable than the feeling of meeting. Physically I am trying to go back to your States as soon as possible. I have a fancy for your country, and being inspired by that, I first went to your country, and still I feel that way. I am improving, although slowly; but I am eating and sleeping better than in New York. Regarding your speculation as to accepting a teaching position: Krishna wants everyone to utilize his talent as far as possible. Arjuna was a great fighter, and Krishna encouraged him to fight. He never said, "You sit down and I shall do it for you," although He was able to. No. We must utilize our talents for the service of the Lord; that is real sannyas. Formal acceptance of sannyas, as required for all old men, means that one should retire from materialistic life and devote his time and energy to the Lord's service. As you are devoted already to His service, without any personal consideration, you are always sannyas at heart. A teacher's position is always influential; so your sincere efforts for kirtan may be followed by some of your students and co-workers.

At the same time, your good editorial work will also continue, so I think you should accept a position.

Swamiji only briefly mentions passage to India at the close of the letter: *"I am also going to Bombay to try to induce the managing director to give us some concession on the Scindia Line."*

A postscript by Kirtanananda puts us all in a fit of speculation:

I was duly made a *tridandi swami* yesterday, the Lord's advent day, and Swamiji says that it was the most auspicious *sannyas* ceremony he has ever seen. Just at the moment when I was being inducted, hundreds of people who were at the Radha Damodar gathered around to observe the ceremony and offer obeisances. Now I have a great desire and a great mission to spread this transcendental vibration of Hare Krishna all over America.

* * *

Although it is late in the season, and my chances are not good, I phone New York University Placement Center and tell them I'm looking for a job again.

Miraculously enough, they land me one. With short-cropped hair, I pass the interview and am offered an assistant professorship at a community college in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. With some trepidation, but knowing it best to follow Swamiji's advice, I accept the post and attend inauguration ceremonies. I sing "The Star Spangled Banner" and march across a stage chanting Hare Krishna on beads hidden beneath black robes. The dean introduces me to the college president as "the author of Bragaway Getter."

They are delighted to have me on the new staff.

I think of Lord Jagannatha bouncing through Haight-Ashbury. I muse on chanting in the rhododendron dell.

* * *

Letters from India indicate a steady improvement in Swamiji's health. Kirtanananda reports that Swamiji is even walking to different temples in Vrindaban to visit his God brothers. Although he enjoys visits to Imlitala, where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was absorbed in love for Krishna, he usually remains in his room at Radha Damodar Temple, wherein reside the Deities of Jiva Goswami, personal associate of Lord Chaitanya. To the side of the temple is the *samadhi* of Rupa Goswami, also an associate of the Lord and author of *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, *The Nectar of Devotion*, an important Vaishnava handbook on *bhakti-yoga*.

"Swamiji's obviously regaining strength," Kirtanananda writes, "but it is still very slow. He is still very weak."

Kirtanananda also relates stories of snapping turtles in the Jamuna

River that clean cadavers to the bone within minutes. And stories telling that if you go to a certain garden in Vrindaban at night, you will see Lord Krishna dancing with the *gopis* and will never return. Upon hearing this, Swamiji reportedly laughed and said, "Do you think Krishna is so cheap that He can be seen so easily with material eyes?"

* * *

Success! Brahmananda has interested Macmillan Company in *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*!

I receive a letter from Swamiji dated October 19 from Sri Chaitanya Saraswati Math in Navadwipa, Lord Chaitanya's birthplace in West Bengal.

"Regarding *Bhagavad-gita*," he writes, "I fully agree with your suggestions. So far Macmillan is concerned, I shall be so glad to hand over the matter to them for publication, but in case they do not do it, please negotiate with another publisher."

The Macmillan negotiation is the parting of the clouds. At last, a major publisher! Swamiji's word will be heard.

But there remains one big problem. The manuscript runs eight hundred pages, and Macmillan wants it cut down to three hundred to lessen production costs.

And I have the doleful job of trying to decide which of Swamiji's purports are not essential.

* * *

After a week in the classroom, I'm already weary of my job. I've a hundred and twenty drowsy, conditioned American teenage souls on my hands, and I have to teach them how to write simple declarative sentences and then put them together to make five hundred word essays. At the same time, I want to inject some Krishna consciousness. But

how?

From India, Swamiji's words inspire me:

It is so nice to read your letter and hear how you are always thinking for Krishna. When you write to say that I would like very much to be teaching them Krishna consciousness instead of English," I am reminded of Lord Chaitanya. For some time Lord Chaitanya was conducting a chatuspati, which is a small tutorial village class run by a learned brahmin. When He was teaching grammar to His students, He was explaining Krishna. There is a chapter in Sanskrit grammar called 'dahtu', that is, verbal conjugations. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was explaining dahtu as Krishna, and He would explain Krishna in every step. When the students felt that the teacher was crazy, the Transcendental Teacher closed his class.

* * *

I pass a typically cold and drizzly November on the Susquehanna. For me, Wilkes-Barre represents the pits of consciousness. Coal mining town. Beer halls. Loud kids on motorbikes. Pinball machines in Kresges's Five and Dime. Students with unpronounceable Polish names. Now that we're in it, support the Vietnam War. Some kids leave for the army. Others stay home, let their hair grow long, and smoke pot. The Beatles follow "Sergeant Pepper" with "Magical Mystery Tour" before Christmas. The Rolling Stones issue "Satanic Majesties." Jim Morrison and The Doors peak with "Strange Days." As the December winter enfolds us, I think of spring in Golden Gate Park, bright skies and flowers, and Swamiji dancing under the shadow of Hippy Hill. Walking under the barren trees to class, I chant "*Samsara Dava,"* and through my mind the Mamas and Papas sing "California dreaming. ... Brahmananda phones me from New York.

"Swamiji's leaving India," he tells me jubilantly. "He's flying to Japan. Then Los Angeles."

* * *

It is sudden, happy news, but each new letter from India brings different plans. We all write Swamiji, telling him how much he is needed. Even In Wilkes-Barre, the kids, via popular music, are aware of *gurus*, *yoga*, and "mysticism." It is "The Year of The *Guru*," according to *Life Magazine* in a write-up featuring Swamiji and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who has converted the Beatles and other celebrities. Mick Jagger of the Stones wants to cut a "*mantra* record" with Ginsberg and the Beatles. In Vietnam, an American soldier becomes a Buddhist monk.

The time can't be riper for Krishna consciousness. We cry out for Swamiji.

* * *

And he appears in a wholly different and wonderful way.

As the year wanes and Americans brace for another Christmas holiday, he arrives in San Francisco via Tokyo, December 16. He doesn't arrive as the ailing Swamiji, but returns in full strength as "Prabhupada."

"Prabhupada means one who is always found at Krishna's lotus feet," he says. "Rupa Goswami was called Prabhupada because he was always worshipping the lotus feet of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. All the six major Goswamis were called Prabhupada. A spiritual master is usually addressed as Vishnupada, or Gurudeva, or Prabhupada. These signify reverance and respect."

"Oh, you mean Srila Prabhupada!" Brahmananda corrects me on the phone when I enquire about "Swamiji."

"Yes, Srila Prabhupada is doing fine. I hear he looks very well and is already shouting at the impersonalists. He arrived in San Francisco this morning."

I phone the San Francisco temple, and Mukunda informs me that Prabhupada is fine and taking rest in his room.

"Should I fly out now?" I ask.

"Why don't you wait for me to ask? If Prabhupada wants you here now, I'll tell Brahmananda."

In two days, I receive a special delivery letter from Prabhupada himself, telling me that I should continue teaching in Wilkes-Barre, save money and buy property for an *ashram*. He sends me a copy of a lecture to edit for presentation to a San Francisco radio station.

"We think in Krishna, we chant in Krishna, we live in Krishna, we eat in Krishna, we talk in Krishna, we hope in Krishna, we are sustained in Krishna," he writes. "And we return to Krishna without any doubt, and this is the substance of Krishna consciousness."

At last! The master of *bhakti-yoga* returns to his dais at last! Bogus *yogis* scatter in his wake. "What's all this cheating *yoga*? They are saying, 'Give me thirty-five dollars, and I'll give you some private *mantra*, then you can do whatever you want.' This is *yoga*? Our *mantra* is free. It is no secret. We are distributing it freely to all. And we say that if you act like a dog, you become a dog."

* * *

For ISKCON, the continent is alive again. Phone calls flow from New York to the new Los Angeles center on Pico Boulevard. And Frederick Street, San Francisco. And Montreal. Now *Bhagavad-gita* is out of my hands editorially. Rayarama snipped it down to three hundred pages for Macmillan, despite my protests. I call it the "skeleton edition," as only a few purports managed to survive Rayarama's cutting. In a letter of January 15 (1968), Prabhupada encourages me to work editorially with Rayarama again and forget petty disagreements.

"To me," he writes, "the English language is undoubtedly a foreign language, and I thought your combination of editorship will help me a great deal Now let us start fresh with renewed energy for Krishna's service."

Now that *Bhagavad-gita* is going to press, Prabhupada looks forward to a constantly expanding future of divine literatures. We have to finish the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in sixty volumes, out of which we have published only three. Two more volumes are already in the press in India. So fifty-five volumes remain. I am now very much hopeful with your good cooperation. To finish the whole *Bhagavatam*, I require about $40,000, out of which I have about $12,000 contributed by Brahmananda, Jayananda and others.

Prabhupada adds that I should be prepared to return to India with him within the next four to six months. There we can work on completing the *Bhagavatam* manuscript.

Through February, I fight the urge to fly west. I stick to my classes but find I'm teaching more *Bhagavad-gita* than English. The sublime teachings of the *Vedas* easily seep through etymological analyses, Emerson's essays, Thoreau's journals, Melville's metaphysical ponderings, the tight verses of Dickinson, the mystical poems of Whitman.

Second semester is more relaxed, the students more passive, resigned, friendly. Some visit me in the evenings to chant.

In late February, Kirtanananda, now a wandering *sannyasi*, phones to tell me that he is going to West Virginia to meet a man who has advertised in *The San Francisco Oracle* for people to help establish a religious community.

On a weekend, free of classes, I accompany Kirtanananda out to Wheeling, in West Virginia's northern panhandle. There, we meet Mr.

Foster, a balding, burly, hayseed philosopher who wants to open up a community "for everybody wanting to learn the Truth." Talking rapidly, the gregarious Mr. Foster informs us that he's not only attained the Truth but can impart it as well. "You just gotta open up," he says.

Talking nonstop, he drives us out to see some of the property. "I got over three hundred acres in all," he tells us. "That includes this roadside farm here, and another way up a logging road that's hard to get to. A couple of people from California are supposed to come out this weekend to help."

From the road, we get a general view of the land. It is a little too hilly for serious farming, but it must have looked like good homestead country to the pioneers. The atmosphere is tranquil, and forests of maple, poplar, and locust run along the ridges and creeks.

Foster tells us that he's willing to grant small individual leases on the property to those helping him start a religious community. "You can set yourselves up immediately," he says, "and stay year round."

Then he goes on to tell how Gurdjieff and Ouspensky are but pikers compared to him, due to his recently acquired knowledge. We don't mention ISKCON or Prabhupada. We quickly gather that Mr. Foster would resent any *guru* other than himself.

Kirtanananda decides to stay at the farm, and suggests that I write Prabhupada about starting an *ashram*.

* * *

March in Wilkes-Barre is gusty, overcast and cold. Whenever I think of Prabhupada in San Francisco, I consider chucking the job and jumping a jet for the coast. Just six hours away! I remember March of the previous year, the hippies crowding the temple, the flowers in Golden Gate Park beginning to blossom, the lively hour-long *kirtans*, Prabhupada's lectures, and quiet late-night conferences in his room.

I impulsively write a letter begging Prabhupada to come east now. I tell him about the land in West Virginia and outline possibilities for an *ashram*. His March 17 reply:

I am so glad to learn that one gentleman is going to open an ashram in West Virginia. I wish that this big tract of land—320 acres—be turned into New Vrindaban. You have New York, New England, and so many "new" duplicates of European countries in the U.S.A.—why not import New Vrindaban to your country? I have suggested that San Francisco be established as New Jagannatha Puri. It was already inaugurated when last year the Rathayatra Festival was performed, and you took part in it. And when you come next year, please encourage them to enhance the enthusiasm, and just try to have a new settlement on the Pacific side called New Jagannatha Puri. I am returning to New York sometimes by the middle of April, provided it is not too cold there. In all probability, I hope I shall get a permanent visa in your country, and if Kirtanananda endeavors to utilize the 320 acres and turn them into New Vrindaban, I may permanently stay there and try to serve you in constructing a New Vrindaban city in West Virginia.

* * *

Transcendental cities! Transcendental settlements devoted to the service of Radha Krishna, of Lord Jagannatha, Lord of the universe! New Vrindaban, West Virginia! New Jagannatha Puri, California! Prabhupada, what gifts are you bringing back from mother India? What spiritual frontiers?

I am so glad to understand that you are missing the atmosphere of San Francisco, which you so nicely enjoyed last year. Similarly, I am also missing your company, which I enjoyed last year here. Whenever I go to the class, I remember you, how joyfully you were chanting in the temple, and whistling the bugle so nicely. Whenever I see the cornet lying idle because nobody can play on this particular instrument, I remember Hayagriva Brahmachary immediately ...I shall let you know when I shall go to New York, and, if it is possible to leave your work,

please try to see me there some weekend, and we shall be glad to talk face to face.

* * *

Prabhupada arrives in New York on April 17. Obviously, the India trip has been greatly beneficial. Reports from the west coast were true: his body has been recharged.

Appropriately, at Kennedy Airport he's smothered with garlands. Now we bow, and take care not even to turn our backs toward him. He smiles, seems to float through it all with effervescence, walking jauntily with his cane, obviously pleased with the clamorous welcome. Now we sense the happy air of assured triumph. Out of compassion for us, Lord Krishna has allowed him to return in an hour of urgent need.

"You are all doing nicely?" he asks. "Everyone is chanting his sixteen rounds?"

Mridangas and "Haribol!" sound the thunder of reply. His smile falls on us, a refreshing April shower of mercy.

In Matchless Gifts, he lectures with full strength, telling us that all our qualifications and assets are but so many zeros. Krishna is the numeral one.

"Without Krishna, all your zeros stand alone, and regardless how many zeros you add, the result will always be zero.

"But if you start with the one and then add the zero, you have ten. Another zero, you have a hundred. Six, a million. And so on. Only in relation to Krishna do our qualifications amount to something. Otherwise they are worse than nothing. They are disqualifications."

Goursundar and his wife Govinda-dasi now attend Prabhupada as private secretaries, having replaced Kirtanananda and Ranchor. Talking

in whispers, they futilely try to keep people out. A very intense atmosphere pervades, as if in a royal court where great matters of state are being decided. Everything revolves about Prabhupada. He is no longer poor little old Swamiji needing help. To look at him is to behold a radiant center, a source of countless ideas, plans, concrete instructions, perfect answers, ideal advice, and happy well-wishes.

"You are looking well," he tells me.

"And so are you," I say. "Very well. You have fully recovered. "Yes. India was very agreeable to me."

He looks at me for a moment in silence. Face to face. It is as it has always been in eternity. He is still behind the tin footlocker, now covered with saffron silk. He is still sitting on the Indian rug and inviting everyone in. But now a certain intimacy that comes with a small group has vanished. He is a great leader, a purely spiritual vehicle for the liberation of souls. And now we are aware of it.

"So, you have seen this property and its owner in the Virginia?" he asks.

"Yes," I say. "It's very beautiful land. I've some reservations about the owner, though."

"You must convince this gentleman to become Krishna conscious. Then we can make it into a Krishna conscious *ashram*."

"I doubt I can convince him," I say. "Maybe Kirtanananda can. He says he's opposed to all sectarian religions."

"Then you must convince and inform him that we are not a religion but a science that is nonsectarian."

"I'll try."



Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival at New York Airport, 1968.



Śrīla Prabhupāda, New York, 1968.


NEW YORK ISKCON
WELCOMES
PRAHBUPAD!

"Yes, you must try," he says. "That is all Krishna asks. You should try, and Kirtanananda should try. Just try to turn this land into a New Vrindaban. Then the rest is up to Krishna."

As I sit listening to him discuss the possibility for a transcendental community, devotees in the background tiptoe about. There is activity everywhere. Govinda-dasi enters with a silver plate filled with fruit.

Seeing that I'm a little annoyed with all the comings and goings, Prabhupada suddenly smiles very affectionately and reaches for the garland of roses about his neck.

"Come," he tells me.

I offer obeisances, and as I bow down, he places the garland over my head. I feel their weight and smell their fragrance.

"I don't deserve these, Prabhupada," I say, using his new name for the first time. He looks pleased. Embarrassed, I take off the garland and hold it before me.

"No, you take, he insists.

I offer obeisances again, and he hands me some diced honeydew melon.

When I leave Matchless Gifts, I carry the garland with care. Back in Wilkes-Barre, I hang it around a picture of Lord Krishna. The aroma lingers throughout the spring.

End of Chapter 13

Chapter 14. New Vrindaban, West Virginia

When Kirtanananda phones from West Virginia, I tell him that Prabhupada wants Mr. Foster converted to Vaishnavism.

"Impossible," he replies. "We don't agree on anything. I've just moved out to the back farm for some peace and quiet."

"What about selling? Is he interested?"

"No, but he still favors five year leases on small parcels."
"But we require the property!"
"Patience," he says.

Impatient, I begin looking at real estate in the Poconos, near Wilkes-Barre. Prices, however, are prohibitive. Still, letters from Prabhupada keep pushing the conception of a rural *ashram* in West Virginia:

"We should always know that Vrindaban is not localized in a particular area, but that whenever Krishna is present, Vrindaban is automatically there. And wherever the holy name of Krishna is chanted, Krishna is present. There is no difference between Krishna and His holy name. So now Krishna is blessing a nice piece of land, resembling Vrindaban, to be a new place of pilgrimage for you Western devotees. So you must try for it."

* * *

Satsvarupa has opened a fourth ISKCON center in Allston, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. From there, Prabhupada writes Kirtanananda, May 23:

"If this piece of land is turned into New Vrindaban, I shall forget to return to Indian Vrindaban. I am getting older and older, so actually if I get a peaceful place, as you describe, the rest of my life will be

continued translating Srimad-Bhagavatam and other Goswami literatures, assisted by some of my disciples like you. So anytime you take me to your new hermitage, I shall be very glad to go there."

Prabhupada indicates that at the end of May, he may either go to Montreal or return to New York.

* * *

In Wilkes-Barre, I'm fired from the community college. The college president and dean took exception to my chanting in English 102.

I manage, however, to get a contract to teach English in the fall at Ohio State University. It's the same instructorship I held in 1964. Not really wanting to teach, I write the department chairman and request a Tuesday-Thursday class schedule. Surprisingly enough, he grants it. This gives me five days a week free. With such a schedule, I can commute weekly between Columbus and the West Virginia farm, about a three hour drive.

Still, I'm at a crossroads. Correcting hundreds of student themes is tedious time-consuming business. Shouldn't my time be spent working with Prabhupada on *Srimad-Bhagavatam*?

Confused, I write Prabhupada. He replies:

"Accept this job without hesitation. In Bhagavad-gita you have read that one should fully utilize one's talents for the service of the Lord. Arjuna was a military man, and he utilized his talent fully for Lord Krishna. So by the grace of Krishna, you have some educational talent, and when there is an opportunity to get some money, you must accept it, but spend the money for Krishna. As you are proposing to develop New Vrindaban, you will require some money. I advise you to purchase land there instead of taking on a lease. If you must take on a lease, it should be over a long period, say ninety-nine years. I do not

understand the position of Mr. Foster there, but I advise you not to make any big plans on the land of others. There is a Bengali proverb saying that if one is a poor man, he can go to some friend's house and accept food and then leave. But one should never accept residence in another's house. That is very inconvenient."

* * *

Classes finished, I leave Wilkes-Barre for West Virginia, accompanied by a student, Harold Miller, who is interested in the chanting and the idea of starting a community. We leave at three in the morning and arrive in West Virginia about noon.

Actually, Mr. Foster owns two farms: one, called simply "the Goat Farm," borders the winding county road. The other is land-locked, inaccessible to ordinary vehicles.

At the Goat Farm, we are welcomed by Foster and his new tribe acquired from the announcement in *The San Francisco Oracle*: Reg Dunbar from New York City, Don Thomas from California, and two California girls, Caroline and Janet.

I talk with Foster. He's still offering only five year leases. Kirtanananda, he tells me, is now living "on the old back farm."

Harold and I wait, and in the late afternoon, Kirtanananda finally arrives. He's obviously not interested in chatting with the loquacious Foster but in taking us immediately to the back farm.

We follow him down to a state lake and an empty field used for parking. Then we strap on backpacks with basic supplies and start trekking along a footpath leading to a creekbed lined with sycamores. It is a fresh, early summer afternoon, and the walk is invigorating. We cross the creek bed twice, stepping carefully from rock to rock. Soon the footpath turns into an old, abandoned logging road winding uphill through a dense forest.

After some minutes of the steep incline, we stop and set down the backpacks. “It’s not much further,” Kirtanananda says.

We walk a mile, all uphill, then rest again in the mottled brown and green of maple and beech, poplar and locust. The poplars are perhaps thirty to fifty years old, tall, wide and straight. Then we take a footpath to the top of the hill, where the trees thin and give way to blackberry and raspberry bushes.

Walking along the ridge top, we can see the county road running along the opposite ridge. As we pass a grove of sassafras trees and clumps of wild roses, I sense the good feeling of arriving home, of being in an old familiar place full of warm memories.

Then suddenly I see, beneath a spreading willow, nestled snugly on the hillside, the old wood frame farmhouse.

Welcome to New Vrindaban.

* * *

The house itself is over a hundred years old, with beams hewn out of the great trees that once grew profusely throughout the Ohio River Valley. The men who built it were the children or grandhildren of pioneers. They were good builders. The chimney and basement were built from rocks hauled out of the creek. There is a back room, a living room with a stone fireplace, a small bedroom, and narrow stairs leading up to a dark, dusty room. Though small, the house is adequate for our immediate purposes. I sense it is already a kind of spiritual home.

“There were ghosts here when I first came,” Kirtanananda tells us. “But the chanting drove them away.”

After a rest, we set about cleaning the upstairs. Since there is no electricity, we have to work during daylight. Harold is a big help. Together we clean the dusty upstairs and repair the tattered ceiling.



Sycamore tree.



Sycamore tree.



New Vrindaban, Farmhouse.



Since the well isn't working, we have to carry buckets down to the spring. Walking back uphill with the buckets is the hard part. Save for the creek beds and ridge tops, none of the ground is level. You are either rolling downhill, or climbing to the top.

We begin making lists of things to get in town. Screens for the windows. Insect repellent. More mantles for the kerosene lantern. Detergent. A new broom. Foam mats. Rubbing alcohol for mosquito bites.

Sugar and oatmeal. Canned fruit juices. Whatever fruit and vegetables we can carry. Buckets. A bush-ax for clearing around the house and cutting paths.

At night, I stay awake a long time listening to the high whir of crickets punctuated by the occasional croaks of a bullfrog. It is pitch black, and the stars are very bright. No street lamps stun our vision.

I begin wondering how we're ever going to make a transcendental village modeled on Vedic India's Vrindaban. Materially speaking, we're on a rundown, landlocked farm in the ancient West Virginia hills. A Walden, perhaps. But a village?

"If this piece of land is turned into New Vrindaban, I shall forget to return to Indian Vrindaban."

* * *

In the morning, Kirtanananda builds a fire in the stone fireplace and makes pancakes with honey, which we offer before a picture of Lord Krishna. It is delicious *prasadam*.

In the early morning sun, I appraise the farm. Mist hangs down in the creekbeds. The pastures are overrun with wildflowers and prickly blackberry bushes. The fences are in disrepair—more barbed wire and new locust posts needed. The barn requires new siding, but its basic structure, like that of the house, is sound. The house also needs new

siding, and a new roof before the fall rains. Shingles can be nailed up, and plastic stapled over the broken windows. Everything needs painting.

The old logging road continues past the house two miles south to Limestone Hill Road. City dwellers would consider it impassable. There are ruts, creek crossings, bogs, rocks and fallen trees to impede progress. After one attempted traversal, we dub the road "Aghasura," the name of a monstrous demonic serpent who, camouflaging himself on a road, laid in wait to devour Krishna and the cowherd boys.

Krishna, of course, saw through his trick and killed him.

As our first chore, we clear paths with scythes and bush-axes so we can walk about without getting scratched, snake bitten or lost. Afterwards, we repair the farmhouse doors. Kirtanananda works in his small garden, clearing weeds and spading. We have to bring up water in buckets for the tomato plants.

In the evenings, after work, we walk down the hill to the creek and bathe in a waterfall and waterhole beneath. The creek water is ice cold. We sit on rocks under the waterfall and chant.

My first days on the farm are spent picking blackberries, so many that I inspire Kirtanananda to start canning blackberry jam and chutney. In the early mornings, Harold walks to the lower pasture and gathers wildflowers for the altar. We get up just before dawn, chant, then read aloud from *Bhagavad-gita*. In the evenings, at seven or eight, we repeat this program, spraying on insect repellent to survive the mosquitoes. After chanting, we sit outside beside the garden and watch the stars.

On June 14, Prabhupada writes from Montreal:

"I advise Kirtanananda and yourself to convert West Virginia into New Vrindaban."

We ponder this. Not just the farm. He wants the whole state.

"I understand the spot is very beautiful. The hills may be renamed New Govardhan. And if there are lakes, they can be renamed Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. Vrindaban does not require modernization because Krishna's Vrindaban is a transcendental village completely dependent on nature's beauty and protection. Krishna preferred to belong to the vaishya (agricultural) community because Nanda Maharaj happened to be a vaishya king, or landholder, and his main business was cow protection. It is understood that he had 900,000 cows, and Krishna and Balarama, along with Their many cowherd boy friends, used to take charge of them. Every day, in the morning, He used to go out with His friends and cows into the pasturing grounds. Nine hundred thousand cows! We don't even have one. And friends? There's only Harold. And Nanda Maharaj a king! We're just scraping by until I start work in October."

So if you seriously want to convert this new spot into New Vrindaban, I shall advise you not to make it very much modernized. Better to live there without modern amenities but to live a natural, healthy life for executing Krishna consciousness. It should be an ideal village where the residents will practise plain living and high thinking. For plain living we must have sufficient land for raising crops and pasture for the cows. So far we don't even have one acre. The pastures are hilly and overgrown, and as for seriously raising crops....

"If there are sufficient grains and milk, then the whole economic problem is solved. You do not require any machines, cinemas, hotels, slaughter houses, brothels, nightclubs—all these modern amenities. People in the spell of maya are trying to squeeze out gross pleasure from the senses, but this is not possible to derive to our heart's conten"

Instead of opening brothels and slaughter houses, we are advised to purchase and protect cows.

"We have to maintain the animals throughout their lives. We must not sell them to the slaughter houses. Krishna taught us to give all protection to the cows; therefore the special feature of New Vrindaban will be cow protection, and by it we shall not be the losers"

I gaze out the window at the blackberries and saplings growing in the pastures, at the fallen fences, decayed locust posts, rusty barbed wire, and try to imagine cows grazing.

"In India, of course, a cow is protected, to the cowherd's profit. Cow dung is used as fuel. Cow dung dried in the sun is kept in stock and used for fuel in the villages. They get wheat and other cereals produced from the field. There is milk and vegetables, and the fuel is cow dung. Thus every village is independent. There are handweavers for the cloth. And the country oil mill—consisting of a bull walking in circles round two big grinding stories, attached with yoke—grinds the oil seeds into oil"

Handweavers.... Cow dung for fuel.... Bulls walking in circles.... Grinding stones....

* * *

Inspired by Prabhupada's letter, I confront Foster while he's weeding cucumbers at the Goat Farm. I suggest that he either sell or lease us the entire back farm.

"I'll lease you the house," he says, "and an acre or so around it. But not the whole hundred and thirty acres."

I dicker, make excuses, suggest that with the entire farm, we'll be more likely to stay on.

"I don't want one sect to take over the whole *ashram*," he says firmly. "I want to leave it open for as many different kinds of people as possible. That's the idea, you see. To leave the path to Truth open. People of all backgrounds and philosophies can come from all over the world here to seek Truth."

"I'm thinking of a long-term lease," I say.

"No." He stands up and shakes his head. His face is red from

weeding. “No. Just five year leases. Renewable, of course. You see, the idea is not just to settle in. The idea is to get to the Truth, to open up and let the Truth come in.”

* * *

When I inform Prabhupada of Mr. Foster’s stand, Prabhupada immediately writes back:

"Mr. Foster may be a very good man, but he does not know what is sectarian and what is nonsectarian. But at least you should know that Krishna is nonsectarian. Krishna claims that He is the seed-giving Father of all the 8,400,000 species of life visible within the material creation. They may be of different forms—aquatics, vegetables, plants, worms, birds, beasts, human beings—but Krishna claims that all of them are His begotten sons. Nor does Krishna claim that He Himself is an Indian or kshatriya or brahmin, nor white nor black. He claims that He is the enjoyer of everything that be. He is the proprietor of all the planets and the creation. And He is the intimate friend of all living entities. So it is a fact that Krishna is universal and nonsectarian. Therefore if Mr. Foster actually wants some nonsectarian institution, he must know how this is possible. I therefore think that you should try to convince Mr. Foster of our philosophy, and let him become nonsectarian in fact. Without understanding Krishna, one is sectarian."

* * *

As the days grow hot and dry, and the houseflies increase, Mr. Foster grows more and more defensive and paranoid in respect to neighbors. This is somewhat provoked by a local newspaper account of “hippy” guests who “talk to trees.” Now Foster has taken to rifle practise. He, Reg, and Don set cans and bottles on a tree stump in sight of the road and shoot by the hour. Foster thinks it wise to advertise himself as an armory.

July 10. Another letter from Prabhupada. As we read it, we realize

that the New Vrindaban project may have to be abandoned.

"We have no freedom of action because the land belongs to Mr. Foster, and he wants to develop an institution appealing to all sections of seekers in spiritual enlightenment. Such an impersonalist ideal can never be successful Our mission is to reach the supreme planet in the spiritual sky, namely the abode of Krishna. Therefore we cannot compromise by saying that all sorts of meditation give the same result. There is no Vedic evidence of this, nor proof by the acharyas. If Mr. Foster wants something for the satisfaction of all sections of spiritualists, I think your endeavor in that part of the country will not be very successful. Under the circumstances, I would advise you to live with me."

The New Vrindaban scheme under the present inconveniences is not possible to be successful ultimately.

We read the letter several times. Should we pack up and leave? Stay on and struggle? There are plenty of other farms on the earth. Why be attached to a particular plot of land?

After debating all this, we finally resolve to go to Montreal to talk personally with Prabhupada and let him decide.

Quickly, we pack a few clothes and start out. On the trail to the car, we meet Reg. He is panting from running up the hill. There's been a shooting at the Goat Farm.

It was Foster's paranoia that set the scenario. He rigged up spotlights on his roof, posted "No Trespassing" signs, kept the rifles handy and everyone on constant, fearful alert. Inevitably, when some youngsters on Route 250 got drunk and rambunctious, they decided to drive by Foster's house and throw some firecrackers. Late at night, of course.

"We thought the firecrackers were gunshots," Reg tells us. "Foster

was running all around flicking on spotlights and handing out rifles, shouting, 'We'll get 'em next time round!' Naturally Don and the girls were terrified. I was just dazed. And sure enough, the car came back. When the firecrackers went off, Foster and Don started shooting out of the second floor window. A 17-year-old boy was hit. They say he'll survive. The parents are suing."

When we arrive at the Goat Farm, we see that Foster has thrown up picket barricades. Additional spotlights line the roof; the road gates are locked, and boards are nailed across the doors and windows.

Foster's face is pale, his eves sunken from worry and insomnia. Don now weeds the garden while Foster sits on the back porch, his rifle at his side, his chair tilted against the house.

"I might reconsider that lease proposal," he tells me.

He's worried about the legal repercussions—instant *karma*. Despite all his acreage, he has very little ready cash. If the boy's parents win their suit, he can lose his back farm.

But if the farm is leased to someone else....

"We'll need a lifetime lease," I say, "with all land rights granted."

"Can't do that," he says. "The mineral rights were sold off years ago, and there are some trees in there I want, so I can't give you the timber rights. But I'll grant a long term lease on the whole property."

When I propose four thousand dollars for a ninety-nine year lease, Foster squints, then turns to quickly survey the field of tomatoes and bell peppers.

"Blasted groundhogs," he says. When a car passes by, he reaches for his rifle and fires senselessly into the garden toward a fleeing groundhog.

"All right," he sighs. "I'll look into drawing up some kind of lease. Ninety-nine years! Jesus! Trouble with you people is you want to be God almighty."

End of Chapter 14

Chapter 15. Seven Temples on Seven Hills

The Montreal temple is located in a large, grey Gothic building near McGill University. The ground floor is occupied by a commercial printing company. The upstairs bowling alley has been converted into a *kirtan* hall and living area for new devotees—Shivananda, Jayapataka, Hansadutta, Vaikunthanath. Now it is crowded. There has been a flurry of activity since Prabhupada's arrival.

Kirtanananda and I visit Prabhupada in his nearby apartment. As always, it seems, Prabhupada is seated behind his footlocker, the familiar aromas of gardenias, incense and sandalwood about him.

Goursundar and Govinda dasi scurry about, fretting that too many people are disturbing him. We pay our obeisances, and I offer Prabhupada yellow roses, which Govinda dasi arranges in vases.

"So how have you come?" Prabhupada asks. "By plane from New York," I say.

"Ah, very good. And in New York they are doing nicely?"

"Yes, Srila Prabhupada. Very nicely."

"And what about New Vrindaban? That is doing nicely?"

"The owner has finally agreed on a long-term lease," I say, "but he wants the timber."

"Oh, that cannot be. We must have all rights."

"The coal rights were sold sixty-five years ago,"

Kirtanananda says. "This is the case with all the properties in that area."

"This means that if the government develops the coal industry, we

may be asked to vacate," Prabhupada says, concerned. "And no law can stop it."

We admit that this is a point to consider.

"Yes," he continues, "even if the government does not interfere, if some big industry moves into our vicinity, our New Vrindaban will fade away."

I suddenly envision the little farmhouse and willow tree enveloped in a haze of smoke, the pastures invaded by steel drills abusing Mother Earth, giant smokestacks....

"New Vrindaban must be free from industrial contamination," he says. "Industries like mining will ruin everything. Consider well the land's future."

"Most of the coal has already been mined through underground tunnels," Kirtanananda says.

"Another important point," Prabhupada goes on. "What happens to the property after ninety-nine years?"

I don't know," I say, not having really thought of this. "We won't be around then."

"But the Society will," he says. "There must be an agreement that at the end of the lease, the property will go to us."

This had been our oversight. Of course it must go to the Society! Great temples will be rising from the blackberries and pokeweed!

"We'll try to get Foster to agree," I say.

We then describe the property. As soon as Prabhupada understands where the main road is, he asks, "How do you get up to the farmhouse?"

"Well, that's the big problem," I admit. "It's not really what you'd call easily accessible. But you could drive a jeep or horse and wagon up it. Otherwise, it's a two mile walk."

Prabhupada reflects on this a moment.

"Hm. Horse and buggy would be better," he says at length. "You should avoid machines and become as self-sufficient as possible. And horses are pleasing to look at. They are the most beautiful of animals."

Kirtanananda presents a quart of blackberry chutney and one of raspberry jam.

"Ah, very fresh," Prabhupada says, sampling them. Then, serious, thinking again of New Vrindaban: "Yes, in New Vrindaban everything will be Krishna conscious because everything will be for Krishna. So building houses, tending cows, and working fields will also be *bhakti-yoga*. People mustn't go there just to retire. They must be engaged. In your country, old people like to keep dogs and smoke pipes when they retire. Or they play... what do you call—?"

"Shuffleboard," I say, thinking of the old men in Golden Gate Park. "And checkers."

"Yes. That is what we want to avoid. We must always engage in Krishna's service so maya cannot enter."

"There's no end to engagement, Prabhupada," Kirtanananda assures him.

I think of breaking my back removing rocks from beneath the waterfalls. I think of all the wildflowers left unpicked.

"The hills and temples must all be named," Prabhupada says. "On seven hills we will build seven main temples, as in the original Vrindaban—Govindaji, Gopinatha, Madana-Mohana, Shyamasundara, Radha-Ramana, Radha-Damodar, Gokulananda....

Sitting before him, we begin to see spiraling gold-domed temples in the West Virginia hills. Vaporous fantasies, perhaps, but so strong is Prabhupada's confidence that for us his New Vrindaban temples seem as tangible as his tin footlocker.

"Of course, Kirtanananda, you have seen Vrindaban," Prabhupada continues. "Remember the atmosphere? There are temples everywhere, some five thousand, it is said. That is a far distant scheme."

A far distant scheme. I wonder if we can repair the farmhouse roof before the autumn rains.

"But now let us build at least seven temples," he says, his eyes wide with anticipation. "The hills you can name Govardhan. There must be pastures for the cows, and *ghats* for bathing, like Kesi-ghat. Oh, I will give you so many names! And Kirtanananda, you can attract the neighbors with your delicious *prasadam*."

Talking leisurely in the cool Montreal afternoon, Prabhupada describes New Vrindaban so graphically that we envision great lines of tourists waiting for guides to lead them through marble temples and palaces.

Every moment, Prabhupada builds and tosses out schemes to occupy thousands of devotees. On his footlocker is a lamp, some papers, and a few books. *Bhagavad-gita* is always within reach. I see him sitting thus eternally, looking up from the holy scriptures through his spectacles, creating whole cultures and civilizations centered about Krishna.

In the evening, Govinda dasi serves spiced puffed rice.

Prabhupada garlands us. We drink sweet yogurt, and he comments on Janardhan's plans for a *Back To Godhead* in French for Canada. He is jolly, and when we pay obeisances before leaving, he says, "Yes, try for this New Vrindaban with heart and soul. And rest assured it will develop."



Kīrtanānanda, Vāmanadeva, Hṛṣīkeśa, Hayagrīva and Pradyumna,
New Vrindaban, 1968.



Original farmhouse on hill slope and first cottage erected by Kirtananda and Hayagriva at New Vrindaban



New Vrindaban, the first buildings near the farmhouse.

* * *

For four days, Prabhupada waters the New Vrindaban devotional creeper. It is indeed a young, tender plant requiring special treatment.

On the fifth day, carrying plans, schemes, visions, and lofty aspirations, we fly back to New York, accompanied by universal royalty, the Jagannatha Deities, purchased from a Montreal import house.

In New York, we spend two days shopping for the Deities on Orchard Street, bargaining for cloth, haggling over five cents a yard. At Sears, we buy some farming tools, a chainsaw, a new battery, tubs, buckets, hoses.

As bills quickly accumulate, we painfully realize that for our grand enterprise, we will be needing a great deal of money.

* * *

In West Virginia, the first signs of autumn can be seen even in July. Blackberry picking is over, and some leaves are even turning red. I'm surprised to see visible changes in the forest over our week's absence.

Foster has been working on his picket fence. Now indicted for attempted manslaughter, he labors over a post-hole digger, pounding out holes for the locust-wood barricade.

"Come on in," he says, "and we'll cool off with a soda. I've been thinking about that lease." I tell him directly that we must have timber and lease transferral rights.

We hem and haw. Worried and tired, Foster finally gives in.

A week later, August 8, 1968, the lease is signed and entered in the

courthouse records. With great happiness, we write Prabhupada and tell him that the New Vrindaban property is secured. Prabhupada replies:

"Now we can work with great enthusiasm for constructing a New Vrindaban in the United States of America. Its construction is my great happiness. And I am very glad to notice in Kirtanananda's letter that he has realized more and more that the function of New Vrindaban is nothing physical or bodily, but purely spiritual and for the glorification of the Lord, Sri Krishna."

And for Lord Krishna's immediate glorification, Prabhupada informs us that we can commence holding *aratik* first thing in the morning.

Aratik is a ritual whereby certain objects are offered to the Deities—incense, camphor, ghee, a conch shell with water, a handkerchief, flower, peacock feather fan, yak-tail whisk—very elaborately to chanting, bell-ringing, and dancing. Prabhupada had performed *aratik* when Lord Jagannatha was installed in San Francisco.

Another letter from Prabhupada outlines the details:

"I am very glad to learn, Kirtanananda, that you are feeling so happy in serving the beautiful Jagannatha Deities from Montreal. The aratik ceremony can be performed as follows. The first aratik is performed as you have seen in Vrindaban at the Radha-Damodar Temple—early in the morning, at least one and a half hours before sunrise. The second aratik is performed about 8 a.m., after dressing and decorating the Deity with flowers, the third after offering lunch to the Deity, the fourth in the evening, and the fifth when the Lord goes to bed. Jagannatha Swami is very kind to the fallen souls, because He is the Lord of the universe, and all the living creatures are His subjects; therefore, Jagannatha Swami will bless you with all the required intelligence needed for knowing how to satisfy Him."

* * *

We awake at 4:30 a.m., sleepily light the kerosene lantern and sponge bathe over buckets of cold water. All agree, cold water awakens the system like nothing else.

We are assisted by Randy Freeman, whom Kirtanananda had met in 1966 in Bellevue Hospital. Now Randy has had his fill of New York City life; he wants to do something grandiose, like build seven Vedic temples on seven West Virginia hills.

At 4:45, we all stand before the little altar of the Jagannatha Deities and chant:

(kiba) jaya jaya gorācāṅder āratiko śobhā
jāhnavī-taṭa-vane jaga-mana-lobhā
jaga-jana-mana-lobhā
"Everyone come see the glorious *aratik* ceremony of Lord Chaitanya.
This ceremony, on the Ganges banks,
is so beautiful that it attracts the mind of the world."

The little farmhouse vibrates in the early morning dark. Nary a hint of dawn.

"Boing-boing, boing-boing," resound the steel gongs salvaged from a local junkyard. The heavy disks hang from straightened clothes hangers, and Harold strikes them with a wooden mallet. Kirtanananda plays the harmonium, and we take turns circulating the offerings before the Deities.

After *aratik*, we read from *Bhagavad-gita*. The darkness finally fades. Sitting outside, we eat oatmeal and watch the sunrise. Best to get the hard work done in the cool of the morning.

* * *

Now ISKCON is expanding rapidly. Rupanuga is in Buffalo, and Boston is now well established. Los Angeles is ballooning, almost the size of the San Francisco temple. Santa Fe is holding on; Subal's still in

the castle. Even teenage Upendra has gone to Seattle to open a center. And Prabhupada is sending Shivananda to Hamburg, and Umapati to Paris.

I receive packets from Montreal with more *Srimad-Bhagavatam* manuscripts. Macmillan is promising that *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* will be ready in January. Rayarama is working on *Back To Godhead*; I'm entrusted with the editing of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

In Montreal, Prabhupada meets with the San Francisco devotees—Mukunda and Janakil Gurudas and Yamuna, Shyamasundar and Malati, three couples en route to London to try to open ISKCON's first European center. They want to land with a *sankirtan* party and attract as much attention as possible.

"You told me that you will arrange for the electricity immediately," Prabhupada writes me. "As soon as it is there, I shall go and stay in New Vrindaban for some time. Maybe, Krishna desiring, I will make my headquarters there."

Then a telegram from Brahmananda informs us that Prabhupada has returned to New York.

Kirtanananda, Harold, Randy, and I leave the farm early in the morning, immediately after *aratik*, and by afternoon we are driving through the Holland Tunnel to the Lower East Side.

Matchless Gifts has never been so alive.

New devotees tiptoe and whisper in the hallway outside Prabhupada's door. Now there are many new faces from California and Canada, as well as New York. I hardly catch their names. They cluster around Prabhupada in his room, where he sits, as always, on a mat behind his footlocker.

"Ah, come on!" he says as we enter and pay obeisances. "You have

all come from New Vrindaban?" He says "New Vrindaban" as if it had been founded centuries ago.

"Just this morning, Prabhupada."

"And this is the boy who is interested?"

"I am, Srila Prabhupada," Harold says in a whisper.

Harold recently wrote to Prabhupada, telling him of his confusion with Christianity and attraction to Krishna.

"So you are liking our Krishna consciousness movement?" Prabhupada asks, smiling broadly. "Yes, that's good. I received one letter, and thank you. So, tell me—what is the difference between relative and Absolute? Do you actually understand the difference?"

Harold sits and stares. It is the first time he has ever seen Prabhupada. "Relative and absolute?" he repeats, his mind now obviously drained of cognitive thought. "Well, absolute…?"

"That's all right," Prabhupada says mercifully. "Anyway, just try to understand. This lightbulb that you see here—light is emanating from the bulb. The bulb is different from the light, but without the bulb, there is no light. The light is dependent on the bulb; therefore we say that it is relative to the bulb. Or we can compare it to the sun and the sunshine. The sunshine is relative to the sun disk itself, because it is emanating from it. And so the Vedas define the Absolute as that from which everything is emanating. Do you understand?"

"I ... think so," Harold says.

"So, Krishna is like the sun disk. He is the Absolute, and everything is emanating from Him. *Aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate*. 'I am the source of everything. The entire creation is coming from Me.' All this is explained in *Bhagavad-gita*. You have

read *Bhagavad-gita*?"

"I ... a little."

"So, what is the difficulty? Krishna is there, and He is the father of all living entities. He declares: *Sarvayonishu kaunteya murtayah sambhavanti yah tesham brahma mahad yohir aham bijapradah pita*. 'I am the seed-giving father of all beings, and material nature is the mother.' And Lord Jesus Christ says, 'I am the son.' So where is the contradiction? Do you mean to say that you pay homage to the son and not to the father? Is that very wise? Or do you pay homage to the father and not to the son?"

Prabhupada looks at Harold for an answer. Harold fidgets and looks down, embarrassed. "Well—"

"Therefore we do not decry Christianity," Prabhupada concludes. "Worship Jesus Christ, but chant Hare Krishna with us and try to understand this sublime philosophy of Krishna consciousness." Then, turning to me: "He will make a very nice devotee. So, now, this New Vrindaban scheme is progressing nicely? There is one carpenter in Montreal named Vamandev. He can help. And Pradyumna is an intelligent boy who can help you edit *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. He's studying Sanskrit and can catch the errors. And he can also help you start a center in Columbus."

"There are forty thousand students there," I say. "We can surely open a temple near the university."

"And you can also invite them to New Vrindaban. It is not far from Ohio. If they see that it's a spiritual community, they will come. And when you get electricity, I will come, and we shall work there on the remaining cantos of *Bhagavatam*. We may even buy our own press and print our books there. Adwaita and some other boys are now studying with some commercial press. So there at New Vrindaban we can have the whole operation."

As Prabhupada talks, Umapati enters and pays his obeisances. “So how are you feeling?” Prabhupada asks him. “Very well, Srila Prabhupada,” Umapati says. Then, seeing Kirtanananda and me: “It’s just like old times here now.”

“There are no old times, no new times,” Prabhupada says. “Since we are all eternal associates, there is no old or new.”

“Jai!” Umapati exclaims.

“And the post office?” Prabhupada asks me suddenly. “You have enquired about arranging a New Vrindaban post office?”

“A certain volume of letters is required,” I say.

“So, if you require some letters, that will not be difficult. First of all, find out, and I shall advise our centers to send you letters. At least six or one dozen letters from each temple. This will prove we’re getting plenty of mail”

I suddenly realize that establishing a post office is almost as good as establishing a town. If you have your own postmark, the town will follow.

Now, as more disciples crowd into the small room, Prabhupada is inspired to talk on, hour after hour, and in his presence, our *bhakti* plants are watered yet again and again.

“We can see that the hippies are searching for a peaceful place like New Vrindaban,” Prabhupada observes. “They are now leaving the cities and going to the countryside to seek peace of mind. So you can invite them to New Vrindaban and show them that peace and happiness are there on the spiritual platform, in a community centered about Krishna.

“Now Krishna is giving you boys intelligence and bestowing His

mercy upon you. Continue with your present attitude, and whenever you feel some difficulty, chant Hare Krishna. Pray to Krishna to help you, and there will be no difficulty. Rest assured."

* * *

September 5. There is a marriage ceremony. Prabhupada has paired Satsvarupa and Jadurani. Since Satsvarupa holds a responsible job as social worker, he can best protect our chief artist. After the marriage, Harold is initiated as Hrishikesh, and Randy as Ranandhir. Then I receive the brahminical thread. Prabhupada lectures on the qualifications of a *brahmin*.

"Brahminism is not a birthright," he says. "It is by *guna*, by qualification. 'One cannot be a *brahmin* without being Krishna conscious. And by being Krishna conscious, one immediately attains the *brahmin* status."

After the ceremonies, we enjoy a big feast. Matchless Gifts is packed with new devotees and guests eager to see a fire sacrifice.

It is also Kirtanananda's thirty-first birthday.

* * *

September 8. We see Prabhupada off at Kennedy Airport.

"Please try to organize the students in the university," he tells me just before boarding. "But do it tactfully so that the administration won't be disturbed. And as for New Vrindaban—" He turns to Kirtanananda. "There may be many challenges, but do your best, work together, and rest assured that success will be there because you are acting on Krishna's behalf."

Then, to the thunder of *mridangas* and jet engines, he takes off for Los Angeles.

* * *

Before returning to New Vrindaban, we acquire a small pair of bell-metal Radha Krishna Deities from a devotee recently returned from India. Back at the farmhouse, we set Their Lordships beside the Jagannatha Deities, and Kirtanananda writes Prabhupada for instructions on worshipping.

“It appears that Krishna has not only given you New Vrindaban,” Prabhupada answers, “but He has also, out of His good will, come to you. It is very surprising.”

He then informs us that we should supply the Deities with a throne and install Them.

You have seen the New York Deity’s dress and process of worship. There is nothing new to add. The same principle should be followed, and the Deities should always be well dressed in clothing and some ornaments and flowers and incense. The Deities should always be attractive. The more we engage in Deity worship, the more we become purified.

Prabhupada flies to Seattle. More centers are opening internationally. He writes:

"I have sent Goursundar to Hawaii to open a branch there, and I have received letters from London that the six devotees there are holding *kirtan* in the morning, and are having love feasts also. In Berlin also we are hoping for a new branch. I think that as soon as they are prepared to receive me there, I shall go immediately to Europe."

* * *

Ohio State University has changed little since 1965. Forty thousand farm-fed students amble about the sprawling campus and up and down High Street. It is fall, the leaves are red and gold, and in

Columbus, consciousness is football.

As an antidote, I quickly organize the O.S.U. Yoga Society. That is, a front for ISKCON. From Los Angeles, Prabhupada writes:

"It would have been better to name it the Bhakti Yoga Society, otherwise the Society may be misunderstood to be one of the hatha-yoga bogus societies. Anyway, whatever the name may be, it does not matter. If you are successful in capturing the students for chanting, it will be a great success."

October 30. The new O.S.U. Yoga Society convenes in the Astronomy Department auditorium. About five hundred students assemble. As always, they are very well mannered. I'm always impressed how well dressed and mannered Ohio State students are.

YOGA CHANTS ARE KEY TO KRISHNA, The Ohio State Lantern reports the following day. They quote me as saying, "Chant, surrender and be happy." Denouncing popularized *hatha-yoga* as a mere physical discipline, I define real *yoga* as "linking to the Supreme."

"Krishna is not Indian or American. He's beyond material designations. He's the powerhouse."

After this, the chairman of the English Department looks on me as another potential timebomb. Yet he has to appear permissive to keep the staff happy in a time of inflation and Vietnam discontent. Faced with the election of Nixon, English professors are flaunting their traditional liberalism.

* * *

In New Vrindaban, we buy a 1955 Ford powerwagon for $250. Sputtering and banging and smoking, it grinds like a tank up the two mile Aghasura Road in the cold November drizzle. Aghasura Road is an obstacle worthy of Vedic heroes, a force to be reckoned with. Every

journey is an odyssey of slick mud, washed-out culverts and ruts covered with thin slivers of ice, ruts with soupy mud fillings and more mud under that—a slippery, clammy West Virginia clay impossible to shake off. Each trip involves a major battle wherein Ranandhir or Hrishikesh jump out with shovels and shout directions for me to rock the powerwagon back and forth. We are always having to stop to repair the tire chains, or to cut trees suddenly fallen in the November wind.

We buy gloves and thermal underwear, insulated boots and woolen caps. Wheeling Electric assures us we'll have light by Christmas.

We take the chainsaw and powerwagon out to the back woods, cut up some dead trees and haul them back. Since the fireplace is inadequate for heating, we buy steel oil drums and make stoves out of them. They blister from the heat.

From Reg, we understand why Foster was so willing to grant us the lease. "He doesn't expect you guys to last the winter."

* * *

We pay a local bulldozer firm ten dollars an hour to come out to grade the Aghasura Road. After some twenty hours, the mud is smooth and neatly packed.

Two weeks later, after a few rains and traversals, the old ruts reappear. Muddy Aghasura comes to life, more horrible than before.

We try to get the State Road Commission to pave the road, but it was scratched as a county road years ago. Sympathetic, they send out a man to look Aghasura over.

"This is all gonna have to be drained," he tells us, shaking his head. "Then it'll take tons of gravel to build it up. You'll pay forty thousand dollars. All 'cause you're wanting a road where a road was never meant to be."

* * *

Prabhupada writes:

"You have asked whether you may use charcoals for fuel during the winter, and since this is the simplest thing to do, certainly it is all right. For such questions, you need only use your good common sense. As for machinery at New Vrindaban, if it is helpful, take advantage of it. We are not enemies of machines. If they can be used for Krishna's service, welcome them. With nice roads, we can invite many people to New Vrindaban."

Prabhupada enjoys the good climate of Los Angeles and expects to remain there through the Christmas holidays. The Department of Immigration has granted him a permanent tourist visa.

"You will be glad to know that we have now signed a lease for a new temple for the Los Angeles center," he writes. "It is for an ex-Japanese-Buddhist temple—Spanish style—on La Cienega Boulevard, a very fine, large chapel, and now there is a program to invite many people."

Prabhupada offers to sell me two thousand copies of *Bhagavad-gita* at forty percent discount for distribution to Ohio State students. Macmillan is still promising that the book will be ready by January, 1969. We receive an advance copy. There are introductory appreciations by Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and Thomas Merton.

It is an exciting moment. Prabhupada is now an author published by New York's biggest publisher. I assure him that we'll be able to distribute two thousand in no time.

* * *

After the evening *aratik* at New Vrindaban, we sip hot milk with honey and stand around the fifty-five gallon stove. There's nothing else

to do. From time to time, Kirtanananda stokes the fire. On a battery-run tape recorder, we listen to Prabhupada's 1966 New York lectures. As the mantle dies out on the kerosene lantern, we drift asleep to visions of Second Avenue.

Prabhupada writes:

"I am so pleased that you are feeling for me and listening to my old tapes with pleasure. As you are remembering our old meeting days on Second Avenue, similarly I also remember the incidents and speak to so many friends and disciples. So our meeting was Krishna's plan. And we should always remember this plan and continue to work jointly for the advancement of the Krishna consciousness movement."

December, and still no electricity. We're going through firewood fast. Heat seeps out cracks and gaps in the old farmhouse. Feet and backs are always cold. The temperature plunges to fifteen, and there's no way to keep hands warm outside. They even stick on the icy plastic steering wheel of the powerwagon. When the ground freezes, Aghasura Road is hard, jaggy and jolting. We crash through ice and spray mud, and wonder why we're here.

In December, our first heavy snow descends.

I write Prabhupada and mention that my parents are asking me down south for Christmas. His reply:

"I think you can give up the idea of seeing your parents annually. Just prepare yourself for further advanced spiritual life. After all, our mundane relationships with father and mother, or wife and children, cannot protect us from the trap of maya. One Vaishnava poet says that in every form of life, one gets a father and mother, because without them nobody is able to get a material body. So father and mother are possible in any form of body, but only in this human form can one contact Krishna and a bona fide spiritual master. That is the highest gain of our travelling in different species of life in different planets."

I switch my plane reservation to Los Angeles. When I arrive December 13, Prabhupada is happily awaiting me in his Hayworth Avenue apartment. He has chosen a wife for me.

* * *

I enter and offer obeisances. Prabhupada is all smiles. The California climate is obviously good for him. He looks robust. A Mexican sarape is spread over his footlocker.

"But Srila Prabhupada," I begin.

"I think you should get married," he says.

"But right now ... I don't need a wife—"

"Not wife. Assistant. You require an assistant who is an expert typist to be your secretary. Such a wife will be a great asset in your writing. You prefer to be free, but a devoted wife is as good as freedom. The *grihastha* disciples—just like Shyamasundar, Mukunda and Gurudas and their wives—are doing very nicely in London. Similarly, Dayananda and his wife Nandarani are doing very nicely here. And Satsvarupa and his wife Jadurani are doing very nice in Boston. And Goursundar and Govinda dasi are going to organize Hawaii and the Pacific region. And Rupanuga Prabhu and his wife"

The matter was settled before my arrival; the girl, already picked, is named Shama dasi. I recall having seen her in the San Francisco temple. She is a tall, very pretty, blonde *brahmacharini*.

"You American boys are liking tall girls?" Prabhupada asks me, laughing.

He marries us in the La Cienega temple on Christmas Day, 1968. The feast after the wedding is magnificent. We eat beneath a flower-festooned canopy, our clothes tied together, and Prabhupada beams with happiness, flashing smile upon smile.



Śyāma dāsī, Hayagrīva's wife.



Three married couples who left to preach in London.
Mukunda and Jānakī, Gurudās and Yamunā, Śyāmasundara and Mālatī.

* * *

SWAMI SAYS PEOPLE ARE LIVING ON MOON! The Los Angeles Times reports three days after the wedding.

MAY OPPOSE ASTRONAUTS!

Prabhupada tells the astounded reporter that the moon is an upper planet inhabited by demigods.

"But with this body, you cannot land there," he says, "nor can you interfere in their business. They would be almost invisible."

This write-up provokes many strange phone calls to the temple. Surprisingly, most callers agree with Srila Prabhupada.

Prabhupada discards all propaganda about the planned moon landing.

"They will never get there by these artificial, mechanical means," he insists. "But even if they manage somehow, the demigods would kick them out."

Some people, disturbed by this, leave. But most devotees consider it unimportant, saying, "If Prabhupada says it, it's so."

End of Chapter 15

Chapter 16. Krishna, The Flower-bearing Spring

I return to West Virginia in time for a major snowstorm. Aghasura Road becomes a shimmering white path through a fantasy land of icicles. In the little farmhouse, nucleus of our transcendental village, it is impossible to keep warm. Cold air somehow seeps through the old floorboards and cuts through cracks. We stoke the woodfire in the steel oil drum. At night, the oil drum glows crimson, like a self-contained galaxy in the dark blue cold of space.

We are spared the worst northwest winds sweeping down from the Arctic and Canada, and across the plains from northern Ohio, for our wise pioneers built the little house on the eastern side of Govardhan Hill. Still, the sun rises late, reluctantly. We sit two hours in the predawn darkness, chanting *aratik mantras*, reading *Bhagavad-gita*, and stoking the fire. There are always logs to cut, brambles to break, firewood to haul in to dry before burning.

The predawn hours are the coldest. We stand wrapped in blankets before the little altar as Kirtanananda offers incense, camphor, ghee, water, handkerchief, flower, peacock fan, and yak-tail whisk to the Radha Krishna and Jagannatha Deities.

"When making *aratik* offerings," he writes Prabhupada, "is it proper to meditate on the different parts of the Lord's body?"

Prabhupada writes back no. "The Lord is actually there with you," he replies. "And you are seeing all of His bodily features, so there's no need to meditate that way. Food should be offered before *aratik*..."

Of course, this means getting up earlier to cook. We take turns tending the fire. I don't thaw out until I'm in my office in Columbus.

* * *

At the university, interest in the O.S.U. Yoga Society increases.

I offer a supplemental course at the Free University. In my eagerness, I get a reprimand from the English Department chairman, who catches me mimeographing Yoga Society handouts.

I quickly offer to pay for paper and ink, but the damage has been done. I begin to wonder about my contract renewal.

"Don't be anxious whether you are fired from your present service or not," Prabhupada writes. "Don't do anything that will unnecessarily disturb the authorities, but in all circumstances execute this Krishna consciousness program, even at the risk of dissatisfying your so-called employer master."

A department colleague informs me that Allen Ginsberg is scheduled to give a poetry reading sometime in May. He's been contracted by the Student Union in what students consider a rebellious gesture against a staid O.S.U. administration. I write Allen at his upstate New York farm and ask if he would be interested in chanting with us at a campus program.

"I have a date at O.S.U. for May 13," he replies, "and yes we should have a *sankirtan* hour there."

Prabhupada tells me that I should arrange his arrival in May to correspond with Ginsberg. "I'm so glad to learn that Mr. Ginsberg is taking some serious interest in our Hare Krishna movement," he writes. "When he actually comes into Krishna consciousness, which I expect will be in the very near future, our movement will get a great impetus."

At New Vrindaban, we are enlivened by thoughts of a mid-May visit by Prabhupada. We wait like spring buds buried beneath snow, just enduring the cold, knowing that the day will come when the ground thaws, and the sun will resurrect us.

* * *

Wheeling Electric chainsaws a swath from the ridge road down to

the creek and up to our farmhouse—a mile and a half—throws up poles, and strings cable across the creek. “Let there be light!” For the first time in history, electricity lights New Vrindaban.

No more temperamental Coleman lanterns. No more flammable kerosene lamps. No more squinting to read *Bhagavad-gita* in the early mornings.

“They have finally installed the electricity,” I write Prabhupada happily. “And it makes all the difference here. At last we can begin to make some progress.”

“Progress” is a very sunny word to use, however. Though the electricity helps in many ways, we still sit frozen and landlocked. Half the day is spent gathering wood to burn and bringing up supplies. With the powerwagon dead beside the creek, we have to walk everything up in the snow and ice, or (worse) mud and cold rain. And supplies are inevitably bulky and heavy—twenty-five pounds of sugar, cooking oil, cartons of powdered milk, mung beans, flour. Determined, we endure those frozen treks. Our back packs bulging, we walk the two miles in night blizzards even, hoping to reach the house before flashlight batteries run down.

The timid sun rises late and dim, stays low in the sky, usually behind clouds, and vanishes mysteriously around four in the afternoon. Trudging up and down Aghasura Road, we often wonder, Why here? Why not on warm Hawaiian beaches? Or California?

Prabhupada’s letters goad us on:

"The immediate necessity is to construct some simple cottages for living purposes.... Another important scheme is to start a nice printing press next spring. We have so many books to print.... Now you must construct seven temples as in old Vrindaban. We must have a school and qualified teachers for the children.o What progress have you made on living accomodations? Many devotees are ready to go there

immediately. Everything appears very bright for the future. We just have to work very sagaciously and success will surely be thereю Press or no press, we must have some houses there because many students are eager to go"

In the helplessness of our situation, Prabhupada's utopian requests keep us splitting firewood and hauling supplies up and down Aghasura. After all, a brief four centuries ago, only a few humble wigwams dotted the island of Manahattan.

Still, to us, the idea of a community seems an impossible dream. We see ourselves more often as four outcasts living in a shack. Only Prabhupada's letters hint at more. Only he can truly envision a transcendental village.

* * *

Now *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* is receiving some appreciation.

"The book is without a doubt the best presentation so far to the Western public of the teachings of Lord Krishna," Prabhupada quotes Dr. Haridas Choudhary of the Indian embassy in San Francisco.

"Now we must make propaganda to convince the colleges to present it to their students. I am happy to hear that you are selling some fifty Gitas weekly and that your Lord Chaitanya play is at last completed. It is very well done, simply a little prolonged. In London, Mukunda is ready to print a new edited version of 'Easy Journey To Other Planets.' I hope that soon Brahmananda will get our own press so we can print these books. Macmillan deletes so much that it is not possible. We shall have to publish on our own press."

* * *

As March roars in with blasts of Arctic air, we are still landlocked, vehicles still sit in the creek graveyard, and Aghasura Road remains

impassable as ever. Despite Prabhupada's encouraging letters, we feel ourselves the snail of ISKCON. From London, we hear that Shyamasundar and Mukunda are going to cut a Hare Krishna record with George Harrison and John Lennon. If the Beatles chant Hare Krishna, millions will hear.

From our new Oahu center in warm Hawaii, Prabhupada writes:

"The boys and girls in London are doing very nicely. My Guru Maharaj sent one sannyasi, Bon Maharaj, to preach in London in 1933. Although he tried for three years at the expense of my Guru Maharaj, he could not do any appreciable work. So Guru Maharaj, being disgusted, called him back. In comparison, our six young boys and girls are neither Vedantists nor sannyasis, but they are doing more tangible work. This confirms Lord Chaitanya's statement that anyone can preach provided he knows the science of Krishna."

New centers also open in Vancouver, Hamburg, Kyoto, Berkeley, Laguna Beach, Boulder, Detroit, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Washington D.C. On travelling *sankirtan*, Kirtanananda goes to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and interests students there. In Columbus, I pressure Pradyumna to find a place near campus where students can visit daily. Our two-room apartment on High Street is inadequate. When Prabhupada arrives in May, we must have a temple ready.

As our May meeting at the University approaches, Allen Ginsberg expresses some concern, writing: "Though I'm glad to chant with Swamiji, I'm not sure that a mixture of his presence and my poems will be appropriate. He may be offended by the poetry, or it may seem inappropriate to his teachings, which are more detached from sexuality and other worldly politics that I am into. On the other hand, I don't think he's ever heard me read, and that would be interesting too."

We agree that this might be inappropriate. Best chant on a different night. "I don't want to wish on him a situation where he's a captive audience to my stream of consciousness or my notoriety," Allen adds.

“You might consult him on the proprieties.”

From Hawaii, Prabhupada writes that he will arrive in Columbus on May 9 and that he can chant with Allen any day thereafter. At last! A specific date! If Allen’s poetry reading is on May 13, we can schedule a massive “chant-in” for May 12. Ranadhir begins drawing up posters.

* * *

“For your toothache trouble,” Prabhupada writes Kirtanananda, “mix common salt, one part, and pure mustard oil, enough to make a suitable paste. With this brush your teeth, especially the painful part, very nicely. Gargle in hot water, and always keep some cloves in your mouth. You don’t have to have your teeth extracted"

“You may not put the initiation beads on the cow,” he writes my wife. I am perplexed, for as yet we have no cow.

“Nor is it necessary to recite the Gayatri mantra aloud,” he adds. “It should be silent or whispered.”

To me: “Husband and wife should chant at least fifty rounds before going to sex. The recommended period is six days after the menstrual period.”

To Kirtanananda: “Delivering children is not a *sannyasi’s* business. You should not bother about it. Best thing is that the women at New Vrindaban go to a bona fide physician.” But no one’s pregnant!

Reg Dunbar at the Goat Farm presents us with thirty quarts of pickled cucumbers. Kirtanananda asks Prabhupada about them, and from Hawaii comes the hurried reply:

“So for the cucumber pickles: We should not offer to the Deity food prepared by nondevotees. Aside from this, vinegar is not good. It is tamasic, in the mode of darkness, nasty food. So I think we shall not accept these pickles.”

Kirtanananda empties all the pickles out of the Mason quart jars, then scours the jars with soap and hot water.

"I think it is not proper for Srimati Radharani to have a white night dress," Prabhupada writes. Kirtanananda buys new night clothes for the Deity. Dark blue. Gold. Beige. Pink.

"I do not understand why you still have no cows," another letter states. "New Vrindaban without cows does not look good."

George Henderson, now teaching mathematics at Rutgers, visits for a couple of days. Laughing, he recalls the time Prabhupada challenged him to display the universal form. When he leaves, he gives us a check for two hundred dollars. "Buy that cow," he says.

When Prabhupada wants a cow, Lord Krishna dictates to random souls to give in charity. And when the cow needs a cowherdsman, Lord Krishna, directing the wanderings of all living beings, sends us Paramananda and his wife Satyabhama.

* * *

Before coming to Krishna consciousness, Paramananda and Satyabhama lived at Millbrook, New York, at the community founded by Timothy Leary and his psychedelic clan. After initiation by Prabhupada, they moved to an apartment near Matchless Gifts. As soon as they heard of New Vrindaban, they decided they had to try it. "Go there and help," Prabhupada told them. "Chant and be happy."

Now, in the cold March wind, Paramananda clears bottles and garbage out of the shabby chicken coop, cuts out windows, staples plastic over the openings, and installs an oil barrel for heating. Within an afternoon, he converts the small chicken coop into a liveable dwelling and unceremoniously moves in with Satyabhama and a few boxes of books and clothes.



Paramānanda painting the farmhouse.

Satyabhama wants to teach children and cook. Paramananda is eager to raise cows and farm. He feels that the solution to Aghasura Road is simple.

"What you need, " he tells me, "is a wagon and two workhorses."

With hopeful know-how, he explains how he can harness the horses to a four-wheel wagon and bring supplies up and down the road all year, in rain, mud, ice, snow, whatever nature throws our way.

I consult Kirtanananda and Ranandhir. We all agree. Paramananda has been sent by Krishna to tend cows and conquer Aghasura. Of all of us, Paramananda is the calmest and most practical, a real man of the soil. We send him off to farm auctions to search for wagons and horses destined for the glue factory.

After repairing the pasture fence, we buy our first cow, named Kaliya by Prabhupada, a seven-year-old cow that has just lost her calf. Part Jersey and part Holstein, black with a white stripe down her nose, Kaliya is a gentle soul. She is fed by Ranandhir, milked by Paramananda, and garlanded by Satyabhama. Her big, brown, tranquil eyes tell us that she appreciates being protected from slaughter houses. Happily, her milk is rich and plentiful.

* * *

The more we battle with Aghasura, the more we realize how much simpler our lives would be on the ridge road, and we desperately try to buy property from our two neighbors, Mr. Cooke and Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson owns the two farms adjacent to us, some three hundred acres of choice property on the ridge top. Due to his farms, we are forced to use Aghasura Road. Occasionally, with Mr. Thompson's permission, we use the ridge top and drive right across to Vrindaban. Compared to Aghasura, the ridge top is a modern freeway.

We don't ask permission too often, for everyone knows that with repeated use, we can establish right of way. Mr. Thompson is a considerate neighbor, but everyone has his limits. When asked if he's interested in selling, he says, "Maybe. If I can get a good price." I ask what this might be, and he says, "Twenty thousand or so." The subject is dropped. The figure seems astronomical to us.

* * *

In Columbus, Pradyumna's house hunting has succeeded. The house is made to order. Only three blocks from campus, it stands on the fringe of Greek-columned fraternity row. A large, three-story wooden house, it can serve adequately for a temple and living quarters.

We quickly sign a year's lease and pay a deposit and $175 for the first month's rent. The landlady is most amiable. She tells us that we can move in tomorrow.

* * *

Aham ṛitūnāṁ kusumākaraḥ: "And of seasons, I am flower-bearing spring," Lord Krishna tells Arjuna.

And truly a reminder of Krishna, our first spring at New Vrindaban! First, the light green buds on the willow beside the old house appear. Then the Appalachian grass, the pungent onion grass, the green umbrellas of May apples, dandelions, and blankets of violets spread up and down the creek hollows. With the sun's return come warmer and longer days, the fading of the dull browns of winter, the greening of rolling hills, awakened hornets and flies, scurrying groundhogs, busy, talkative birds, the fresh smell of newly plowed earth.

Doors are unnailed, plastic torn off windows, the indoors emptied outdoors to bask in the purifying sun, the rooms swept and cleansed with disinfectant, floors repainted, walls whitewashed. Kirtanananda inspires the *brahmacharis* to live ascetically in the pigpen or barn, or in

a lean-to on the hillside.

Building supplies arrive, Ranandhir driving them up in the resurrected powerwagon, and Paramananda and the horses rattle up and down Aghasura Road, covered with mud, the sugar no doubt wet, the butter melted. Now at last we feel we've the upper hand of Aghasura, despite the spring rains and ever deepening ruts. Occasionally the powerwagon gets stuck, or the wagon breaks, and Paramananda and Ranandhir arrive later and muddier than usual, but they arrive. We are learning to take obstacles in stride.

"O Arjuna, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons.

They arise from sense perception, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed."

Vamandev begins repairing the upstairs quarters in the old farm house for Prabhupada. He puts up new plasterboard, lays linoleum, paints the walls and ceiling. Prabhupada's personal servants—Purushottam and Devananda—can live below and walk up the narrow stairs to serve him. Prabhupada's Deities can reside in the small upstairs room partitioned off by cherry paneling. Prabhupada can sit and contemplate his Deities, or look at the garden and willow outside. Already no one can deny that New Vrindaban has atmosphere. With satisfaction, we imagine Prabhupada's happiness—"I will forget to return to the old Vrindaban"

* * *

From Hawaii, Prabhupada flies to Los Angeles, thence to New York and Boston, where Satsvarupa has been trying to acquire a press.

"Have you bought the adjacent land yet?" Prabhupada asks via Purushottam. And we sadly have to say no.

"Perhaps I shall go to Chapel Hill, North Carolina," he writes, "and from there to Columbus and then to New Vrindaban, if it is possible, and stay there for as long as you like."

Last minute changes of plans, flight cancellations. Prabhupada doesn't have time to go to North Carolina and still attend the Ginsberg engagement May 12. North Carolina is sacrificed. He flies directly from New York to Columbus.

* * *

We gather before the arrival gates some thirty minutes before the plane lands. Surprisingly, about two hundred students from the university show up. There are also three devotee *sankirtan* parties—from New Vrindaban, Washington, and Buffalo. At the request of airport officials, we delay chanting, but as soon as the plane taxis into view, Hare Krishna begins.

Jai Sri Krishna! At last Prabhupada has arrived!

Devotees jump atop chairs to see. The students press forward to the protective glass windows through which we can watch the passengers deplane.

As usual, Prabhupada is the last to emerge. Some devotees begin throwing flowers. Then, as he enters the gate, we all offer obeisances, falling to the floor.

When we look up, we see Prabhupada standing before us, radiant, healthier, and stronger than we've ever seen him. He's obviously delighted to see so many students come to greet him.

Kirtanananda garlands him first with a string of marigolds.

"Ah, very nice," Prabhupada says. Then, looking at me: "Hayagriva Prabhu." I approach him, bow to the floor again, recite the

mantra of obeisance, touch his lotus feet, and feel his hand patting the top of my head. Yes, His Divine Grace is pleased.

Damodar from Washington and Rupanuga from Buffalo also garland him, this time with roses and gardenias. The gardenias' sweet aroma pervades the airport.

Since the Columbus reporters want to question Prabhupada, we arrange a special seat for him at the end of a corridor, where he speaks briefly.

"Are you a Buddhist?" one very confused reporter asks.

Prabhupada smiles kindly. "Buddhist and Mayavadi philosophies externally deny the existence of God and are atheistic," he explains. "One says there is no God, another says that He is impersonal, but we Vaishnavas, devotees of Krishna, are directly personal. We serve the person Krishna, and by this we are eternal gainers. Service, as you know, is not a very pleasant thing in this world, but service to Krishna is different. If you render Him service, you'll be satisfied, Krishna will be satisfied, everyone will be satisfied."

"So, just who is this Krishna?" another reporter asks.

"Come to our temple and find out," Prabhupada says, then adds that by Krishna, "We refer to God, Bhagavan, the Supreme Person."

Then Prabhupada holds up a new copy of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*.

"This *Bhagavad-gita* is most important. You should read it carefully. In it, God is speaking about Himself. We don't have to speculate or read hundreds of books. If we understand just this one book, or just one *sloka*, one verse, we understand everything. Give up your mental speculation. The laws of nature are kicking you at every moment, and you should know it. You are not the unlimited Supreme Person. Just try to hear about the Supreme from the right source."

With this, Prabhupada ends his brief arrival statement. We leave the airport and go directly to the temple on Twentieth Avenue.

Students overflow the house and stand on the sidewalk and lawn. Now, at last, our identity is well known to neighbors.

"Yes, a very nice building," he says, inspecting even the upstairs bedrooms. "So because you are sincere, Krishna is giving you all facilities. The first requirement is sincerity to become the Lord's servant. We don't have to go far. Once qualified, we can talk to the Lord from within. The Lord is beyond our sensual perception, but He can reveal Himself to us. If you are a true lover of Godhead, you see God everywhere, in your heart and also on the outside. But the Lord reveals Himself only through this *bhakti-yoga* process.

Before *kirtan*, Prabhupada takes a short rest. When he enters the *kirtan* room, the chanting and dancing stop. We offer obeisances.

"Go on with *kirtan*," he says, and we resume chanting.

We open the side windows so that students standing outside can see in. Since we are all packed tightly in the rooms, it begins getting hot. Hrishikesh fans Prabhupada with a peacock feather fan. The students stare at Prabhupada and his devotees, and strain to hear.

Prabhupada announces that his subject is *Vedanta*, the ultimate goal of knowledge. Everyone in a university is seeking knowledge of some kind. So where does all knowledge finally lead?

Citing *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, he points out that true knowledge is lost because of the degradation of this age of Kali.

"In previous ages, men were far more advanced," he says. "Arjuna, for instance. *Bhagavad-gita* was spoken on a battlefield, so you can just imagine how much time Arjuna spent studying it. At the utmost, Lord Krishna spoke the seven hundred verses in an hour, but in

this brief period Arjuna understood it all. We can hardly imagine how great a man Arjuna was. Now we are so fallen that so-called great scholars cannot understand *Bhagavad-gita*, even after many years of study. Arjuna was not a *brahmin*; he was a military man. And formerly, Vedic knowledge was *shruti*, spoken, not written down because the *brahmacharis* had such fine memories that they could remember everything on first hearing."

Some students, who are writing down notes out of habit, laugh good naturedly. "What of tape recorders?" someone asks.

"Of course," Prabhupada laughs, "you have now become so advanced that you need these modern amenities. But formerly, there was no such need. The recording device was already there in the finely developed tissues of the brain. But such powers were cultivated by celibacy and sense control."

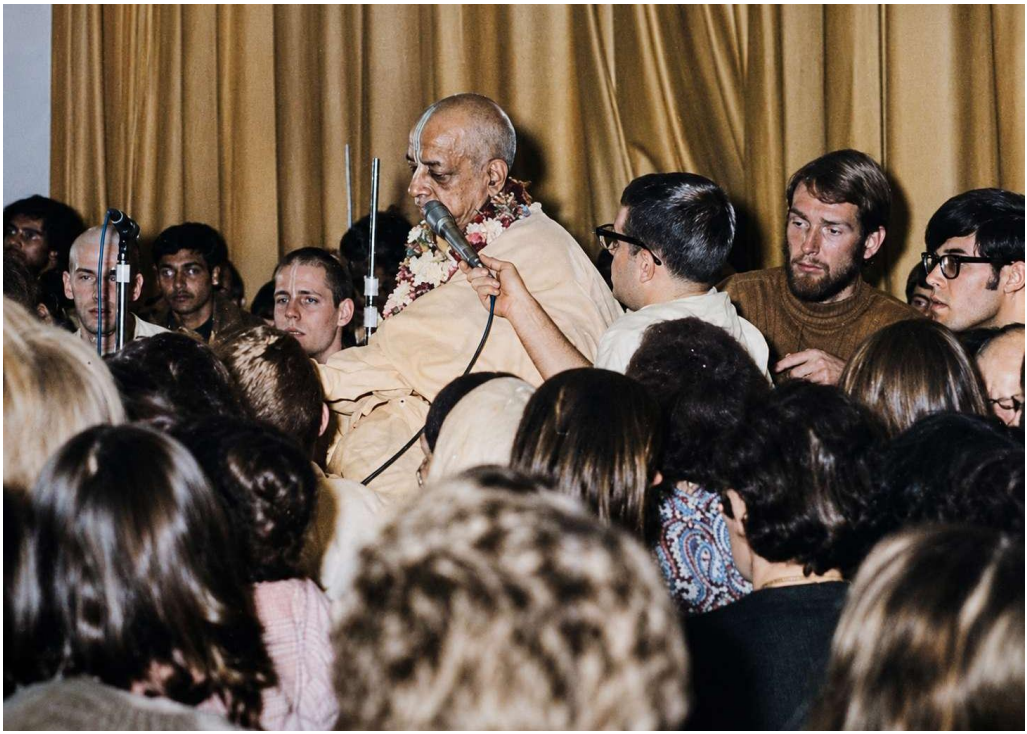
* * *

"All religions accept the fact that God is great," he continues, "but they do not know to what extent. That information is given in these vast literatures. In any case, the test of first-class religion is love of God."

"But aren't we already connected to God?" a student asks.

"Certainly. Without connection with God, we cannot even sit here. God's energies are working, and at any moment the whole material manifestation may be vanquished. It is by the mercy of God that we are living at all."

The students listen intently. They have never before heard anyone speak with such urgency and authority about God. Prabhupada seems even stronger than in 1966. He speaks with force, emphasizing certain words, meeting the philosophical issues head on. Immediately asserting the absolute authority of the *Vedas*, he points out that Vedic literature is not concerned with just planet earth but with all the planets in the universe.



Program in Columbus, Ohio, 1969.

"Lord Krishna spoke this *Bhagavad-gita* to the sun god many millions of years ago," he says. "What Lord Krishna spoke is perfectly clear. We do not need the interpretations of some mundane scholar."

In conclusion, Prabhupada humbly submits his role in the transmission of knowledge.

"Our mission is to deliver this *Bhagavad-gita* as it is, just as the postman delivers your letter as it is, and both the good news and bad news are for you. The postman's job is to deliver what is sent, and our mission is to present Krishna's message as it is. Thank you very much."

After the lecture, we serve vegetable *kachoris* with raisin chutney and fill styrofoam cups with nectar—sweet, rose-scented yogurt—a preparation Prabhupada has just taught Kirtanananda.

* * *

In the evening, Prabhupada takes hot milk in his room. All the devotees come in for an informal *darshan* —Kirtanananda, Pradyumna, Ranandhir, Hrishikesh, Paramananda, Satyabhama, Arundhuti, Vamandev, Shamadasi, Nara-narayana, Purushshottam, Devananda, and others. Present also is a young man called Luke from Akron, and a Puerto Rican named Carlos from New York, both due to take initiation, both now chanting their beads and pressing close to Prabhupada's desk.

The carpenter Vamandev raises the first question: "What of these new *gurus* who claim to be God?"

"And what if I say that I am President Nixon?" Prabhupada challenges. "Would you accept me? just tell me why not?"

"You don't have the characteristics," Vamandev says.

"That means you are not insane," Prabhupada says approvingly. "But if I say I am God and you accept me, can you begin to imagine such insanity? Double insanity. One man claims that he's God, and the

other man accepts him to be God.

"Are we not all one?" Carlos asks.

"That is a different thing. Are you one with President Nixon?"

"Yes. He's a human being."

"That may be. As human beings, you both have so much in common, but still you cannot say that you are President Nixon. In so many qualities, we are one with God, but we aren't God. Those who do not know how great God is try to claim His greatness. This is insanity, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Insanity means forgetting God. Forgetting God means material consciousness, *maya*. When a man is insane, his condition is considered abnormal. Sanity is his normal condition. *Maya* is an abnormal departure from our original Krishna consciousness. Actually, *maya* means having no existence. It just appears to be there. In *maya*, we falsely think that we are independent. But really, who's independent? Can anyone claim independence?"

"No more than proprietorship" Kirtanananda says.

"Achha!" Prabhupada smiles. "So these are all false claims, hallucinations. Everyone is thinking, 'Oh. I have so many problems.' But the only problem is, 'How can I best serve Krishna?' And Krishna is so kind that He says, 'Just chant Hare Krishna.' That's all."

There's a moment's reflective silence, finally broken by Luke, one of the boys awaiting initiation. Luke seems a big talker, big speculator, but is basically a simple farmboy.

"The Buddha's teachings are very similar to *Bhagavad-gita*," he says. Prabhupada looks at him squarely, calmly. "Do you follow

Buddha?" he asks. Luke hesitates, surprised to have the subject bounce back.

"Well... no," he admits.

"You simply talk of him?" he explodes suddenly, as if just talking of Buddha were some terrible outrage.

All eyes turn to Luke, who now seems very startled. Like all of us, he is receiving Prabhupada's mercy without realizing it.

"If you are serious about Buddha, then meditate," Prabhupada says sternly. "But you are not serious. You simply talk."

Luke glances at the floor, his face now red with embarrassment.

"Do something!" Prabhupada shouts so loudly that we all jump. "Whether you follow Christ or Buddha or Krishna, it doesn't matter! Don't just sit and talk! Follow someone! Lord Buddha is very nice. If you like, you can become a Buddhist priest and meditate. Go do it. But that is your problem. You don't do anything. You talk much. Just do something and do it perfectly."

As always, Prabhupada hits the mark. That is indeed our dilemma: to do, or not to do. Inactivity, the bane of armchair speculators.

At nine, Kirtanananda serves hot milk and sliced apples. Prabhupada happily mentions a priest with whom he chatted en route from Hawaii to Los Angeles.

"On the airplane, this Catholic priest told me, 'Swamiji, your disciples have such shining faces. "Yes,' I replied, 'they are making spiritual progress.' Krishna is the most pure. If you are impure, how can you approach purity? *Tapasya*, penance, is required. We voluntarily accept some suffering for the sake of transcendental realization. Is it not worth it?"

* * *

At four in the morning, there is an *aratik* In Prabhupada's room before his Radha-Krishna Deities. Purushottam is the *pujari*. All the initiated disciples attend and chant the *aratik mantras*. After *aratik*, we leave Prabhupada alone to continue translations of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* on his dictaphone.

Shortly after dawn, we drive him to the banks of the Olentangy River, only a few minutes away, and he takes a brisk, thirty minute walk. From time to time, he stops to comment on trees or newly blossomed May flowers. Then he returns to the temple for *prasadam* and rest.

At ten, we drive to the Student Union for a meeting with the university's Indian Association. We have a rousing *kirtan*, and the Indians partake timidly. Afterwards, they garland Prabhupada.

"We have heard so much of your work, Swamiji," President Sanyal says. "And we so appreciate your *Bhagavad-gita*."

The members of the association are wealthy, family centered, conservative, and professional. They have left India for technical training, or for a better paying job, or both.

Prabhupada's talk is strong and pointed. It is clear that he very much wants his fellow nationals to help him. Describing ISKCON's humble beginnings in New York, he points to the founding of twenty temples in less than three years.

"Many Indian students take this chanting and dancing as something trifling," he says. "That is because they are imitating and trying to advance in technology like Americans. Indians are suffering because they are by nature Krishna conscious. They are not fit to imitate the West technologically.

"And what has India offered the West? Cheaters offering *yoga* methods not intended for this age. Maybe one or two people can understand *Vedanta* or practise *hatha-yoga*, but not the majority.

"India is the land of *tapasya*, penance, but we are forgetting that. Now we are trying to make it a land of technology. It is surprising that the land of Dharma has fallen so low. Of course, it is not just India. In this age, the entire universe is degraded."

At the conclusion of the lecture, Prabhupada asks for questions, and one elderly gentleman enquires about the "reported existence of a New Vrindaban."

"Yes," Prabhupada says proudly. "We now not only have a New Vrindaban in West Virginia but also a New Jagannatha Puri in San Francisco. Americans have imported so many new cities, so why not New Vrindaban?" Prabhupada laughs, and the Indians smile appreciatively. "So, please now come forward," he challenges them, "and join this movement. You Indians especially should help New Vrindaban. Just as Lord Krishna is the supreme worshipable Deity, His *dham*, Vrindaban, is also worshipable. Now we want to make a replica Vrindaban in the West and live a simple Krishna conscious life with cow protection and agriculture. So please join us."

* * *

After returning to the temple, Prabhupada is so enlivened that instead of taking rest, he chants *bhajans* and plays harmonium in his room. I set up the tape recorder and accompany him with cymbals.

"Softly," he says, playing elaborate cadenzas on the harmonium and chanting Jiv Jago" in an exotic, minor key, his voice impassioned and pleading. He soon becomes lost in his singing, his voice rising and falling like waves crashing on rocks and sands, the harmonium chords pulling the spent waters back to the basic theme, then letting them flow again, to seek the shore.

There is no hurry. His eyes are closed, his brows intently knit in concentration. His fingers press the keys firmly, precisely.

jiv jago, jiv jago, gaurachanda bole
kota nidra jao maya-pisacira kole

He does not strive for some musical effect, but every note is marvelously correct, every vocal nuance colored just the right shade, effectively, masterfully, spontaneously.

"Lord Chaitanya is asking all living entities to wake up to Krishna consciousness." he explains when the song is over. *Jiv* means the living entity, and *jago* means 'wake up!' So Bhaktivinode Thakur has written, 'Wake up! How long will you go on sleeping in the lap of the witch Maya? In your mother's womb, you promised to cultivate Krishna consciousness during this life, but you've forgotten everything under the spell of the illusory energy.' In the womb, we suffer so severely that we pray to God for release, but once in the world, we forget. Therefore, *jiv jago* —wake up!"

When Prabhupada finishes chanting, Kirtanananda announces that Allen Ginsberg has just phoned. "He's in Columbus now," he says. "He wonders when it's best to visit."

"Anytime," Prabhupada says. "He can come now."

"I'll tell him this evening," Kirtanananda says. "Achha! We are always ready to talk of Krishna."

And with relentless energy, Prabhupada takes up the dictaphone again. We all move quietly about the house, hearing his voice with satisfaction, knowing that he is presenting the greatest literatures to a world desperately needing them.

End of Chapter 16

Chapter 17. The Guru and the Poet

In his room, Prabhupada reads from an advance copy of *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya*, which he has paid Dai Nippon Press to print. Prabhupada is very pleased.

"Now that they have done this nicely," he says, "we can make immediate plans to print our Krishna book."

Kirtanananda and Pradyumna prepare *prasadam* for distribution tomorrow. New announcements are posted on campus: SWAMI BHAKTIVEDANTA AND ALLEN GINSBERG: A NIGHT OF KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS IN COLUMBUS. MAY 12. TRANSCENDENTAL PASTIMES. ECSTATIC ILLUMINATIONS.

Prabhupada talks about the financing of "the Krishna book," which is to be a summary of the Tenth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, dealing specifically with the pastimes of Lord Krishna in Vrindaban and Mathura. George Harrison is particularly interested and has offered to donate printing expenses.

"Just see how these books are attracting," Prabhupada says. "My Guru Maharaj always said that books are the big *mridanga*."

At nine p.m., Allen Ginsberg enters. He has just flown in from Louisville, Kentucky. Concluding a long tour of college poetry readings, he is eager to return to his Cherry Valley farm in upstate New York. When he sees Prabhupada, he smiles broadly.

"Hare Krishna!" he says. As always, Allen touches Prabhupada's feet, offering obeisances, then sits cross-legged on the floor. "So, we'll sing tomorrow?"

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "At noon today we had some meeting in the university. *Kirtan*. Wherever we go, there's *kirtan* and speaking. You've seen our book, *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya*?" He hands Allen

his advance copy. Allen handles it with respectful curiosity, first looking at the color paintings.

"ISKCON published? Printed where?"

"Japan," Prabhupada says.

"Printed in Japan. Beautiful. Very industrious." Then, grinning: "It's marvelous!"

"The next book is coming," Prabhupada says. "*Nectar of Devotion*."

"What will that be? Your own writing?"

"No. An authorized translation of Rupa Goswami's book *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*. Rupa Goswami was Lord Chaitanya's principal disciple. He wrote immense literatures."

Allen thumbs through the book, expressing interest in certain chapters. He admits that he's not very familiar with the Chaitanya school. His India was one of impersonalists, Shivaites, hippy prophets, Buddhists.

"Do you remember a man named Richard Alpert?" he asks suddenly.

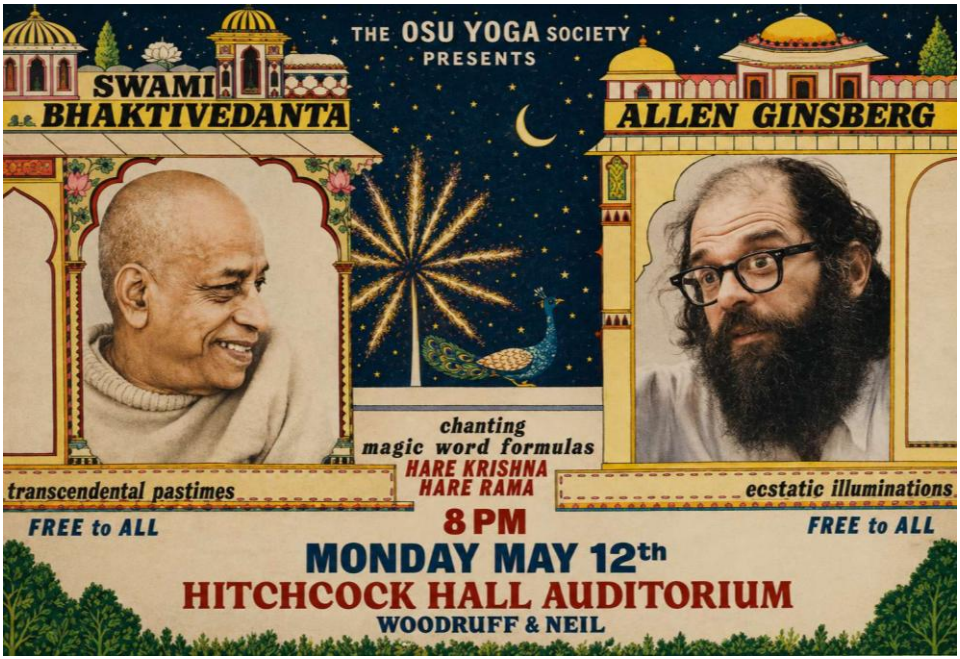
"No," Prabhupada says.

"He used to work with Timothy Leary in Harvard," Allen says. "Then he went to India and found a *guru*. Now he's a devotee of Hanuman. We were talking about *maya* and the present condition of America, and he said that his *guru* told him that LSD was a Christ of the Kali-yuga for Westerners."

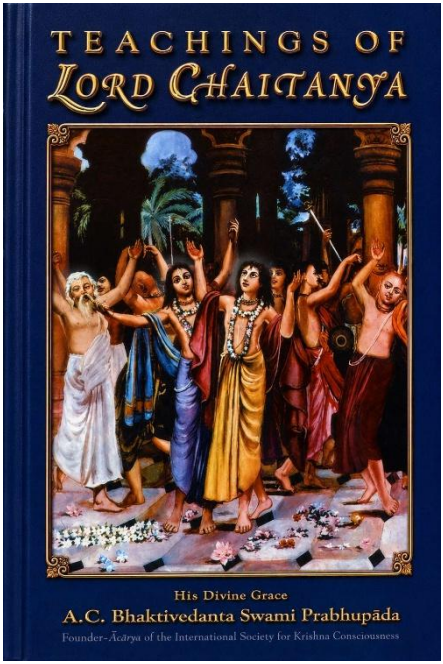
"How is that?" Prabhupada asks.

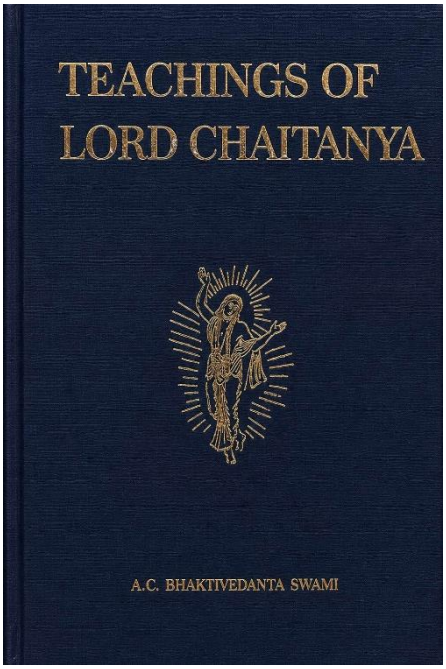


Śrīla Prabhupāda and Allen Ginsberg.

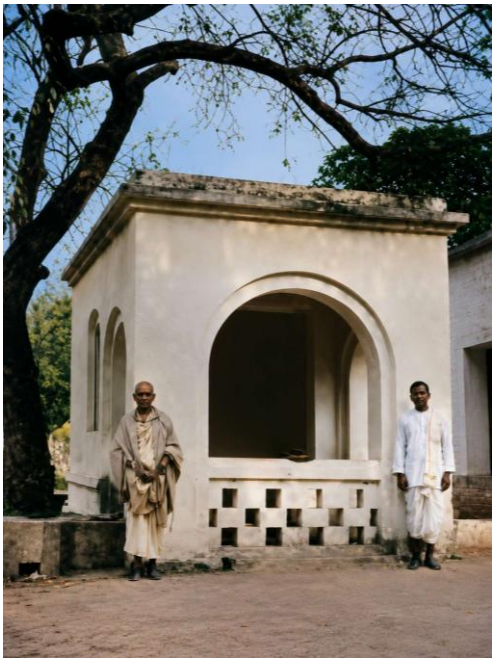


Advertisement for the evening program, May 12, 1968.









Dust jacket and book cover, along with several photographs from the book.
"Teachings of Lord Caitanya."
Dai Nippon Publishing, Japan, 1968.

“Well,” Allen goes on, “as Kali-yuga gets more intense and as attachment gets thicker and thicker, salvation has to become easier and easier.”

“Yes,” Prabhupada says. “That is also the version of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. But the process is *kirtan*, not LSD.”

“Well...” Allen says, hesitating. “Well, the reasoning is that for those who will only accept salvation in a purely material, chemical form, Krishna has the humor to emerge as a pill.”

The devotees’ eyes widen with concern. Prabhupada just smiles and shakes his head.

“If it’s material, “ he says, “where is your salvation? It is illusion.”

“The subjective LSD effect,” Allen says, “is to cut out attachment.”

“But if you’re attached to some material chemical,” Prabhupada counters, “how are you cutting attachment? If you accept help from matter, how are you free of it?”

Allen frowns reflectively, as if struggling to reconcile opposites.

“The subjective experience is that while intoxicated on LSD, you realize that it’s a material pill and that—well, that it really doesn’t matter.“

Prabhupada again shakes his head. “That is risky,” he says. “Very risky.”

Still, Allen obviously would like somehow to convince Prabhupada of the value of the psychedelic movement, and perhaps receive a condoning nod. “So, if LSD is a material attachment,” he says, “which I think it is, then isn’t the Hare Krishna *shabda* also?”

"No," Prabhupada says. "*Shabda*, or sound, is spiritual. Originally, sound produced the creation; therefore sound is originally spiritual. And from sound, sky developed; from sky, air developed; from air, fire developed; from fire, water, and from water, land."

"So what was the first sound, traditionally?"

"The Vedas say Om," Prabhupada says. "God and His sound are nondifferent, absolute. I may say, 'Mr. Ginsberg,' but this sound and you are a little different. But God is not different from His energy. *Shakti*, energy, and *shakti-makta*, the energetic, are nondifferent. Just like fire and heat. Fire can be differentiated from heat, but they are integral."

"Then is the sound Krishna and Krishna Himself not different in all circumstances?"

"Yes," Prabhupada says, "but it's a question of my appreciation, realization, and purity. If we vibrate the sound Krishna, we immediately contact Krishna. Because Krishna is pure spirit, I immediately become spiritualized. If you touch electricity, you immediately become electrified. So, by vibrating Krishna, you become Krishnized, and when you're fully Krishnized. you don't return to this material existence. You remain with Krishna."

"The impersonalists would say 'merge,'" Allen says.

"That's less intelligent, Prabhupada says flatly. "Merging does not mean losing individuality. When a green bird enters a green tree, he appears to be merging, but the bird has not lost his individuality. As Krishna tells Arjuna, we are all individual persons in the past, in the present, and in the future. Individuality is our nature and is never lost. Therefore our proposition, *bhakti-marga*, is to keep individuality and agree. Our surrender means we agree with Krishna in everything, although we are individuals. If Krishna says that we have to die, then we die—out of love. So merging means merging in total agreement.

That is the perfection of liberation: to retain our individuality and agree with God totally. We can come to this point immediately, or after many, many births."

"And you believe literally in rebirth?" Allen asks. "Yes. What is the difficulty?"

Prabhupada sits erect, looking frankly at Allen. There seems to be no difficulty at all. "I just don't remember having been born before," Allen says.

"You might not remember your childhood," Prabhupada says, "but that doesn't mean you didn't have one. Don't you remember the time when you were a small boy?"

"Certain things."

"Or do you remember when you were in your mother's womb?"

"No."

"Does that mean that you were not?"

"No."

"Then your not remembering is not a reason for denial. The body changes, but I remain. We've changed bodies, but this doesn't mean that we're different persons."

Again, Allen frowns, scratches his beard pensively. "It's that I've never heard any reasonable or even thrilling descriptions of previous incarnations or births," he complains. "I've never heard anything that's actually made me stop and think, 'Ah! That must be it!'"

"And why not? You've experienced that your body has developed from the size of a pea to this point. What's so astonishing about

changing this body and taking on another pea body?"

"What's hard to understand," Allen says, "is whether there's any continuity of consciousness from one body to another."

"If you don't understand," Prabhupada says, "you must consult some great authority. No?"

"No," Allen says emphatically, shaking his head. "Not enough to make me dream of it at night. No. Not enough to make me love it. Words are not enough. Authority is not enough to make me love it.

Authority. From the very beginning, this has been the central point of contention. Before Prabhupada's submission to Vedic authority, Allen is still the teenage rebel.

"You do not accept authority?" Prabhupada asks, seeming like a little boy incredulously asking another boy, "You don't obey your mother?"

"Not enough to love," Allen says, growing excited.

"No, apart from love," Prabhupada says. "Consult. Consult."

"It's not that I don't accept authority," Allen says. "It's just that I can't even understand an authority that says that I'm there when I don't feel myself there."

"But if you're in legal trouble, you consult a lawyer," Prabhupada says, "and if you're sick, you consult a doctor."

"In America, we've had a great deal of trouble with authority," Allen complains. "Here it is a special problem."

"No, that's misunderstanding. Authority must be accepted. A child accepts authority when he asks, 'Mother, what is that?' Asking is a way

of acquiring knowledge. The *Vedas* tell us that if we want to understand the science of God, we must go to *guru*."

"And do you understand your previous lives from the descriptions in authoritative texts, or from introspection?"

"We collaborate," Prabhupada says. "*Sadhu shastra guru vakya*. We have to test everything from three physicians —the *sadhu*, or holyman, the scriptures, and the *guru*. These three should not contradict but collaborate."

"So what is the difference between the holyman and scripture?"

"None. We shouldn't accept any man as a spiritual master or *sadhu* if he doesn't agree with the statements of the scriptures. He should be rejected."

There's a long silence. Everyone waits for Allen to speak, but he only sighs in resignation. He's just come to loggerheads with authority.

* * *

We discuss tomorrow night's program. Allen tells Prabhupada that at poetry readings he has been chanting "*Ragupati Raghava Raja Ram*" and "*Gopala, Gopala, Devakinandana, Gopala*" to give the students a little variety.

"There's no harm," Prabhupada says, "but Hare Krishna must be chanted. *Kirtan* in the beginning and at the end, and in the middle you can discuss Krishna consciousness."

"I think you'd better speak," Allen says. "You're more eloquent on the subject, and you might not like what I say."

"So. tell about what you're experiencing. And I will also speak. You have Krishna's blessings upon you. You are not an ordinary man.

"I'm not certain that I'm worthy of that," Allen says, laughing.

"That's all right," Prabhupada says, "but I know you're not an ordinary man. *Yad yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ*."

"Well, since the car crash, I've stopped smoking," Allen says. "But I haven't stopped eating meat."

"Stay with us three months, Prabhupada says, "and you'll forget all that. Just come with your associates to New Vrindaban, and we shall live together. You'll forget *maya* and become fully Krishna conscious."

"Well, we've a farm now in upstate New York, a vegetarian table, a cow and goats—"

"Economically, if a man has a cow and four acres of land, he has no problems," Prabhupada says. "That's the program we want to start in New Vrindaban. A cow and four acres. Then all the factories will close. There's a proverb that agriculture is the noblest profession, is there not?"

"Yes."

"And Krishna Himself was a cowherd boy. And according to the *Vedas*, a man's wealth is estimated according to his grains and cows.

"Until the last century, at least, man has been living that way for twenty to thirty thousand years."

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "Minimize bodily necessities. Just take enough to keep the body fit for Krishna consciousness. Plain living and high thinking."

We decide to tune the harmoniums in the morning. I assure Allen that there will be sufficient microphones to prevent him from getting laryngitis.

Kirtanananda serves hot milk and plates of diced cantaloupe drizzled with honey.

"I've been learning to write music," Allen tells Prabhupada. "My *guru* was a poet named William Blake. You know Blake?"

I'm surprised to hear Prabhupada say yes.

"He's a lot like Kabir," Allen says, encouraged. "I've been learning to meditate by singing poems by Blake, poems I've put to music."

"I can give you many songs," Prabhupada says, happy to Krishnaize everything.

Allen asks if he'd like to hear one of the Blake songs, and Prabhupada says yes. Pumping a steady, lively drone on his portable harmonium, Allen sings Blake's "To Tizrah." As he sings, Prabhupada looks like a delighted child being entertained, his eyes wide, his smile broad. Here, at least, in a kind of hodge-podge, hurdy-gurdy *mantra-bhakti*, there's agreement. Allen is accepting the authority of Mr. Blake.

When Allen chants, "It is raised! A spiritual body!" Prabhupada says, "He believes in a spiritual body! That is nice. That is Krishna consciousness."

"He apparently fits into what the West calls the Gnostic tradition, having *bhakti* ideas related to the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Similar cosmology. Blake was my teacher."

"He did not give much stress to this material body?" Prabhupada asks.

It suddenly occurs to me that Prabhupada thinks that Allen has personally met Blake. After all, "*guru*" usually implies this.

"Well, he didn't toward the end of his life," Allen says.

Allen then sings another Blake song, this time "The Chimney Sweeper." I can sense that the devotees are fearing that Prabhupada is being offended by some mad poet. But Prabhupada smiles and claps his hands.

"And by came an angel who had a bright key," Allen sings, "and he opened the coffins and set them all free "

After this song, Purushottam announces that it's five to eleven. "Let everybody retire," Allen says.

Prabhupada offers Allen two flower garlands strung around the photograph of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. Allen accepts them, offers obeisances and bids farewell till the next day.

* * *

When Purushottam points out that Mr. Ginsberg represents certain "hippy values," Prabhupada says, "Yes, that may be, but he is appreciating Hare Krishna, and on that point we agree. He is chanting Hare Krishna publicly, and if he goes on, then all these *anarthas*—unwanted things—will fall away. He will see them all as stool."

* * *

In the morning, just after Prabhupada has finished a light fruit and milk breakfast, Allen returns. Prabhupada acknowledges his obeisances—"Jai!"—and immediately suggests that he write poems about Krishna. Then he mentions that one of the peculiar qualifications of a devotee is that of lunacy.

"The poet, the lover and the lunatic," Prabhupada laughs. "The Krishna lover is also another kind of lunatic or poet, you see."

"Except that writing of Krishna would mean concentrating all my consciousness on one single image of Krishna," Allen says.

"Not image," Prabhupada corrects.

"Well," Allen smiles, "the one single thought, or name, or feeling, or awareness..."

"Yes, and to that end we're engaging all these boys and girls in a variety of duties." Prabhupada gestures to the devotees running about tending the Deities, cleaning, arranging, intent as bees. "For us, sleeping is a waste of time. The Goswamis used to sleep for only a half hour and were always engaged in Krishna consciousness. They have written thousands of books, and when they weren't writing of Krishna, they were chanting or talking of Him, not allowing *maya* time to enter."

"Who's the most perfect Vaishnava poet?" Allen asks. "Mirabai?"

"In India she's very popular," Prabhupada says. "Most of her poems are written in Hindi. She was a devotee. She saw Jiva Goswami and wrote many poems."

"Did she ever meet Lord Chaitanya?"

"No, but she appreciated the fact that He is Krishna. And her life was also exemplary. Her father gave her a small Krishna doll to play with, and in time she developed love of Krishna as her husband."

"And Ananda Mayima? What is her position?"

"Impersonalist. She's not a devotee. There are many impersonalists who take advantage of Vaishnavism, saying, 'Chaitanya's path, Shankara's math.' That is, follow the *bhakti* principle of Chaitanya, but ultimately accept the impersonalist conclusion of Shankara."

"Which is—?"

"Shankara's purpose was to defeat Buddhism, and to do so he preached an impersonalist philosophy, stressing Brahman. Buddha

appeared in order to put an end to animal killing done in the name of Vedic ritual. In *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, he is accepted as the ninth incarnation of Krishna."

"And the tenth?"

"Kalki."

"And what is Kalki's nature?"

"Kalki comes just like a prince in royal dress, on horseback, killing all rascals with a sword. No more preaching. Simply killing."

Allen laughs, evidently pleased with the idea of a Hindu Second Coming.

"You may laugh," Prabhupada says seriously, "but when Kalki comes, no one will have the brain to understand God."

"No brain?"

"People will be so dull. After all, it requires a little brain power to understand. Only when you are fully joyful in *bhakti-yoga* and freed from all material hankering can you understand God. Understanding God isn't such a cheap thing. Not understanding, people say that God is this or that. When Krishna Himself comes, they reject Him. They prefer to create their own God."

"And when will Kalki come?" Allen asks, still pursuing an apocalypse.

"At the end of Kali-yuga. Then Satya-yuga begins."

"Which is—?"

"*Satvic* means pious. People in Satya-yuga will be pious, truthful and long-lived."

"And are those the people who remain, or who are created out of the destruction?"

"It will not be complete annihilation," Prabhupada says. "The pious will remain. *Paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya cha duskritam*. The miscreants will be killed, and the few pious will remain."

"Do you think of this in terms of a historical event that will occur in the lifetime of your disciples?"

"No. This will happen at least 400,000 years from now. By that time, my disciples will be with Krishna."

"Jai!"

"And those who will not follow them," Prabhupada adds, smiling, "will see the fun."

And as Prabhupada laughs, I imagine Lord Kalki sweeping the world on a great white horse, severing heads as easily as a child stomps ants.

"Will people still be chanting Hare Krishna in 400,000 years?" Allen asks.

"No," Prabhupada says. "Hare Krishna will be finished on this earth within ten thousand years."

"So what will be left?"

"Nothing. There will be, 'I'll kill you and eat you,' and, 'You'll kill me and eat me.' In this way, we'll have full facility for meat eating. There will be no milk, no grain, fruit or sugar. Still, Krishna is very kind." Prabhupada shakes with laughter. "Yes, very kind. He gives full facility. 'All right, why eat cows and calves? Eat your own sons.' Yes, just like serpents, they'll eat their own offspring. Like tigers. There will

be no more preaching, no brain to understand preaching, no preacher. Civilization gone to the dogs, they say. And then Kalki will come and say, 'All right, let Me kill you to save you.

"Do you also see this as an actual historical event? That is, Hare Krishna chanting will diminish in ten thousand years?"

"Oh yes, but now it will increase."

"Until?"

"Ten thousand years, then diminish. People will take advantage of Hare Krishna for the next ten thousand years."

"Then this is like the last rope," Allen says, "the last gasp."

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "The duration of Kali-yuga is 432,000 years, of which we've passed five thousand. There's a balance of 427,000, and out of that, ten thousand is nothing."

Allen shakes his head, as if bewildered by such cosmic calculations. In the Western tradition, long spans of time are considered uninteresting. The Second Coming is always just around the corner.

"But where is all this stated?" he asks.

"In the last canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* there are descriptions, Prabhupada says. "For instance, it's said that in Kali-yuga, marriage will be performed simply by agreement. And people will think they're beautiful just because they wear long hair. Also, it's mentioned that the Germans will become kings and that the English and Mohammedans will occupy India. Many incarnations are also foretold, Lord Chaitanya and Lord Buddha being two."

Then, to Allen's surprise, Prabhupada points out that Lord Buddha engaged in "transcendental cheating" just to trick the atheists into

worshipping God in the form of Buddha.

"Sometimes a father has to cheat his child," Prabhupada says, "for the child's own welfare. Especially if the child is insistent on some point."

As Allen and Prabhupada converse, more devotees arrive from Buffalo and New York City. Devotees I've never seen before introduce themselves and offer to help. Kirtanananda puts them to work in the kitchen and sends them out to collect boxes to cart *prasadam* onto campus.

The more Allen and Prabhupada talk, the more it becomes obvious that there are questions that Allen wants cleared up before the campus meeting. I know how he feels. When he is with Prabhupada, his reservations about Krishna evaporate. But when he leaves that effulgent presence, the dark clouds of doubt return. Again, Allen tries to clear away the clouds for good.

"It's just difficult," he says, "for me to conceive of vast numbers living a Hindu-language-and-food-based monastic life here in America. Now there are a number of Krishna temples firmly rooted, and I think they will continue"—Allen's expression is pained as he wrestles with words, trying to speak both truthfully and tactfully. "But I'm wondering about the future of a religion as technical as this, so complicated, requiring so much—eh, sophistication in terms of diet, daily ritual, *aratik, ekadasi* and all that you've been teaching. Just how far can this spread by its very complexity?"

Complexity. Sophistication. When Allen first heard Prabhupada speak in New York, he used the word "esoteric."

"First of all," Prabhupada says, "you must understand that we're trying to make people Krishna conscious. Therefore our program is to engage people twenty-four hours a day."

"The orthodox Jews also have a very heavy, complicated, moment by moment ritual for that same purpose," Allen says, "to keep them conscious of their religious nature. And that has maintained a small group of Jews over the centuries. But really, how far can total Krishna devotion, act by act, all day, spread? How many people can that encompass in a place like America? Or are you intending to get only a few devotees—like several hundred or a thousand—who would be solid and permanent?"

"Yes! That's my aim."

Allen looks startled. No one in America starts a religious movement without hopes of converting everybody. Prabhupada perceives his surprise.

"This is because Krishna consciousness is not possible for everyone," he explains, almost apologetically, not wanting to offend Allen's democratic notions. "In *Bhagavad-gita* we learn that after many births and deaths, the man of wisdom finally surrenders to Krishna. It's not possible for a large body of people to grasp this. You see?"

Obviously, Allen would like Prabhupada to agree with his own democratic beliefs, but politically Prabhupada is a Vedic monarchist. The devotee-king should rule.

"Understanding Krishna is not a very easy thing," Prabhupada continues. "Krishna says, 'Out of many thousands among men, one may endeavor for perfection, and of those who have achieved perfection, hardly one knows Me in truth.' So, Krishna consciousness is not easy because Krishna is the last word of the Absolute Truth. But Lord Chaitanya is so munificent that He has given us an easy process, this Hare Krishna chanting."

"Then your plan here in America is to set up centers so that those who are concerned can pursue their studies and practise a ritual?"

“I personally have no ideal ambitions,” Prabhupada says. “But since life’s goal is to come to Krishna consciousness, there must be some society devoted to this end. It is not that we expect everyone to come. Our mission is to inform intelligent people that sense gratification is not the aim of life.”

“Now in America there’s a bankruptcy of sense satisfaction,” Allen says. “Everybody agrees.”

“There must be,” Prabhupada says.

“Our civilization has come to the end of its possibilities materially,” Allen says, “and everybody understands that. It’s in the New York Times editorials as well as the ISKCON journals. There’s a population explosion, and everybody is looking for an alternative to material extension. Now, my question is this: Is the mode of life that you’re proposing adaptable to many, many people?”

“I’ve already said that it’s not for many, many people,” Prabhupada answers calmly, again leaving Allen with the democratic masses.

“But there is a thirst by many, many people for an alternative, he insists.

“If they’re actually thirsty, they can adopt this Krishna consciousness,” Prabhupada says simply. “What’s the difficulty?”

“There’s an aesthetic difficulty,” Allen says. “There should be some flower of the American language to communicate in.”

“Therefore we’re seeking your help,” Prabhupada says.

“Well, I haven’t found a way,” Allen admits. “I’m still chanting Hare Krishna.”

“Yes,” Prabhupada concludes. “That is also my view.”

* * *

As noon approaches, devotees crowd into the room until there is no sitting space left. They even crowd around the doors and windows, eager to catch some rare pearls from Prabhupada, or see the famous poet converted.

"At least I've come to America with this view," Prabhupada continues, "now that America is on the summit of material civilization. Americans are not poverty stricken, but they are searching after something. Therefore I have come, saying, 'Take this, and you'll be happy.' If America takes to Krishna consciousness, so will other countries, because America now leads. And exalted persons like you should especially try to understand. Even a child can chant Hare Krishna. What is the difficulty?"

"But there are difficulties," Allen says, "for many people. Following the rituals in this temple, for instance."

"All my students are following," Prabhupada says, "and the movement is spreading."

"But it requires an adaptation of Indian dress."

"That is not very important. "And Indian food."

"It is not Indian food," Prabhupada corrects. "We are eating fruits, grains, and vegetables. Do you mean to say that this is Indian food?"

"But—"Allen looks vainly to the devotees for understanding. "But—the curries!"

"You may boil only," Prabhupada suggests. "It's not necessary to like our taste. You can cook vegetables and prepare fruits, grains and milk to your own taste. Of course, you cannot offer meat to Krishna. But apart from this, what is the difference?"

“Well,” Allen ponders, “the food is basically the same material.”

“Yes. Just the style may be different. We are not prohibiting. Just adjusting.”

Adjusting. Allen seems to mull this over as he looks at the clean-shaved devotees, so different from Ohio State fraternity boys and San Francisco hippies. Is it only a question of adjustment?

“There’s a limit as to how much the pronunciation of Krishna will spread, I think,” Allen ventures. “No limit,” Prabhupada says. “You can pronounce the word any way you want.”

“Rather, there’s a limit until the word becomes as common in English as any other English word.”

“It’s already in the dictionary,” Prabhupada says. “What more do you want?”

“A large, single, unifying religious movement in America,” Allen says frankly.

“So, here is Krishna, the all-attractive,” Prabhupada says. “What do you want or expect from the Supreme, the all-unifying? Everything can be found in Krishna: opulence, beauty, wisdom, renunciation, strength. He is the unifying center of all.”

There is a long silence, and again the devotees look to Allen for some sign of surrender.

“Well, everything you say is beautiful,” Allen finally says. “But—but I’m not even convinced!”

“No?!” Prabhupada is genuinely surprised. “Why not? You’re intelligent. You’re a recognized popular poet. I take it you’re intelligent. You’re chanting.”

“The chanting is almost a physical body movement,” Allen says, “rather than—”

“That may be,” Prabhupada interrupts, brushing all this aside, “but your intelligence is sufficient for understanding. This is not sentimentalism, nor bluffing, nor money-making business. You know that from the beginning I came single-handed and chanted. That’s all. I never asked anyone for money.”

“That was never in question,” Allen laughs. “What was in question was the universe.

“I’m just some newly come foreigner,” Prabhupada continues. “Who cares for me? You’re a popular American leader. If you recommend Hare Krishna, people will join.”

“Well, I’ve been chanting Hare Krishna on this continent beginning in Vancouver in July, 1963,” Allen says, “and I’m finding there’s a limitation to the people joining the chant. It’s strange and new to people here. As it becomes more familiar, it might spread more. Part of the limitation is due to a natural resentment or resistance. People want a prayer in their own tongue, their own language. I don’t know. For the same reason, an American Indian chant wouldn’t take hold, nor even a Latin chant. So, is it possible to find an American *mantra*?”

“*Mantra* cannot be manufactured,” Prabhupada says. “It is not American or Hindu. It is transcendental. Like *omkara*.”

“You think the very nature of the sound is transcendental?”

“Yes.”

“*Om* is an absolutely natural sound from the throat to the mouth,” Allen says, “and yet even *Om* sounds foreign to us. It’s hard to get people to chant *Om*. I tried in Chicago with both *Om* and *Hare Krishna*.”

"But there's no alternative," Prabhupada says, laughing.

"No. We haven't been able to think of one yet," Allen says. "Some people have suggested, 'God, God, God,' but that doesn't have the right ring."

"Who's going to chant that five minutes?" Kirtanananda asks. "Well, you could almost do 'Amen, amen,'" Allen says. "That's not English."

"No, but it's known in English. And maybe Krishna could become as well known as God or Amen." We look up Krishna in the dictionary and find that He is next to Kris Kringle.

"He's next to Santa Claus," Allen says.

"Yes," Prabhupada notes with satisfaction. "Yes. Krishna is the center of all, the father of everyone. Not only human beings, but plants and animals as well. *Sarva-yoniṣu kaunteya mūrtayaḥ sambhavanti*."

"But what do you do when different religious groups claim to be the center?" Allen asks.

"We welcome all religions," Prabhupada says. "We don't decry any religion. Our point is love of Godhead. Krishna is love, all-attractive, and we want to be attracted by Krishna, just as iron is attracted to some magnetic force. That is the test of true religion—how much have you enhanced your love of God? Call Him Krishna or something else. What you call Him doesn't matter."

"Then, do you think that the Hare Krishna *mantra* could serve as an intermediary *mantra* to link the religious tendencies both of Christian and Moslem religions?"

"Yes. Any religion. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says that you don't even have to chant the name of Krishna. He does say, 'If you have no

suitable name for God, here. Chant Hare Krishna!'"

In the temple room, bells suddenly announce noon *aratik*. Prabhupada looks about the crowded room. The devotees offer obeisances and begin leaving.

"Let's tune the harmoniums," I suggest.

"Yes, we have to work on the music boxes," Allen says. "We have to start material preparations for the evening."

"That is not material," Prabhupada says, smiling. "Here we have nothing material."

"Ah yes! *Shabda* preparations," Allen corrects himself.

"*Shabda* is original and spiritual. *Shabda Brahman*. We have to understand that there is nothing material. Everything is spiritual. That must be our vision."

"Jai!" Allen exclaims.

"Jai Sri Krishna!" Prabhupada says.

We offer Prabhupada obeisances, then take the harmoniums out on the porch for tuning.

* * *

I quickly see the error in scheduling the 750-seat Hitchcock Auditorium instead of the basketball court. The front doors are blocked, jammed with students crowding sidewalks and stairs. Inside, all seats are taken, but students squeeze into the clearing below stage and along the aisles and balconies—all in violation of fire codes. They clap hands, shout, and wave incense sticks. Strawberry and frangipani.

It's not a typical O.S.U. Yoga Society meeting. It's a midwestern be-in, a gathering, a happening. It's Haight-Ashbury two years later.

Ranadhir and Hrishikesh run in circles trying to distribute *Bhagavad-gita*. It's too chaotic to try to post devotees at the doors. Instead, we press through the crowds to sell books.

"We're number one! We're number one!" the students begin chanting.

"Krishna's number one," Allen says as we climb onto the stage with the harmoniums.

The cheering gets louder as Allen begins regulating the microphones. "Hare Krishna! Testing!" I notice some of my freshmen in the front rows; I've assigned an optional 500-word theme based on the meeting. Students sit knee to knee in the aisles. Someone brings folding chairs to the side stage for faculty. Devotees arrange roses and buttercups from New Vrindaban around the dais.

"About two thousand made it in," Pradyumna tells me. "They've closed off the doors now."

Allen pumps out his familiar hurdy-gurdy harmonium drone. He sits on a mat on the floor, one microphone buried in the harmonium keyboard, another in his beard.

"Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare," Allen chants, his voice loud and heavy, chanting the same tune he chanted two years ago in the Avalon Ballroom. But now he's not chanting to drug-hazy hippies and Hell's Angels. The healthy corn-fed faces of blond, blue-eyed midwesterners are chanting back.

* * *

By the time Prabhupada arrives, all the students are chanting. He

enters from behind the stage, heralded by devotees carrying flowers and incense, clashing cymbals, pounding mridangas. As he walks up the platform and sits on the dais, Allen brings the chant to an end.

"Very good. Don't stop. Go on with the *kirtan*," Prabhupada says.

A devotee hands Prabhupada his cymbals, and Allen asks him to lead.

Prabhupada draws himself erect. *Ching ching ching*, the cymbals clash. His brow furrows in concentration as he chants "Vande Hum,"

"Sri Krishna Chaitanya" and then Hare Krishna. His melody, slower and not as showy as Allen's, is easier to follow. The students pick it up quickly.

Prabhupada stands and raises his hands, inviting the students also to stand and dance. The response is immediate. Students in the aisles are first to their feet, then students in the rows and balconies arise. There is little room for dancing; a spontaneous bounce catches hold instead. As Prabhupada bounces on the dais, the students bounce also. As he waves his arms, they wave theirs. He leads them as a maestro conducts an orchestra, until gradually the inherent spiritual rhythm of the *mantra* itself prevails. We can no longer hear Prabhupada—just the chanting, the clapping, the pounding on chairs.

As in a dream, I see my students before me dancing and chanting in ecstasy. Sandra Hunsaker, nursing major, clapping, her eyes closed. Jeff Horner, in agriculture, chanting so loud I see blue veins pop in white skin. Pretty, buxom, fresh-scrubbed Marilyn Butler, swaying to Sanskrit rhythms.

Prabhupada throws marigolds from his garland. The students shout, "Here! Here!" and scramble for the gold prizes. Allen continues pumping the harmonium, his head wagging back and forth, sweating under the lights, the devotees pounding *mridangas*, the cymbals still

heard over the chant, but loudest of all the young voices empowered by the *mantra*, not even knowing the meaning of the words.

Then somehow, as remarkably as it began, it all ends, and Prabhupada's amplified voice echoes the praise of the *gurus*.

* * *

"The amazing fact is that everybody was able to get up and dance, leaping out of their skins almost, after sitting frozen," Allen says, speaking quickly into the microphone. "When ancient rhythms are flowing through everybody's body, then certainly we desire to dance and sing rather than sit frozen. But such is the nature of our conditioning in this Kali-yuga"

Allen then draws an ecological picture of Kali-yuga—part Vedic, part Ginsberg—as an age of robots, doom and pollution. After a brief synopsis of the age of iron, he introduces Prabhupada.

"I have known Swami Bhaktivedanta for about three years," he says, "since he settled in the Lower East Side, New York, which is my neighborhood. It seemed to me like a stroke of great intelligence for him to come, not as an uptown swami but as a real down-home street swami, and make it on the street in the Lower East Side, and also open a branch on Frederick Street in San Francisco, right in the center of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood....

"It's strange that such a far-out and ritualized Indian form should take root in the United States a little more naturally than the more Protestant Vedanta Society or the extremely rigorous Zen groups. I think partly it's due to the magnanimity, or generosity, or the old-age charm, wisdom, cheerfulness of Swami Bhaktivedanta, his openness of heart, his willingness to come down into the street, and his sense of his own divinity and the divinity of others around him. It is Swamiji himself who has made it possible for the *bhakti-yoga* cult of India to be planted very firmly here in America."

Allen then defers to Prabhupada to "explain his divine self."

* * *

Now Prabhupada receives the students' full attention. He seems to float on air, not sit on his dais. His robes glow radiant gold; his eyes close in meditation as he prays: "*Om ajñāna-timirāndhasya.* His voice, low and wavering, repeats the prayer that he chanted when he first began translating *Bhagavad-gita*: "I was born in the darkest ignorance, and my spiritual master opened my eyes with the torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful obeisances unto him."

His eyes open, and he looks at the audience as if he's just arrived from Vaikuntha.

"My dear boys and girls," he says, "I thank you very much for coming here and participating in this *sankirtan* function, or, as it is called, *sankirtan-yajna*, sacrifice."

The students lean forward, concentrating, straining to make out the meaning through the unfamiliar accent. Here is someone very unlike all their other teachers. Here, at last, is a master.

"In this Kali-yuga age," Prabhupada continues, "as poet Ginsberg has explained to you, everything is very degraded from the spiritual point of view. And from the material viewpoint also, people are reduced in their duration of life, in their merciful tendencies, strength and stature."

It is the same message as always, the same I heard him proclaim that first night in Matchless Gifts. Now it is spelled out even more clearly for the young fresh minds of mid-America.

"When we chant Hare Krishna," he says, "our original consciousness, Krishna consciousness and its joyfulness, begins. When we come to the platform of pure, spiritual consciousness, we become joyful, *brahmabhuta*."

This joy, he explains, begins when we develop our love of God.

"Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has given a nice example of love," he says. "He's playing the part of Radharani, the conjugal consort of Krishna. Our Krishna consciousness is not dry. You see the picture of Radha and Krishna. Krishna is a boy sixteen years old, and Radharani a young girl, a little younger than Krishna. They are enjoying.

The students look at the picture on the stage beside Prabhupada. Radharani clings to Krishna, who stands independent, legs crossed, holding His flute while a cow nuzzles at His feet.

"We should love God without cause, but we pray, 'God, give us our daily bread. I have come to You for my bread.' This is not love of God. This is love of bread."

Instant laughter and applause. The students are sympathetic, and Prabhupada does not waste time with dry philosophy. He tells them quickly and frankly their spiritual state.

"This transmigration of the soul, these repeated births and deaths, is a diseased condition of the spirit soul. That you do not know." There is urgency in his voice, as if shouting for everyone to flee a fire. "In our educational system, there is no department of knowledge teaching what the soul is, what is after death or what was before birth. There is no science. It is very lamentable. Education in the name of simply eating, sleeping, and mating is not education, not if my bodily conception continues. The *Bhagavatam* says, '*Yasya atma buddhi kunape tridhatuke*. Anyone who is thinking that this body of flesh and bones is self—he is an ass.'"

Again there is appreciative applause and laughter. Prabhupada looks at the audience as if it is one large individual.

"And because they conceive this body to be the self, they don't even have common reason. This bag of flesh, bone, blood, urine, stool

and secretion—can this be soul? Can this be self?"

Looking out at the students, I see Doug O'Connor, engineering major, staring intently at Prabhupada. Sitting beside him, dainty, prissy Miss Karen Burke takes notes quickly.

"Because you cannot see it, you are concluding that there is no soul. That is ignorance. There is soul, and this body has developed on that platform. That soul is migrating from one body to another, and this is called real, spiritual evolution, and that evolutionary process is going on through 8,400,000 species of life....

"So, don't commit suicide. Take to chanting this Hare Krishna *mantra*, and all real knowledge will be revealed. It is practical. We are not charging anything. We are not bluffing you, saying, 'I shall give you some secret *mantra* and charge you fifty dollars.' No. It is open for everyone. Please take it."

There is urgency in his message as Prabhupada now implores the young audience.

"That is our request. We are begging you—don't spoil your life. Please take this *mantra* and chant it wherever you like. There are no hard and fast rules you have to follow. Wherever and whenever you like, chant, and you'll feel ecstasy."

As in deference to being hosted by a university, Prabhupada mentions that we have volumes of books for understanding Krishna through philosophy.

"We are not dancing and chanting sentimentalists. We have background," he says, hinting at the Vedic tradition. On the other hand, he quickly points out that we are not dry mental speculators.

"Don't foolishly try to speculate to understand the unlimited," he warns. "It is not possible. Just become meek and humble and try to

receive the message from authorized sources. You don't have to change your work or conditions. Just hear. Then a day will come when you will be able to conquer the Supreme Lord, who is unconquerable. God is great. Nobody can conquer Him. But if you simply follow this process and try to hear about God from authorized sources, then one day you will be able to conquer the Supreme Lord—" Prabhupada holds out his hand to the mesmerized audience. "—within your hand!"

A dramatic pause and pindrop silence. Prabhupada leans back on the dais. Once again he seems to be floating, so unattached he is from materials, the *paramhansa* floating on the waters of the world, untouched by mundane desires, filled with love for Krishna.

"As *Brahma-samhita* confirms, you cannot find God by merely reading and speculating on *Shastra*, scripture. You have to conquer Him by your love. He'll reveal Himself to you if you sincerely chant this Hare Krishna *mantra*. It will cleanse your heart, and then if you read just one chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*, you will gradually understand what is God, what you are, and what your relationship with God is. And when you understand all this and develop your love of God, then you will become perfectly happy."

* * *

Finally, hands folded, Prabhupada concludes by paying reverence to the picture of Radha Krishna. "This is our path—Krishna consciousness," he says. "The path of happiness. Hare Krishna."

Applause. Prabhupada does not call for questions due to the audience's size. Instead, he and Allen lead another chanting. The response is even more vigorous than before. Soon again, everyone is dancing, and Prabhupada stands on the dais and waves his arms, and the students shout and wave back.

A marvel. If approached on the street, these students respond, "I have my own religion, thank you," and walk on. But now, inflated by

Prabhupada's presence, they chant with fervor, hungry for more spiritual food, their response outshining that of hip New York and San Francisco.

And after thirty minutes—or an aeon?—it all ends. Prabhupada chants the closing prayers, as we all bow down. Encircling the stage, the students press forward for a last look at Prabhupada.

Hands folded in blessing, Prabhupada walks quickly to the exit. He has had his say. The effect his words will have is up to Krishna.

* * *

Students are in and out of the temple all the next day. Prabhupada gives afternoon discourses in his room, informal explanations of the basic lessons of *Bhagavad-gita*: I am not this body but eternal spirit soul.

Some students express serious interest in the philosophy. In the afternoon, there is a fire sacrifice, and Prabhupada initiates Luke (Lokanath), Carlos (Chaitanya-das), and Sherry (Chintamani) and weds our Sanskrit scholar Pradyumna with Arundhuti.

* * *

May 14. In the bright spring morning, Allen comes by to bid Prabhupada farewell before leaving for New York. On entering, he notices Prabhupada's Deities on the dresser and enquires about them.

"When I was seven years old, my father was worshipping Deities," Prabhupada says. "So, wanting to imitate, I asked him to give me a Deity, and he gave me Radha Krishna."

"And did you wash Them and play with Them?"

"Yes. Washed, changed dress, served Them."

"And you still do so?"

"In India, yes. Now my disciples are here, and they are tending Them."

Prabhupada looks at the Deities and smiles broadly, then laughs. Allen sees that he is reading *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, and Prabhupada obliges him by reciting some verses aloud, chanting the Sanskrit in meter.

"This is very beautiful prosody," Allen comments. "Very complicated."

"Difficult," Prabhupada says. "They have a metric system whereby so many words should be first, so many second. You cannot deviate. And rules for analogy and metaphor. Nothing should be repeated twice. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu defeated a great scholar just on the basis of one mistake."

Allen says that at last night's poetry reading, he was telling the students to chant Hare Krishna for President Nixon when he comes for commencement in two weeks.

"There's a lot of resentment against the President and government," Allen says, "from young people who don't like war. It's dangerous to show real conflict, but all that energy wants to express itself. So I suggested that they greet him by chanting Hare Krishna."

"That's a very good service," Prabhupada says. "Nixon said that he wanted to meet some religious leaders, so one of my disciples wrote him, but he never replied." Prabhupada shakes his head as if it were strange indeed that President Nixon didn't reply.

"Well," Allen consoles, "if in this typical university the students greet him by chanting Hare Krishna, he may well invite you."

"Yes," Prabhupada laughs, "actually I came here thinking that

America is in need of something substantial. I'm doing my bit, and if the government or the people help, this movement can be pushed nicely. Otherwise, it will go on slowly, however Krishna desires."

Allen gives obeisances. "Now I must leave," he says. "Hare Krishna!"

When he bows to touch Prabhupada's feet, Prabhupada smiles and says, "All right," appreciatively.

"We'll have to chant again this summer," Allen suggests, "in New York City. Just let me know two weeks in advance, and I'll come down from the farm."

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "Thank you." Then, indicating the white and red roses fresh from the Radha Krishna Deities: "Give him that garland!"

A devotee places the garland around Allen, who bows again and, wishing us good luck at New Vrindaban, leaves for his plane.

* * *

In the afternoon, my students deliver their 500-word themes, and I'm happily surprised when I read them. Those who chose to cover the meeting wrote their best compositions of the year. Back at the temple, I read some of them to Prabhupada. He listens closely, occasionally breaking into a smile, and says, "Just see! Just see! They are appreciating."

I have rarely seen Prabhupada so satisfied with an engagement or its reaction. As I read from the themes, Kirtanananda and other devotees listen with satisfaction.

"Just one thing," Prabhupada says. "This Yoga Society." He looks directly at me. "You must change the name to Bhakti-yoga Society."

"Yes, Prabhupada," I say, shamefully aware that he had mentioned this before.

"If you just say '*yoga*,'" he continues, "people will think we are sitting like pretzels to improve our sex life."

We all laugh, and Kirtanananda points out that no one on campus knows what "*bhakti*" means.

"That doesn't matter," Prabhupada says. "Let them come to find out. That will make them curious. Now, Purushottam, will you get my harmonium?"

* * *

May 21. In the evening, Paramananda calls from New Vrindaban's closest pay phone.

"Prabhupada's coming out in the morning," I tell him. "We're driving out in the Lincoln. Important. Get Mr. Thompson's permission to drive over his property."

"All right," Paramananda says grimly, "but I can tell you now that the powerwagon doesn't sound right. It coughs a lot and then dies out. We carried the battery all the way to get charged and—"

"Get Ron to look at it," I tell him. "And make sure the upstairs is ready for Prabhupada to move right in. Sparkling clean, and lots of flowers."

Paramananda tries to explain more about the powerwagon. He should know that there are no alternatives.

"Just get it fixed," I say. "Tomorrow is the biggest day in the history of New Vrindaban. Just think! The first holy *dham* in the Western world created by Sri Krishna's pure devotee. This is a historic

event. The demigods may even be there."

"It rained the other day," Paramananda says quietly. "You'll never make it up that road. I'll be sure to ask Thompson."

* * *

May 22. A most auspicious day, a cool, clear morning, the sky a baby blue without a wisp of cloud or speck of pollution, the sun rising early and bright, the aromas of spring everywhere, the dandelions with their cotton puffballs, the bulging umbrellas of May apples, the tiny, lustrous violets....

The devotees have swept out our newly purchased 1959 Lincoln Continental, washed the upholstery, waxed the exterior, polished the chrome, cleaned the windows, and filled the tank. It will guzzle twenty-five gallons easily during the three-hour drive.

Prabhupada descends the stairs of the temple and gives the day a sweeping joyful look. Then he turns to Kirtanananda and asks for a scarf. The air is brisk and clean. The devotees offer obeisances—Pradyumna, Vamandev, Nara-narayana, Ranandhir. Lokanath opens the door of the Continental.

Prabhupada stops to appraise the long, black limousine whose best days are long past.

"You have bought?" he asks me.

"Yes, Srila Prabhupada."

"And how much was it costing?"

"Three hundred dollars," I say.

"Achha!" he smiles and gets in front. Kirtanananda drives, and

Purushottam and I sit in back. The other devotees quickly scramble for their cars, and follow us down Interstate 70 to West Virginia.

End of Chapter 17

Chapter 18. Paramhansa in the Hills

When we arrive at the foot of Aghasura Road, the devotees are waiting beside the powerwagon. The air is vibrant with the humming of bees and fragrant with the sweet aroma of white locust flowers.

The devotees offer obeisances as soon as the Lincoln turns down the driveway. They fall face down on the grass and gravel.

"Oh, there are many waiting here," Prabhupada says, stepping out of the car. "Jai Sri Krishna!"

Little Dwarkadish, six years old, timidly obeys his mother and garlands Prabhupada with gardenias and red roses.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. D.D.D.," Prabhupada says. "D.D.D." is his nickname for Dwarkadish-das, who has just arrived with his mother from the Los Angeles temple. Present also are other recent arrivals: John and Susan, students from Ohio University, where Prabhupada lectured; Patita-pavana and Uddhava, two brothers from New York; Rupanuga and his five-year-old son Ekendra; and Nara-narayana, the carpenter who's been helping Vamandev repair the farmhouse.

"So, where do we go from here?" Prabhupada asks.

"It's two miles up that road, Prabhupada," Ranandhir says, pointing at the muddy Aghasura winding its way down the creek through locust and maple.

"And we go in this?" Prabhupada asks, looking at the old powerwagon.

"It's as strong as a tank, Prabhupada, " Kirtanananda says, getting inside and starting it. The engine roars and smokes as he revs it up.

"Why not walk?" Prabhupada suggests.

We protest that the two-mile trek would be too hard on Prabhupada. Driving the power-wagon over Mr. Thompson's property is quicker and easier.

Paramananda calls me aside to inform me that he couldn't contact Mr. Thompson.

"He wasn't in last night or this morning," he says. "I guess it's all right to drive over. He's never refused."

"Well, it's an emergency," I say.

Purushottam and Devananda load Prabhupada's luggage in the back of the powerwagon. Prabhupada curiously asks about the vehicle's model as he gets in. To cushion the jolts, we've placed clean pillows over the bare springs of the seat. Shama-dasi has even garlanded the dashboard.

Once Prabhupada is securely seated, Kirtanananda starts driving up the gravel road to Mr. Thompson's farm. The powerwagon shudders and lurches forward. Hrishikesh, Paramananda, Ranandhir and I jump in back. The other devotees run behind in a hurried procession.

Driving around the back of Mr. Thompson's house, Kirtanananda starts up the dirt road to the pasture running along the ridge two miles to New Vrindaban. As we pass Mr. Thompson's horse corral and chicken coop, Prabhupada chants on his beads and looks about curiously.

When the powerwagon starts pulling the first small hill, it suddenly shakes violently. Then the engine hisses and dies. Kirtanananda starts it up again and throws in the clutch. The powerwagon rolls backward, lurches forward, roars, shudders and dies again. This process is repeated. We look anxiously at Prabhupada.

"Why not walk?" he asks Kirtanananda.

Kirtanananda turns the ignition. The powerwagon responds with a

cough and a feline growl. “It’s temperamental,” he says.

Paramananda opens the hood, and Chaitanya-das takes a look. He supposedly knows something about engines. Purushottam stands by the powerwagon door fanning Prabhupada with peacock feathers.

“If only I had some tools,” Chaitanya-das laments.

I start interrogating Paramananda. It seems he couldn’t get the powerwagon to the mechanic. Yes, it’s been dying periodically. It could be due to any number of problems. Well, if we could push it to the top of the hill, it might start coasting down.

“Maybe we can start it in reverse,” I suggest. “Let’s roll backwards.”

“Then Prabhupada should get out,” Purushottam says anxiously. “We can walk,” Prabhupada says.

“It’s a two-mile walk, Prabhupada,” Devananda says. “No matter.”

As Prabhupada descends from the powerwagon, Mr. Thompson suddenly appears, driving his tractor over the hill, hauling a wagonload of cow dung. He stops and glowers at our stalled procession.

“You might have asked permission,” he says.

We explain that we’ve been trying to find him, that this is a special occasion, the arrival of our spiritual master.

“Well, all right,” he says. “But next time, ask permission.”

Before we can petition Mr. Thompson to help us with the powerwagon, Prabhupada starts walking back down the driveway. Purushottam runs behind him, carrying his Deities in a small suitcase. Prabhupada is waiting for no one.

"Better walk," he says, marking a lively pace.

Hurrying after him, we leave the powerwagon and its *karma* with Paramananda and Chaitanya-das. "Push it if necessary," I tell them. "All Prabhupada's things are in back."

Kirtanananda informs Prabhupada that it would be easier to walk over the ridge, but Prabhupada heads straight toward the Aghasura demon.

"Better this road," he says. "Better walk on our own property. Then we won't be intruders."

He enquires whether Mr. Thompson has taken prasadam with us. When we say no, he suggests that we invite him.

"He raises cows for eating," Satyabhama says.

"Oh?" Prabhupada shakes his head. "Animal killers will not take to chanting. But no matter. You can offer him some *prasadam*. With tasteful *prasadam*, you can convince the *karmis* to give up their bad habits."

Then, as nonchalantly as he would walk down a Calcutta street, Prabhupada starts up Aghasura Road, keeping his lively pace. We hurry after him, fretting. He walks, as usual, with his head held high, not looking down for anything, not even Aghasura's mudholes and ruts.

"Govinda-dasi is doing nicely in Hawaii," he says, "defeating the Mayavadis with some very strong preaching. What kind of tree is this?"

"Locust, Srila Prabhupada," Kirtanananda says. "Very hard wood. They're used for fenceposts." Prabhupada stops before a large flower-ladened tree. The limbs are buzzing with bees.

"And they are giving honey also," he says. "Such trees are very

useful. A tree that gives no fruit or fragrant flower is like a man devoid of Krishna consciousness, just standing in the way. A wasted life."

Dwarkadish and Ekendra run ahead and place flat rocks in the shallow creek crossings so Prabhupada won't wet his feet. Talking casually about the plants, trees and vines, Prabhupada keeps up the quick pace. Surely he must slow down going uphill. After two shallow creek crossings, Aghasura Road rises from the creekbed and runs along the hillside, twisting and turning, to the farmhouse.

"Maybe you would like to rest here, Srila Prabhupada," I suggest, indicating a large, flat rock beside a flowering dogwood.

"That's all right," he says, not even breathing hard, not even looking at the choice spot.

Finally, just at the top of the hill, as we round the curve and see the farmhouse ahead, Prabhupada stops. The devotees welcome the rest. Some, including Kirtanananda, are huffing.

"We are stopping just for Kirtanananda Maharaj," Prabhupada says, laughing.

Then, the brief rest over, he starts up again, not stopping until he reaches the farmhouse, where his dais awaits him beneath the willow.

* * *

After Prabhupada washes, we bring him fruit, honey and fresh milk from Kaliya. He sits outside under the willow, and we sit about him in a semicircle. Dwarkadish and Ekendra sit at his feet.

"I haven't tasted milk like this in fifty years," he says.

Ranandhir parades our cow Kaliya before him. Prabhupada admires her but doesn't pet her. "We don't have such fatty cows in

India," he says. "In days past, yes, but now no one can feed them nicely. That is the way the *Vedas* calculate a man's wealth—in cows and grains."

"The honey is from nearby," Kirtanananda says. "It's tulip honey. Maybe next year we can get a hive."

"Then you will have the land of milk and honey complete," Prabhupada says. "That is nature's design, that everything is given complete for a happy life. We don't require artificial amenities. All we need to realize Krishna is here."

Walking out to the barn, Prabhupada watches Ranandhir put Kaliya in her stall.

"There's a waterfall down there in the creekbed," Kirtanananda tells him. "We've called it Kesi Ghat, as you suggested."

"Yes," Prabhupada says, "and that hill you must call Govardhan."

"And this is Revachuggi," I say, introducing the goat.

"Very good," he laughs. "Just see the nipples on her neck. It is said that a man trying to derive pleasure from the senses is like someone trying to get milk from those nipples."

Prabhupada then casually mentions that in her last life, Revachuggi was a Mohammedan who had killed goats.

Returning to the farmhouse, Prabhupada looks about, appraising the land, the road, the hill slanting down to the creekbed, the forests, the hill up to the main road, and the overgrown pasture.

"Where are the flat parts?" he asks, turning to me.

"I'm afraid we left them in Ohio," I say, sadly admitting the

obvious truth. Again, Prabhupada looks about like a king surveying his domain.

"Well, you can flatten this part here," he says, "by taking earth from Govardhan Hill and filling in over there." He points to the field below the house. "Then," he adds, "it will be nice and flat."

As Prabhupada explains how we're to level the land, we listen with silent amaze. "Well, St. Paul speaks of faith moving mountains," Kirtanananda says, baffled.

"Yes," Prabhupada agrees. "Just do it!"

* * *

Lavanga-latika, Dwarkadish's mother, timidly approaches Prabhupada with a silver cup of water freshly drawn from the well. Somehow she manages to offer obeisances, lying face down on the ground, without spilling a drop. Prabhupada accepts the water and drinks from the goblet, not letting it touch his mouth.

"Oh, it is very sweet water," he says. "That is Krishna. That is the way of remembering Krishna. And it is so easy here at New Vrindaban. When we take fresh water, we can remember Krishna because Krishna is the taste of water. And we can remember Krishna as soon as we see the sunlight in the morning, because the sunlight is a reflection of Krishna's bodily effulgence. And as soon as we see moonlight in the evening, we can remember Krishna because moonlight is the reflection of sunlight.

When we hear any sound, we can remember Krishna because sound is Krishna. Even the cow reminds us of Krishna because Krishna is renowned as Govinda, who gives pleasure to the cows. And the countryside also reminds us of Him because He says He is the sweet fragrance of the earth. And when we see the flowers in springtime, that is also Krishna. And the wind and nature's thunderbolt remind us. So

much is there to remind us of Krishna that the devotee can't forget Him for a moment."

* * *

Kirtanananda leads Prabhupada down the hill to what was once a pigpen, located beneath a great shady maple. Vacated decades ago, the building-about fifteen feet square is hewn out of great logs, and structurally it is the most sturdy building around. For purification, Hrishikesh has scrubbed the stone floor with cow dung. For light and air, Kirtanananda has cut out windows and stapled screening over them.

"These are my new quarters," Kirtanananda announces.

"Very good," Prabhupada smiles. "A little cottage like this is just perfect for a *sannyasi* and *brahmachari*. It is cool and clean."

Prabhupada enters and sits on the rough, wooden bench. He inspects the log siding and the roof. We don't mention that it was originally made for pigs.

"It appears very well made," he says. "I notice that people in your country are very expert at building. But cutting this wood is much labor, no? I will show you designs of simple houses made of mud. You can get clay and rock from the creek and make very solid houses at practically no cost."

To show Prabhupada that cutting wood in America is swift and easy, I take the chainsaw and begin cutting some locust logs.

"We can zip through a cord of wood in no time," I say, revving the engine proudly. Prabhupada has never seen a chainsaw in action before. He watches with interest as the sawdust flies.

Then, as I start on a second cut, the chain suddenly slips off the bar, breaking a couple of iron teeth.

"Oh no!"

The chain's ruined.

Prabhupada looks at the smoking machine curiously and says nothing. It is not necessary.

Returning up the hill, Prabhupada selects a sitting spot beneath a persimmon tree near the farmhouse. Purushottam puts down a foam rubber mat for him, and he sits with his back toward Govardhan Hill and looks east, toward the next ridge.

"That is our property there?" he asks.

"No, Srila Prabhupada. New Vrindaban ends at the creekbed. The other side belongs to neighbors."

"Maybe they will sell you a portion," he says, "so we can put a footbridge there. What do you think, Nara-narayana? Is it possible to build a bridge?"

"Quite possible," Nara-narayana says.

"With a bridge, we will have easy access to the property. Or maybe one—what do you call?—cablecart."

"Cable car?"

"Very possible, Srila Prabhupada," Nara-narayana says. "They're quite successful in Alpine country."

"But a bridge would be better. Not for automobiles. Just to walk over. Then many gentlemen will come."

I look out at the swath cut by Wheeling Electric. From the opposite ridge, the land slants abruptly down to the creekbed, a steep descent and

ascent, a long distance to have to span. The electric company was hard pressed just stringing the wires.

"In one sense, the isolation is good," Prabhupada says. "In India, there are temples requiring some austerities to reach. At Tirupati, to see the Deity, you must walk barefoot up a mountain much steeper than this. But in your country, people will not go out of their way."

The roar of the powerwagon descending Govardhan Hill interrupts us. Mr. Thompson helped push it. Paramananda parks before the farmhouse, and the devotees carry in Prabhupada's luggage—suitcases, boxes, a big trunk full of manuscripts, and footlockers.

Purushottam and Devananda install Prabhupada's Radha Krishna Deities upstairs in the small cherrywood room sectioned off from the bedroom. Prabhupada can comfortably watch *aratik* from a new innerspring mattress, which we have set on the floor without a bedstead. Usually, Prabhupada prefers mats to elevated beds. Because the room is a little dim, we have set up gooseneck floor lamps. Two small windows open out on the big willow. Along the walls stand bookcases filled with books accumulated since my high school days.

"These are all your books?" Prabhupada asks.

"A lot of impersonalism, I'm afraid," I reply.

"That may be. But they are philosophical books. That is good. They do not deal with frivolous topics. You can tell a man by his library."

Then, out of hundreds of books dealing with religion, Prabhupada instantly, magically. selects two volumes of Shankara. They are the *Brahma-sutras*, purchased by Kirtanananda two years ago in India. Although Shankara—an incarnation of Shiva—was ultimately a personalist, Lord Chaitanya discouraged the reading of his work due to the emphasis on impersonalism. Prabhupada's pulling them out was

remarkable, since the bindings are unmarked.

"You are reading?" Prabhupada asks.

"Not now," I say. "I find them dry."

"They must be," he says. "They don't deal with the pastimes of Krishna. Even Vyasadeva was dissatisfied after writing *Vedanta-sutra*. We will discuss that in class. But you can be sure that mundane literature will never give us peace of mind. Literature not dealing with the Supreme Absolute Truth, regardless of how literary, is food for crows. It only adds fuel to the fire of material life. But chanting and reading of Krishna is *uttama-sloka*, transcendental verse, full of meaning and life."

* * *

Prabhupada likes his new room. A window fan keeps the air fresh, and it is convenient for his personal servants to bring him *prasadam* from the kitchen. We request everyone to keep quiet around the house. Whenever Prabhupada wants to work or rest, silence must reign.

Kirtanananda cooks *dal* and a vegetable *kitri* for Prabhupada, and Hrishikesh keeps running upstairs with hot *chapatis*. Sometimes, Prabhupada eats as many as five.

"Kirtanananda's still the best cook in the movement," he says, "and also the first to learn."

After eating, Prabhupada rests, and we tiptoe around the house, cleaning and preparing for evening *aratik*. The women and children pick wildflowers in the fields—wild geraniums, buttercups, fiddleferns and the aromatic phlox—and arrange them in vases on the altar.

Prabhupada comes downstairs about an hour before sunset. Devananda brings out the foam-rubber mat and asks him where he

would like to sit. We suggest sitting beneath the willow, but again Prabhupada prefers the persimmon tree beside the well. Here, the ground is a little level, and he can sit comfortably and look out over the ridge. Devananda sets a small reading table on the grass before Prabhupada and puts *Bhagavad-gita* and Prabhupada's reading glasses on it. Also the latest copy of *Back To Godhead*. About fifteen devotees sit around Prabhupada on the grass.

"So, Mr. Ekendra, what have you been doing to be so tired?" Prabhupada asks Rupanuga's five-year-old son, who promptly hides his face.

"He's been picking flowers, Prabhupada," Rupanuga says.

"And the others?"

"Cleaning the barn," Ranandhir says.

"And you, Mr. D.D.D.? Have you been tending your Deities?"

Dwarkadish blushes and stammers. Before Prabhupada, he's too self-conscious to utter a word. After a moment of fidgeting, Dwarkadish abandons the attempt to answer. He is overwhelmed.

"That's all right," Prabhupada says, smiling. "So here at New Vrindaban we may get tired working, cleaning and so on, but that is an asset. We can attain perfection by these simple chores. But if it's just to gratify our senses, we are wasting our time. If you work for *maya*, you'll never be happy. Just tired and confused."

Prabhupada then points out that in the country, it is possible to live on nature's bounty and spend the rest of our valuable time cultivating Krishna consciousness.

"*Karmis* are busy working so many hours daily that they only have time for a little sex, intoxication, and then sleep. But that kind of life is

abominable. Say we are now earning five hundred a month. If we earn five million, will we eat more than four *chapatis*? Will there be more than twenty-four hours in the day, or more months in the year, or more years in our lives? Will we occupy more space than the same six-foot bed? Though you may acquire the whole property of West Virginia, it is *maya* to think that you can improve your condition by economic development. The same four *chapatis* and six feet of space are there. And the same allotted time."

"Most Americans would consider life here too austere," Kirtanananda says. "They would rather work hard in the polluted cities."

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "That is due to lust. Lust is making the *karmi* world turn around, as they say. In the cities, there are so many facilities for gratifying this lust: cinemas and brothels and nightclubs. Even if they see that this New Vrindaban country atmosphere is so nice, they will refuse to come. Even Lord Indra, the king of heaven, was reluctant to leave his hog life. Because Indra committed some offense at the feet of his spiritual master, Brihaspati, he was cursed to take birth as a hog. When Lord Brahma went to earth to convince Indra to return to his throne in the heavenly kingdom, he found Indra enjoying himself as a hog. 'You have become a hog due to your offenses,' Brahma told Indra, 'but I have come to deliver you. Please come with me.' 'No,' the hog Indra said. 'I cannot go. I have so many responsibilities. I have my children, my wife, my society, my country.' So even if you offer to take a hog to heaven, he will refuse. This is called forgetfulness."

A conchshell announces evening *aratik*. We follow Prabhupada into the temple room. During the *aratik*, Prabhupada stands and plays cymbals, and we stand a little behind him. Devananda is the *pujari*. Midway through *aratik*, Prabhupada encourages us to dance. Then he dances, dipping his body slightly forward on one foot, dancing in rhythm to the cymbals, striking them deftly so that they ring loud and long.



New Vrindaban. Śrīla Prabhupāda's favourite spot, beneath the persimmon tree.



From left to right: Ṛṣikeśa, Yadunandana, Raṇadhīra, Kīrtanānanda, Pradyumna, Taruṇī, Nara-Nārāyaṇa, Arundhatī, Puruṣottama and Madhu-Maṅgala.



New Vrindaban, Aghāsura Road, photograph taken in 1969.



The chicken coop, New Vrindaban.

To lecture, he sits on the modest *vyasasana* beside the fireplace.

The dais is a simple wooden platform made of rough-cut native lumber and covered with purple and gold cloth. Above, hangs a print of Lord Nrishingadev tearing out the entrails of Hiranyakasipu.

Prabhupada talks of Vyasadeva's dissatisfaction after completing *Vedanta-sutra*. Vyasadeva's spiritual master, Narada Muni, advised him to write of the pastimes of Krishna to attain happiness. The *Vedas*, Narada argued, are meant to liberate mankind from material bondage, and so far Vyasadeva had yet to write anything liberating. The knower of Krishna's activities is immediately liberated; therefore glorify Krishna's pastimes. In this way, Narada Muni encouraged Vyasadeva to write *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

"This *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is self-luminous," Prabhupada says. "Just as the sun does not need the light of glow-worms, *Srimad Bhagavatam* does not need the commentaries of mundane scholars. When Vyasadeva wrote *Vedanta-sutra*, he thought he had said the last word in self-realization. But no. He was dissatisfied. He did not deal directly with Krishna's pastimes. Of course, today so much is made over *Vedanta*, and *Vedanta* continues to be misinterpreted by crows. So that its conclusion would not be misunderstood, Vyasadeva wrote the beautiful *Srimad-Bhagavatam.*"

After the lecture, we ask Prabhupada if he would like to walk outside for fresh air and a view of the stars.

"Yes. Why not? Purushottam, get my *chadar*."

We follow him outside to the open field before the barn. The moon has yet to rise. The Milky Way, directly overhead, spans the dome of sky, a faint luster on black satin. Prabhupada looks up, then, like a captain reading his course, turns east, west, then north and south, as if he might order the helm set in any direction.

"There's no moon?" he asks.

"It should rise in about an hour, Prabhupada," Purushottam says.

"Just see all these globes floating in air," Prabhupada says. "There are at least thirty-three million planets in this one universe, and they are like phantasmagoria, having no permanent existence. They are like the expression 'sky flower.' There is no flower in the sky. Or, as we say in Bengali, they are like 'eggs of a horse.' Finding happiness in these material worlds is like finding horse's eggs—impossible. How can there be happiness when there is old age, disease, and death? Even if you have a demigod's body and live long, so what? You still must die."

We walk a little distance down the road, but Prabhupada stops, again looks about, then turns back. It is too dark to walk very far. With flashlights, we return to the farmhouse.

"Now Krishna has given you a very nice place here," Prabhupada says. "You have everything. You are not needing cinemas or nightclubs here. At night, we can see the sky and just sit and listen about Krishna. Then take some warm milk and rest. Who would not be satisfied?"

"The *karmis*," Satyabhama says.

"The *karmis* will never be satisfied. They are always running back and forth on the freeways, like in Los Angeles. Zoom, zoom, here and there. Always looking for more money and sex life, and never satisfied. So now Krishna has given you a tranquil place to meditate. The country is in *sattva-guna*, goodness. As you say, 'Man made the city; God made the country.' Here I see that you are already having a nice Vrindaban atmosphere."

* * *

I sleep in the lean-to on the hill just above the garden. The moon, now rising over the ridge, is three-quarters full. The Big Dipper is descending over Govardhan Hill. Out by the barn, someone is chanting *japa*. The chirr of crickets is high and shrill. Lights are off in Prabhupada's room.

I dream of Prabhupada. He is chanting Hare Krishna, and countless devotees sit around him chanting feverishly, sounding like bees in a hive. I see cowherds, hear milk pails rattle, clank, fall to the ground. I see no faces, but hear laughter and the sound of feet running, and the name "Krishna! Krishna!" shouted across great expanses.

Then I awake, back in the lean-to, looking out at the garden and stars. And I recall the dream I had outside Ananda Ashram, ages ago, it seems.

I look down the hill at the farmhouse. The light is now on in Prabhupada's room. Although it is two in the morning, Prabhupada is still dictating.

Again I sleep, and when I awake, the moon is past its zenith. In the kitchen, the devotees are preparing for *aratik*. It is four a.m.

After brushing our teeth, bathing, putting on *tilak* and fresh robes, we attend the *aratik* ceremony, some twenty of us crowded into the downstairs temple room.

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka....

Standing, Prabhupada strikes the steel gongs with a mallet. He watches the Deities intently as Pradyumna offers incense, camphor, water, a handkerchief, peacock fan, and yak tail whisk, circulating them before Radha and Krishna and the Jagannathas in the alcove. We chant the *Sri Gurv-astaka* written by Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura.

mahāprabhoḥ kīrtana-nṛtya-gīta....

After the offerings, Prabhupada goes upstairs and celebrates a second *aratik* before his own Radha Krishna Deities. He sits on the new innerspring mattress and rings a small bell as Purushottam makes the offerings.

After this *aratik*, Prabhupada sits alone in his room, chanting softly. Devotees circumambulate the temple while chanting the required sixteen rounds, about an hour and a half of chanting. Sitting out by the barn chanting, I wait for the first hints of dawn, chanting through the quiet but spiritually vibrant hour before sunrise. Night fades as the first sunbeams light up the mist in the hollows.

For breakfast *prasadam*, we eat a porridge of cornmeal ground in the small hand-turned mill in the barn, fresh milk from Kaliya, and local tulip honey.

After breakfast, chores are assigned. Before typing up Prabhupada's daily correspondence, Purushottam takes me aside.

"We should be seeing Rayarama soon," he tells me. "Prabhupada's furious over the latest *Back To Godhead*. He called me in his room in the middle of the night and dictated a letter."

"Oh?"

"It's over a number of things. In one issue, I interview the Beach Boys, and a photo shows one of them smoking. Well, Prabhupada didn't like that. And there was an advertisement with a woman in it. But worst of all, he said, is the new cover picture of Arjuna in the chariot with Krishna. Arjuna is painted brown like a *shudra*. Prabhupada said he looks like a demon instead of the highest devotee. He wants to see Rayarama at once."

* * *

Prabhupada walks out to the field by the barn to bask in the early morning sun. Devananda follows him and sets down the foam rubber mat. Prabhupada sits down, and Devananda begins to massage him with mustard seed oil. Purushottam takes letter dictations during the massage. Afterwards, we arrange a hot water bath on the porch, heating the water in washtubs over an outdoor woodfire.

In the afternoon, Prabhupada calls a general convocation. We all gather around the persimmon tree, and Prabhupada quickly starts the meeting.

“Here at New Vrindaban, only Krishna is master,” he says. “In the material world, everyone is trying hard to be master, but here it is different. Here we all acknowledge that Krishna is master; therefore we have called this land New Vrindaban. Lord Shiva or Brahma or incarnations of Vishnu or even Radharani—all are servants.

“In this consciousness of knowing that we are all servants, we divide duties among ourselves. By carrying out the duty prescribed by the spiritual master, you attain your perfection. So everyone here has to make his own routine. For chanting and reading *Bhagavad-gita*, you should allow, say, up to three hours daily. If twenty-four hours are at our disposal, we can use six or seven for sleeping, and two or three for chanting and reading.”

“At least five hours are devoted to *aratik* and *kirtan*,” Kirtanananda says. “And at least two hours for *prasadam*,” Satyabhama says.

“And ten to twelve hours in the field,” Ranandhir says.

“So, what are you saying?” Prabhupada asks. “Do you want to stop chanting and reading?”

“No! No!” everyone protests.

"Then you can forego your sleeping and eating,” he says. “The Goswamis were doing that. If they could not finish their chanting, they would forfeit their eating and sleeping.”

“But the Goswamis didn’t swing axes all day,” Paramananda says. “Did they?”

"No," Prabhupada laughs. "They were writing books. Anyway, just as I have to manage my own routine, you have to manage yours. But even if you don't have time to read one chapter of *Bhagavad-gita* daily, that is all right because you're already engaged in *Bhagavad-gita*. Any duty done here at New Vrindaban is spiritual. Because Krishna was inducing Arjuna to fight, his fighting was also devotional service. Similarly, work done here at New Vrindaban is also considered reading *Bhagavad-gita*. But in any case, chanting must go on."

"Can you chant while working?" Hrishikesh asks.

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "You must. Chanting is the basis of our life."

Prabhupada then outlines the *varnashrama* social order to be followed. Being the *sannyasi*, Kirtanananda must be the acknowledged community leader. The *brahmacharis*, celibates, should live with him, under his directions. The *grihastha* householders should work in conjunction and contribute half their income to community maintenance. Since we have no *vanaprasthas*, retired men, that *ashrama* doesn't apply.

"Now, I wish you would draw up some map of the land," Prabhupada says, turning to Kirtanananda, "and I will lay out plans for everything—temples, guest houses, living quarters."

"But we need men to construct such places," Kirtanananda says.

"Right now you need fifty men," Prabhupada says. "And eventually you may need two hundred."

"Two hundred?!" Kirtanananda's eyes widen.

"Yes," Prabhupada says matter of factly. "You'll have to manage so many temples." There is amazed silence as each devotee considers this. Kirtanananda looks dubious.

"I don't know what to think, Prabhupada," he says. "The conservation men were out last week. They took aerial photos. They say that properly developed, this land will support only eighteen cows. So, a cow per person, that's only eighteen people."

"Not per person," Prabhupada says. "Per family. Anyway, it's not possible to be self-sufficient immediately. There's so much you have to get from outside."

"We should invite people from other temples," Satyabhama says. "But there are no facilities," Ranandhir says.

"There's the barn," Prabhupada suggests. "At least ten devotees can live in the barn. First the men. Then the facilities will follow."

* * *

After the meeting, we return to our tasks with renewed enthusiasm. We agree to mail letters to all temples inviting devotees to come help build New Vrindaban. As soon as we get the money, we'll buy building supplies to repair the barn. For ascetic *brahmacharis*, the barn is luxurious.

Desiring to see more of the property, Prabhupada walks to the top of Govardhan Hill and looks out across the rolling hills of forests and green pastures toward the Ohio River.

"Here you can build one small house," he tells me. "You can live here and edit peacefully. No one will ever disturb you. Meditation in the forest is not our method; our way is preaching. Publishing books about Krishna is the most durable form of preaching. And one who instructs others about Krishna is most dear to Krishna."

"This entire community can be an instruction," Kirtanananda says.

"Yes, it must be," Prabhupada agrees. "It is also a form of

preaching. We are saying, 'Look, you can be happy by putting Krishna at the center of your life.' This is also *Bhagavad-gita*."

From Govardhan Hill, we walk down the back road toward the state lake.

"The road's a little steep," Kirtanananda tells Prabhupada, "but it's a beautiful walk."

Prabhupada walks a short distance down the road, past the dense blackberry shrubs, big poplars, locust trees, and dogwoods. When we reach a place where thick vines cover the road, he stops.

"This is jungle," he says.

We start clearing a way through the vines.

"It's clear just on the other side, Prabhupada," I say.

"No," he says, refusing to go further. "It's jungle. Now we can go back.

* * *

In the evening, there is a fire sacrifice before *aratik*. Ranandhir, Paramananda, and Devananda receive their brahminical threads, signifying rebirth in knowledge of Krishna consciousness.

"*Brahmin* means clean within and without, Prabhupada says.

"In India, in the Ganges, we see that some *yogis* can even remove their intestines—through their mouths—clean them in the river and then replace them. But generally, who can do these gymnastics? *Brahmin* means truthful and clean in body and mind. And tolerant."

Prabhupada points out that in this debased age of Kali, people have

become intolerant and are therefore always ready to quarrel. They lack all the brahminical qualifications.

"In this age, everyone is born *shudra*," he says. "Parents do not beget children with brahminical qualities because they don't perform the proper *garbhadan* ceremonies before having sex. Today, parents go to sex like hide-and-seek. And then they wonder why they beget children with *shudra* propensities, or even lower."

"How can you tell when one is a *brahmin*?" Hrishikesh asks.

"By symptom," Prabhupada says. "By birth, everyone is *shudra*. So we must look at the symptoms."

Prabhupada then tells the story of the boy who went to the great sage Gotama and begged him for initiation.

"What is your father's name?" Gotama Rishi asked.

"I don't know," the boy replied. "Go ask your mother."

The boy went to his mother, who said, "Before you were born, I was foolish and loved many men. I don't know whose son you are".

The boy returned to Gotama Rishi. "What did your mother say?"

"Since she was a prostitute, she doesn't know," the boy replied.

"Oh!" exclaimed the sage. "You are truthful. You are a *brahmin*. I will initiate you."

"So there are *brahmins* throughout the world," Prabhupada says, "and we must pick them up. You American boys show tolerance by taking up another culture, which you're not accustomed to since birth. I ask you, 'Don't drink, don't smoke,' things to which you're accustomed. And you're following. This is tolerance, a brahminical qualification."

He points out that tolerance and patience are two important brahminical qualities needed for success in Krishna consciousness.

"Sometimes the example of a young bride is given," he says. "From the day of her marriage, a woman wonders, 'When will I beget child?' And time passes, and no child comes, but because she is married, we can rest assured that there will be a child. That is a gross example. So, you are initiated and take to the *bhakti-yoga* process, and you wonder, 'When will that day come when Krishna consciousness will fully awaken in my heart?' And many days pass, and you worry and are perhaps discouraged, but because you have been inducted into the process, you should know that someday you will see Krishna, that someday you will be fully established in Krishna consciousness and will be completely happy."

* * *

Quickly Prabhupada fits into the New Vrindaban routine, or, more properly, New Vrindaban fits into his routine. Regardless of physical location, Prabhupada's day revolves around Krishna. He dictates in the early hours, dozes after morning *aratik*, walks and takes his massage in the morning, then *prasadam*, and some more dictating or meetings with disciples, usually an afternoon rest, then more meetings, or dictating letters, or a walk and lecture, *darshans*, and dictating alone late at night, into the early hours again, then *mangal-aratik* again. Thus the hours of his days revolve, over and over, happily, tirelessly.

May 26. In the afternoon, after his rest, Prabhupada is visited by Mr. McIntyre, a Wheeling lawyer who has been helping Hrishikesh obtain ministerial status in order to avoid the draft call to Vietnam.

Mr. McIntyre is young, liberal, and already prominent in the local law field. He has read Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita*.

Prabhupada explains *varnashrama-dharma*. *Brahmins*, he points out, are never meant to fight. That is the work of *kshatriyas*, warriors

like Arjuna. By fighting, Arjuna could attain perfection, but not by pursuing the *dharma* of a *brahmin*. Each caste has its own work. Now Hrishikesh has just received his *brahminical* thread, so he must ask for exemption from the battlefield. Mr. McIntyre agrees. "For all intents and purposes, he's a monk", he says.

Prabhupada begins discussing Vedic law, which was set down thousands of years ago in the *Manu-samhita*.

"There it is stated that a murderer should be condemned to death so that in his next life he will not have to suffer the *karma* of his sins. Therefore when the king hangs the murderer, he is benefiting him."

Mr. McIntyre points out that throughout history, official violence has been the standard way of administering justice. "An eye for an eye.

"But that isn't real violence," Prabhupada corrects. "The soul cannot be killed. For the administration of justice, so-called violence is permitted. Of course, we cannot kill whimsically. Personally, we don't have the right to kill even an ant. And in any case, that is no work for *brahmins*. Now this business in Vietnam is simply dog eat dog. No religious principle is involved. This is typical Kali-yuga fighting."

Mr. McIntyre says that many Americans consider the war in Vietnam to be in the pursuit of justice and therefore honorable.

"And what is this pursuit of justice?" Prabhupada asks. "We call Justice *karma*. You don't have to pursue justice. It is automatically there. Do good, you reap good results. Do evil, you suffer. We don't have to inflict the suffering. Material nature—Mayadevi—will do that effectively enough. Of course, to maintain order, the state must administer justice to the people—reward and punishment. But the state is fallible. Perhaps a criminal goes unpunished, or they punish the wrong man. But Mayadevi, working under Krishna's directions, is infallible. It is impossible to escape the fruits of *karma*. Live like a dog, and for your next life, nature gives you a dog's body. Eat meat, next life

a tiger's body. Sex life? All right, become a pigeon or rabbit. Chant Hare Krishna, you get an eternal blissful body like Krishna's. So you may pursue justice, but actually justice is already there."

* * *

Mr. McIntyre leaves, walks back down to the base of Aghasura Road, then returns, looking for his dog, a large Dalmatian.

"He's never run off before", he says, muddy and bewildered.

He finally finds the dog chasing groundhogs in the field below the barn.

"Oh, lost dog?" Prabhupada laughs when Kirtanananda informs him. "It is Krishna's grace. The lawyer has such affection for the dog. Now he can just turn his affection to God, to Krishna. Anyway, a dog will never get lost. Only men get lost."

* * *

We are surprised when Foster visits from the Goat Farm, walking up the back road from the state lake. "I hear your *swami's* arrived, he says. "I was thinking I might get a chance to talk with him."

Foster goes up to see Prabhupada in the upstairs room. We bring a chair so he won't have to sit on the floor. When Prabhupada learns that Foster is the land lessor, he sends Purushottam running down for lemonade and *kachoris*.

"I am hearing that you want to start an *ashram*," Prabhupada says, "a spiritual community."

"Yes, well, that was my plan," Foster says.

"Then you must help these boys here construct this New Vrindaban. There is so much to be done."

"Yes, well, you see, I was interested in something appealing to seekers on all levels," Foster says. "Not just your Krishna worship. I mean, that's just one discipline, and not one that would appeal to everybody."

"Nothing appeals to everybody," Prabhupada says.

"I—? Well, I'm thinking of leaving that open. You see, I don't want to close any avenues. When you close avenues, you block out knowledge. Now, over the years I've been giving this some thought, have met many wanderers on the paths of truth—"

"Just one thing," Prabhupada interrupts. "What's that?"

"Here you must understand that in this material world, everyone is trying to become God."

"Oh?"

Foster looks around uncomfortably. He has told everyone at the Goat Farm that he is already God.

"Yes, everyone wants to imitate Krishna," Prabhupada says. "Everyone here wants to dominate, to be master. That is why everyone's in bondage to material nature, to suffering and death. That is the cause of our conditioning, our insanity."

"Now, wait a minute," Foster says, reddening. "You aren't gonna tell me that those salt and pepper shakers are gonna save you from dying."

Salt and pepper shakers? I suddenly realize that he's referring to the Jagannatha Deities. If Prabhupada catches the irreverence, he doesn't show it.

"No one escapes death," he says. "It is there for everyone on all

planets. Our concern is our consciousness at death. Our state of mind determines our next body."

"But you can be liberated even in this body," Foster says, almost gloating. "And you can see the universe for what it is, for what you've made it."

"What have you made?" Prabhupada asks. "My world."

"Your world?" Prabhupada shakes his head, smiles. "That is our disease. We are each claiming proprietorship. 'This is my land, my wife, my children, my house, my world.' Everyone's trying to be master, to be God. All this is going on, this insanity, just like a madhouse."

"But you don't know the 'me' I refer to," Foster says, sticking to his guns.

"Whatever. You can never become God. That you must understand. You may strive for millions of years, millions of lifetimes, but you will be frustrated. I'm telling you frankly. If I wanted to cheat you, I'd say, 'Yes, you can be God. Here. Pay me money, take this *mantra*, and you'll become God in no time.' And then you'll go away saying, 'Oh. Swamiji is such a great *guru*.' The cheaters and the cheated. But I don't say that. I say that you will never become God, and that you will suffer and suffer until you understand that only God, Krishna, is God and you are His eternal servant. Not just you—everyone. So understanding this is real knowledge. Everything else is cheating."

Foster almost chokes on the *prasadam*. He tells us that people are waiting for him down the road, that he's sorry he has to hurry off. Again, Prabhupada invites him to join us in building New Vrindaban.

Silently swallowing his anger, Foster walks quickly back down the road, ignoring the devotees outside. "I think he's offended," Kirtanananda tells Prabhupada.

"Because we did not lie to him?" Prabhupada shakes his head sadly. "Just see. Such a man strives hard all his life for money and still is not satisfied. Despite this, he will induce his sons and grandsons to follow him. Although he has experience that his life is not very pleasing, that he's basically dissatisfied, he still forces his children to chew the chewed."

"I've tried to talk to him about Krishna a number of times," Kirtanananda says. "He doesn't want to understand. Oh, he reads some philosophers, impersonalists, but he won't hear of Krishna as a person.

"No one is interested in the lotus feet of the Supreme Person," Prabhupada says. "If people were interested, they would be liberated and wouldn't be here."

"Well, Mr. Foster would say that he's here just temporarily, that soon he will leave his body and become God again."

"If he's God," Prabhupada says, "how did he become conditioned? How did he fall into this imperfect material body, into illusion? Is illusion stronger than God? Ask him this. Convince him logically so that he can see the beauty in Krishna consciousness and join us."

"I've tried," Kirtanananda says.

"Achha! Then just induce him to take *prasadam*. Just that much will help him."

* * *

After years of dormancy, my hayfever returns with a vengeance. As the grass pollinates, my sneezing and wheezing begin. I run through dozens of handkerchiefs. My eyes constantly itch. At times, after paroxyms of sneezing, I sit helpless, totally congested.

"The threefold miseries exist everywhere," Prabhupada says. "If

you escape one, another will catch you. There's *adhibitautik*, miseries inflicted by other living entities. Then *adhyatmik*, miseries arising from the body and mind. And *adhidaivik*, miseries arising from natural calamities like earthquakes and tornados."

"This is a natural calamity," I say.

"Looks more like *adhyatmik* to me," Kirtanananda says.

"No," I say, sneezing. "It's the grass pollen. I know. I had tests once."

"What are you saying?" Prabhupada asks. "That the grass is attacking you?"

"Exactly," I say. "It's *adhibhautik*. Misery inflicted by other living entities."

Prabhupada laughs. "That is ridiculous," he says. "Why should the pollen attack just you? Why not others?"

I look at Prabhupada through watery eyes. It's true. No one else is being attacked. "I don't know," I admit. "Maybe they're not allergic."

Again Prabhupada laughs. "Of all the people here," he says, "why is it attacking only you?"

For a moment, I wonder whether I'm imagining that I'm sneezing, but a paroxym renders me helpless again.

Prabhupada asks Devananda for a valise, and from this he produces a small snuffbox. "Here," he says, handing it to me. "When there is discomfort, just take a pinch and sniff."

I do so. The snuff sets off a fresh barrage of sneezes. Finally I sit dazed. Surely my head must be empty of mucus.

"When you're irritated," Prabhupada says, "you may use that. It will help. But you shouldn't think that you are being attacked."

Again he laughs, and suddenly, seeing myself pursued by legions of grass pollen, I laugh too.

* * *

"You don't get tired living outside like you do indoors," Prabhupada says, walking down the road to the spring just below Govardhan Hill. "Here, the fresh air and the cow's milk will make you very healthy."

Kirtanananda picks the tender tops of pokeweed growing by the barn, cuts them up and cooks them in butter for Prabhupada.

"Very tasty," Prabhupada says. "Just see. The plants are just waiting to be picked. You can be like the Goswamis. They lived on whatever fruit dropped from the trees. They slept under trees and used their arms for pillows. And for clothes, they used whatever others discarded. All their time they devoted to Krishna consciousness.

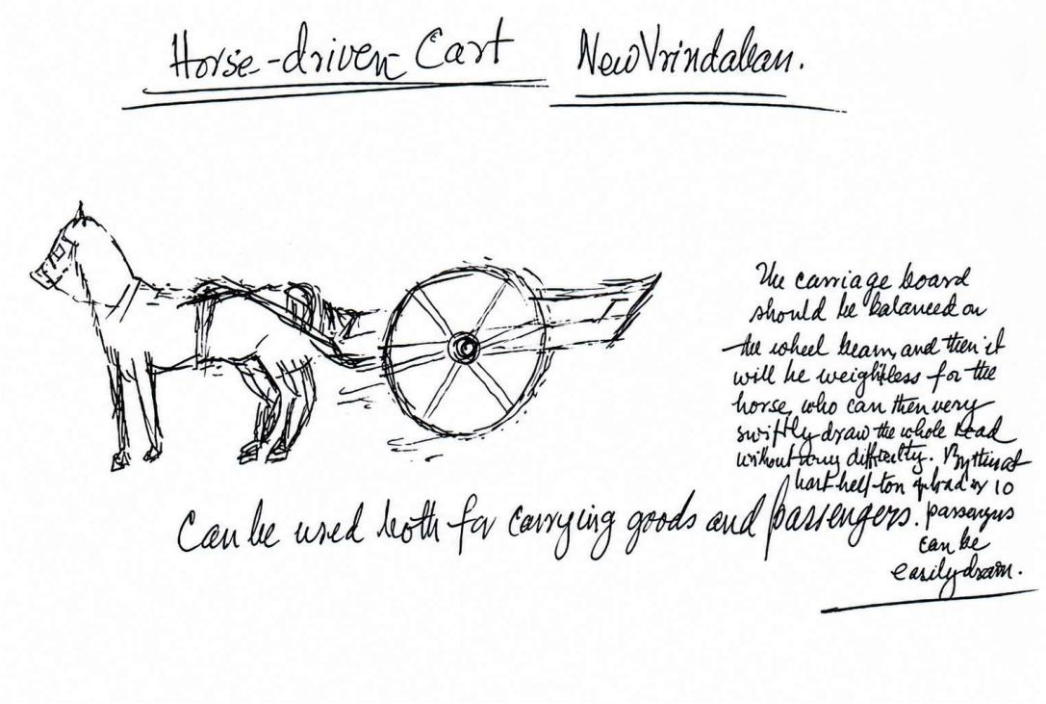
As the late May days pass—beautiful, lengthening days with brief afternoon thundershowers—Prabhupada gradually builds his community, throwing out ideas, planning, even designing a two-wheel cart for the workhorses.

"With this kind of cart," he says, showing me a drawing, "you can more readily go up and down the road. It will be easy for the horses to pull."

I study the drawing. The cart is a much simpler conveyance than our Amish wagon, now in disrepair.

'The *karmis* will see New Vrindaban as an undesirable place," Prabhupada says. "They will say, 'Oh, there's so much trouble. No

amenities, no bathroom or running water.' But devotees will find it a very nice place. When you're Krishna conscious, the world becomes a very beautiful place without problems. Why? Because you've taken shelter of Krishna."



* * *

The first week in June, Rayarama, appears, summoned from New York by Prabhupada's letter criticizing *Back To Godhead*.

"Arjuna looks like a monkey," Prabhupada complains, waving the magazine cover before him, then tossing it on his desk for all to see. "Who painted this picture? By whose authorization?"

"Rohini-dasi," Rayarama says. "A new girl. She didn't know. She just thought he was dark like most Indians."

"Most Indians?" Prabhupada asks, amazed. "She is equating Arjuna with most Indians? With *shudras*? With monkeys? He was a

great *kshatriya*, a great devotee, and she makes him look like a demon with big moustaches and black face."

"She didn't know," Rayarama says. "Anyway, he's brown, not black."

"But Arjuna's neither. He's the most elevated personal friend of Krishna, leader of a great dynasty, a great demigod by today's standards. Men like Arjuna no longer exist."

"The girl didn't know," Rayarama repeats, pleading. "She copied from some other pictures, some other artist."

"Who?" Prabhupada asks. "What rascal paints Arjuna like a *shudra*? Never will you find such a description in authorized scriptures. Why didn't you come to me? Why accept some unauthorized rascal artist who envies Arjuna?"

"But Prabhupada, I didn't know. It certainly wasn't done deliberately. We could print a retraction, if you want."

"You don't know, the girl didn't know, nobody knows. But you are editor of our magazine. It is your business to know or consult."

Bit by bit, Prabhupada forces Rayarama to accept the responsibility for the offense. Prabhupada also makes other criticisms —sex-oriented ads, political articles, a photo of the Beach Boys smoking cigarettes.

"What do they know of Krishna consciousness? Are they authorities, sitting there smoking and talking of Krishna? Why are you printing their opinions?"

Rayarama emerges from the meeting pale and haggard. He stands outside under the willow in a kind of trance. It looks as though his soul has been picked up, spun around and thrown back in his body. He stays long enough for some lemonade, then starts back to New York.

"I think you and Satsvarupa will be doing Back to Godhead, he tells me before leaving. Then: "I just don't know why Prabhupada got so upset over one mistake. It's not like we were presenting some Mayavadi philosophy."

"Maybe it was more serious," Pradyumna says. "Maybe Arjuna's offended."

No one knows what to say. When a disciple is scolded, we don't always see the reason behind it. To us, the rebuke may seem arbitrary, but we know that Prabhupada sees the totality. Ultimately, chastisement is for the devotee's benefit. It is Prabhupada's mercy disguised.

* * *

Sleeping on the cool, stone floor of the pigpen, Kirtanananda is awakened by an enormous black snake slithering across his shaved head. The snake crawls up the log wall and rests on the windowsill.

"Maybe it's a copperhead," Kirtanananda says, dazed. "Looks like a harmless blacksnake to me," I say.

"The *Vedas* advise us to kill all serpents," he says. And, with Vedic authority, he boldly grabs the snake's tail, whirls the snake around like a whip, and beats it against the stones. Then he throws the remains into the bushes.

"The *Vedas* say that saintly persons take delight when serpents are killed," he says. "That was just a harmless creature," I protest.

We consult Prabhupada. Should the snake have been killed?

"All serpents are dangerous," he says. "If they are around the house, then you should kill them."

"But I thought all living things are sacred," I say.

"That may be," Prabhupada says, "but the cow is giving milk, and the snake is giving poison. You don't see the difference? A poison-giver, according to the *Vedas*, may be killed. But mother cow is nicely kept in the barn and pasture. One creature is envious; he is always ready to bite. The other creature is friendly; she just eats a little grass and gives you milk to make butter and cheese. Yes, they are both spirit souls, but these distinctions are there."

* * *

June 4. A young couple from New York, Bill and Inez, come to be initiated by Prabhupada. Both are students at the University of Buffalo, and both were influenced by the night classes in *bhakti-yoga* given by Rupanuga. Bill becomes Bhagavan das, and Inez becomes Krishna-bhamani.

"As soon as you hear this Hare Krishna," Prabhupada tells them, "you immediately remember Krishna, His talks in *Bhagavad-gita*, His form, qualities and pastimes. Everything comes before you by remembering. So we chant Hare Krishna to remember and to remain always uncontaminated. If we forget Krishna, there is chance of contamination."

Bhagavan das and his wife listen intently. Prabhupada continues. He seems to be laughing inwardly.

"Christmas, in Los Angeles, I took some vaccination against the Hong Kong flu," he says. "Hayagriva was insisting because there was some epidemic. So you should know that this world is nothing but the Hong Kong flu. Mayadevi is always ready to attack, and we have to take the injection of Hare Krishna, the vaccine brought by Lord Chaitanya to kill the Hong Kong flu of material consciousness. If you chant Hare Krishna, you will be forced to remember Him. When you are more advanced, you will see nothing but Krishna. When you see a tree, you will actually see Krishna, you will not see the form of a tree. Once you're conversant with the science of Krishna, you know how His

energies are working.

Therefore you will be sympathetic to all living entities. That is universal vision, universal love. If you love Krishna, there will be universal love; otherwise universal love is simply talk."

After the initiation, we celebrate *aratik*, and Prabhupada gives his customary evening lecture, wherein he discusses *sannyas*, the renounced order, and the various stages of renunciation.

"There are four stages," he says. "In the first, the *sannyasi* lives in a cottage outside his village. He doesn't go home, but food is brought to him from home. In the second stage, he asks himself, 'Why stay here? The world is my home.' So he goes out to wander and beg. In India, there is no problem, because there, anyone will give to a *sannyasi*. Even shelter is offered. Thus a *sannyasi* can travel from village to village. In the third stage, he thinks, 'Why should I just take from people? I should also give.' So, instead of hoarding his knowledge, he begins to distribute it. In the last stage, he is experienced in spiritual knowledge and is beyond material infection. This is called the *paramhansa* stage, for, like a *hansa*, a swan, he can extract the essence of the cosmic manifestation—Krishna. The *paramhansa* knows that Krishna is the center, the cause of all causes. All devotees of Krishna are *paramhansas*. We're teaching people to become *paramhansas* immediately, to attain the highest level of *sannyas* just by chanting Hare Krishna."

* * *

That night, I sleep outdoors in the lean-to. The conchshell announcing *aratik* awakes me. I hear the *mantras* telling everyone to come see the beautiful *aratik* of Radha and Krishna. I hurry to bathe and dress.

After *aratik*, Prabhupada sits in the upstairs room chanting

bhajans and playing the harmonium. He calls me up to tell me to set up the tape recorders, that he would like to make a second recording, dubbing in the *mridanga*. He chants the "Chintamani" prayers from the *Brahma-samhita*, in praise of Krishna, and "Parama Karuna,"

"Bhaja Bhakata," and "Udila Aruna," emotive songs of longing for Krishna, expressions of great *bhaktas*.

Afterwards, he tells me that Rayarama needs help on *Back To Godhead*. "He cannot make all the decisions," he says. "He should consult with you and Satsvarupa. It is not difficult. Simply repeat what you have heard. When my Guru Maharaj was selecting articles for *The Harmonist*, if he saw that the writer several times wrote the word 'Krishna' or 'Chaitanya,' he would say, 'All right, publish it. So many times he's written Krishna and Chaitanya.'"

"We're still afraid we don't know enough about Krishna to write very well," I say.

"No matter," he says. "You may not pronounce Sanskrit well. You may call me '*guru'* or '*gau,'* master or cow. But I know your meaning. Similarly, if a book deals with Krishna's pastimes, it's for the swans, even if it's written in broken language. And if it doesn't deal with Krishna's pastimes, it's for the crows, however well written."

"But you've said to try to make it like *Time* [magazine]," I say. "To appeal to a lot of people, we have to relate Krishna to contemporary ideas and events."

"That you may do," he says, "but just make certain that Krishna's at the center. Now the problem lies with all these branches of knowledge. People are pursuing everything and anything, and everyone thinks his field is most important. People collect books, and there are great libraries filled with millions of books of mundane knowledge, and so much time and money is spent. But it's not necessary to read a lot of books. Actually, it's undesirable. Only one book is necessary."

Prabhupada relates the story of a *brahmin* who was instructed by his spiritual master to read three chapters of *Bhagavad-gita* daily. Unfortunately, the *brahmin* was illiterate. Trying to follow the instructions, he sat in a temple and turned the pages of *Bhagavad-gita* one by one. Seeing this, many of his friends, knowing he couldn't read, laughed and made fun. But the humble *brahmin* tolerated this and went on turning pages. When Lord Chaitanya saw this, He took compassion and approached the *brahmin*, asking, "My dear *brahmin*, what are you reading?"

Seeing that this was an elevated person, the *brahmin* replied, "My spiritual master told me to read three chapters of *Bhagavad-gita* daily, but, being illiterate, what can I do? Therefore I'm just sitting down here turning the pages."

"But I see that you're sometimes crying," said the Lord. "You must be appreciating. How is this?"

"Oh yes, I'm appreciating," said the *brahmin*. "When I open the book, I see a picture of Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna is sitting in the chariot, and Krishna is instructing *Bhagavad-gita* to him.

So I am appreciating how kind the Lord is to accept the post of charioteer for His devotee. When I see that the Lord has become servant of His servant, I feel some ecstasy, and I cry."

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu immediately embraced the *brahmin* and told him, "Your *Bhagavad-gita* reading is perfect."

"This is the perfection of *yoga*," Prabhupada says. "Thinking of the activities of Krishna and Arjuna. You don't need academic degrees to read *Bhagavad-gita*. If you understand just one *sloka*, just one verse, and meditate upon it, that is perfect meditation. But no. People must collect and read hundreds of books, going from topic to topic, like crows from garbage to garbage. Therefore you should carefully receive knowledge from the right source and understand it. This means hearing

well."

"Isn't academic education almost an impediment?" I ask. "A whole way of thinking has to be changed."

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "Material qualifications become disqualifications when they're used to help us forget Krishna. But those same qualifications can be dovetailed to Krishna's service. For instance, you learned to read and write in school. Now, you can use these abilities to earn money for sense gratification, or to advance in Krishna consciousness. That's up to you. But usually the effects of education are to entangle us more and more in the world. People lack guidance. Therefore we have founded this Society. We invite everyone—educated and uneducated. Gaura-kishora could not even write his name, but he was so elevated that my Guru Maharaj, a great scholar of his time, accepted him as spiritual master. Transcendental knowledge is revealed to one who has unflinching love for Krishna and the spiritual master. One doesn't have to be a scholar or even literate. The knowledge is revealed by the spiritual master, who is the mercy of Krishna."

* * *

Satyabhama and Shama-dasi spearhead a drive for a washing machine. They convincingly argue that it takes too much time to carry the clothes down to the spring and beat them on the rocks. They could render Krishna much more service if all this were done automatically, electrically.

We agree to allocate fifty dollars, and Paramananda buys a second-hand Maytag washer in Wheeling. Since both the horse wagon and powerwagon are in disrepair, Paramananda, Hrishikesh, Ranandhir and Chaitanya-das have to carry the Maytag on poles for two muddy miles. When they finally arrive at the farmhouse, Prabhupada is amazed.

"This is called *ugra-karma*," he says. "In *Bhagavad-gita*, *ugra-*

karma is mentioned. It is extremely hard endeavor that is painful to carry out and leads to no good." Then Prabhupada laughs. "Yes, you think you're advancing by these materialistic inventions like slaughterhouses, atomic bombs, breweries and this machine. But it is all *ugra-karma*, all hard labor, all suffering."

All suffering indeed. The used Maytag works only three days before breaking down. Now the defunct machine is referred to as "Shama-dasi's *ugra-karma*."

* * *

June 10. My parents visit New Vrindaban for a day. After talking with Prabhupada in his upstairs room, they are impressed. My mother says, "You can tell immediately that he's a real holyman. All he talks about is Krishna."

My parents are too kind to criticize the rundown farm or discourage our ambitions for a community, but by afternoon they decide to return to the Holiday Inn with its toilet and running water.

In the late afternoon, Prabhupada sits in his favorite spot beneath the persimmon tree, reads letters or a few verses, and looks out over the hills.

"This place is out of contact," he says. "It is Krishna's desire that no ordinary man will come here." Prabhupada turns to me, smiling. "Is that not so?" He then begins laughing heartily and nodding his head. "Yes, it is beyond the reach of ordinary men. Just like your father said this morning, 'I'll never walk up that road again.'"

"I'm afraid Aghasura Road is our greatest enemy, Prabhupada," I say.

"No," he laughs. "Krishna's devotee has no enemy. He sees everything as Krishna's plan. Now you may be thinking you have to conquer the road, but someday you may see that it's a great asset.



Śrīla Prabhupāda and the devotees in New Vrindaban.





Mother Kuṭilā dāsī (one of the first settlers of New Vrindaban).



Girindra Mohinī and hand-washing laundry

Someday there may be many cottages by the road, and people will be driving up to see. Don't be discouraged."

For a long time, Prabhupada sits watching the boys working in the fields below, digging roots out of the garden with picks, clearing away the sticky blackberry shrubs with bush-axes, gathering the brambles and burning them.

"Krishna is so attractive that one becomes hypnotized," he says. "Otherwise, why are these boys working so hard on this farm? They're all qualified to earn money outside. In your country, sufficient money is paid for work, but these boys are hypnotized here."

"You've hypnotized them, Prabhupada," Pradyumna says.

"Not I. What attraction do I have? Krishna is the all-attractive. He hypnotizes you in spite of yourself. Like the Pandavas. Arjuna and all the Pandavas were friends and relatives of Krishna, but they were banished from their kingdom for twelve years, and their wife Draupadi was insulted. By becoming Krishna's devotees, the Pandavas underwent many difficulties. Still, their love for Krishna increased. Narada Muni was astonished by this. 'What kind of hypnotist is Krishna?' he was asking."

Prabhupada laughs, shaking all over, his smile enormous. He leans forward on the little table, and joins his palms as if in prayer. Devananda brings him a cup of water.

"They've been working all day," Devananda observes, looking at the devotees in the field.

"Yes, I was just commenting," Prabhupada says. "They are hypnotized by Krishna. That is *samadhi. Samadhi* doesn't mean inactivity. It means being completely absorbed in Krishna. Anyone chanting Hare Krishna is in *samadhi*. Anyone cooking for Krishna or writing for Krishna or working in the field for Krishna is in *samadhi*

because the consciousness is: 'I am doing this for the satisfaction of Krishna."

"*Yogis* are always speaking of entering *samadhi*," I say.

"Yes," Prabhupada says. "*Samadhi* is the goal of all *yoga*. It is total absorption. The illiterate *brahmin* looking at the picture was in *samadhi* because he was absorbed in thoughts of Krishna and Arjuna. But *samadhi* doesn't mean sitting like a statue, holding your breath, and thinking of merging with some void or spirit. No. Working for Krishna is *samadhi*. Thinking of Him is *samadhi*. Preaching *Bhagavad-gita* is *samadhi*."

"But often it doesn't seem that way," Pradyumna says. "Often it's hard. People aren't interested, or they're antagonistic."

"That's another matter," Prabhupada says. "People may not want to hear because the Vedic literatures are reminding us of God, whom we have forgotten since time immemorial. That forgetfulness is the goal of modern civilization. They want the kingdom of God—prosperity, enjoyment, happiness—without God. That was also Ravana's desire. Ravana had much gold. His capital, Sri Lanka, was covered with gold. That is material civilization—paradise without God. So here, on this little piece of land at least, we are trying to restore consciousness of God. So what do you think? We can have paradise with God."

* * *

June 14. We are entering Prabhupada's fourth week at New Vrindaban. He is looking robust and is enjoying himself immensely. In the early mornings now, he walks down Aghasura Road to the spring and often takes a little fresh water in his hand and sips it. He comments on everything: the birds, flowers, fence, pasture, buildings. Nothing is too insignificant to escape his attention. He even inquires about a stray dog.

"Does he have a name?"

"We call him Hare Rama," I say. "And how's that?"

"Because he chants. He can't say Hare Krishna, but he can say Hare Rama."

When I coax Hare Rama by chanting "Hare Rama," he responds, as always, by lowering his head between his paws and making a strange sound that very closely resembles "Hare Ramaramarama."

"Oh, very good!" Prabhupada laughs. "Even the stray dogs are making nice progress here. That is the potency of a holy *dham*. In Vrindaban, you will see many dogs running loose in the streets, but when they die, they are liberated. That is a special benediction for those who have committed offenses in Vrindaban. They receive one life as a dog or hog in Vrindaban. Then liberation."

* * *

June 18. A letter arrives from Mukunda informing Prabhupada that he has found a house in downtown London, not far from the British Museum. There is some interest among the large Hindu population. And John Lennon has offered to host Prabhupada and the devotees at his Ascot estate north of London. George Harrison has taken the most initiative, helping Mukunda and Shyamasundar cut a Hare Krishna record. They expect big sales in England, and are recording more songs under George's direction to be issued in an album by the Beatles's Apple Record Company.

Clearly, Prabhupada stands on the brink of international recognition. Devotees are distributing *Bhagavad-gita* on streets, at games and races, in parks and airports. Arrested for soliciting, they generally win the court cases, and this sparks more newspaper coverage. Money flows quickly in and out, as big buildings with expensive overheads are rented and bought. In the name of transcendental competition, each center tries to establish a bigger and better temple to

attract Prabhupada's presence.

"I must go to London," Prabhupada tells Purushottam. "Make reservations at once."

This casts us into despair. We've been hoping that he would spend the entire summer in New Vrindaban, but he has been saying that everything depends on developments in London.

"There are many Indians in England who want to start a Hindu temple," Prabhupada says, "but I'm not interested in something for Hindus. We want something for everybody. So far, in our Society, there is not one single Indian other than me."

And, thinking of this, Prabhupada laughs loudly.

* * *

June 19. Purushottam schedules Prabhupada to fly from Pittsburg to New York on the morning of June 23. After spending a week in New York, he plans to fly on to London. From there, he will launch the Hare Krishna invasion of Europe.

* * *

June 21. Prabhupada calls a special meeting beneath the persimmon tree to discuss the founding of a *gurukula* at New Vrindaban.

So far, there are only three boys at our school. But not for long. Prabhupada wants all the Society's children sent to New Vrindaban.

"Now in this New Vrindaban we will have a community of enlightened fathers and mothers, and of *sannyasis* and *brahmacharis*. All the children here are very fortunate. They are learning automatically how to chant.

"If you can make just one child Krishna conscious, that will be a great service to the earth. Krishna will be very pleased. Many children will come here, because this place is very nice, and Krishna will give us all opportunity. I will also come again. I like it so much here, but first I must finish the little work still remaining. I want to go once to London and Germany. Then I'll entrust the whole preaching work to you. So do not become too anxious. With cooperation, everything will be possible. Krishna will help you."

* * *

June 22, Prabhupada's last night in New Vrindaban. After *kirtan*, he tells us that even if we can't prosecute Krishna consciousness in full, we should still accept it.

"Once a person has taken to Krishna consciousness, Krishna will never leave him," he says. "His consciousness of Krishna will revive even in his next body as a *shudra*. Previously, you American boys and girls were addicted to eating meat and engaging in many abominable habits, yet you immediately took to this process. This is because in your last life you performed some Krishna conscious activity but somehow or other could not complete the process. So there is no loss, as Narada assures Vyasadeva, and as *Bhagavad-gita* confirms. It doesn't matter. Once you have taken to Krishna consciousness, wherever you may take birth, in whatever country or planet, that consciousness will be revived. That is the nature of the plant of *bhakti* that grows and grows.

"Have I told you of the plant of *bhakti*? Lord Chaitanya likens *bhakti* to the sowing of a seed in the heart by the spiritual master. Once this seed is sown in the heart, and the disciple goes on watering it by chanting Hare Krishna, the seed will fructify and grow and grow until it penetrates the covering of the material universe and enters into the *brahmajyoti* effulgence in the spiritual sky, where it also grows more and more until it reaches the highest planet, Goloka Vrindaban, where the plant ultimately takes shelter under the lotus feet of Krishna, and there rests.

"So Krishna consciousness may seem checked for the time being, but that is only temporary. It will again come out. Just the desire to serve Krishna is sufficient to keep you intact. This desire will never die."

* * *

After *kirtan*, Prabhupada goes upstairs, and Kirtanananda takes him hot milk. We crowd into the small room, all eager to catch his last words. He talks lightly of his travelling. Personally, he says, he would like to stay in New Vrindaban and finish translating *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

When young Dwarkadish begins to nod sleepily, Prabhupada smiles.

"So, you are feeling *samadhi*, Mr. D. D. D. ?" he asks. "All right. Let him take rest. And you are also feeling *samadhi*, Mr. Ekendra? You are very good boys. You can also take rest."

We sense that it is time to let Prabhupada himself take rest, but we remain in the room, knowing the importance of each precious moment spent with a *sadhu*. As Purushottam packs, he asks Prabhupada where he would like certain items placed, and Prabhupada gives him directions while answering everyone's last question.

"Just as a doctor can tell the condition of his patient by feeling his pulse," he says, "so the spiritual master can also tell the condition of his disciple and prescribe medicine accordingly."

"But what if we don't take the medicine?" Ranandhir asks.

"Oh, that much you must do," Prabhupada says. "My Guru Maharaj used to give the example of a man trapped in the bottom of a well. If someone comes along and throws him a rope, he must grab it. If he does not, what can be done? One must make the effort to grab the rope. That much endeavor we must have. We have that much

independence. We have to catch the rope. Then Krishna will grab us. So that is our situation, and we should know it. The test of all spiritual life is at the time of death. It is a difficult test. Therefore we must scientifically practise chanting Hare Krishna to remember Krishna at death. Training and association are important, not mundane education. Getting up for *aratik*, chanting our rounds, and reading *Bhagavad-gita* is real education."

We sit before Prabhupada waiting. There is a silence in which we hear only Purushottam packing and the big bullfrog croaking away in the little pond beneath the spring. It is a very lonely sound.

"It's getting late," Kirtanananda says at last. "We'll never get up for *aratik* if we don't let Srila Prabhupada rest."

Prabhupada says nothing, and this is a sign that we are to retire. We all offer obeisances and leave his room.

* * *

After hot milk, we sit a while under the willow just outside Prabhupada's window and watch the moon slowly climb through the branches. From time to time, I see Purushottam behind the window, packing Prabhupada's trunks. Finally, I walk up the hill past the garden to the lean-to and my sleeping bag.

Chanting one last round before sleep, looking up at the stars, I think of Prabhupada seated eternally behind his tin footlocker, waiting calmly with all the answers.

And how many perfect answers to endless questions! As we all approach Krishna from our own angle of vision, our karmic history, Prabhupada answers us all, patiently sifting and sifting, discarding nonessentials, explaining over and over until only the Truth remains.

"And when you have thus learned the Truth, you will know that all

living beings are but part of Me—and that they are in Me, and are Mine."

Pradyumna's voice rises from below the hill: "Srila Prabhupada, *ki jai*! All glories to Srila Prabhupada!" And from the lower pasture, someone answers with "Haribol!"

I continue chanting softly on my beads and watch the moon, nearly full, shine over Govardhan Hill, spreading its cool light over the earth, like Prabhupada spreading pure love of Krishna. That love is what we all truly want. If we're at all happy, it's because some day we'll attain it. Prabhupada's promise. Whether we have to wait a thousand years, or only until tomorrow, that day will surely come.

End of Chapter 18



Gargarsi (playing the flute), walking with Kālīya (ISKCON's first cow) along the path to the farmhouse in New Vrindaban. Photograph from the 1970s.

THE AUTHOR

Hayagriva Dasa was bom Howard Wheeler in 1940 in Pensacola, Florida, and was raised in the South. He attended the University of North Carolina, The New School For Social Research (A.B., 1963), and New York University (M.A., 1964). Until 1971, he taught English at Ohio State University. In the 1960s and 1970s, as editor of Back To godhead magazine, Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Krishna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Teachings of Lord Chaitanya, The Nectar of Devotion, Srimad-Bhagavatam (30 vols.), Chaitanya, The Nectar of Devotion, Srimad-Bhagavatam (30 vols.), Chaitanya-caritamrita (17 vols.), and many other books, he conferred extensively with Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and set a high literary standard for all ISKCON Press and Bhaktivedanta Book Trust publications. His definitive editing of Bhagavad-gita As It Is helped earn it critical acclaim and fame as the most widely distributed Bhagavad-gita in history, with some seventeen million copies in print. Travelling with Srila Prabhupada in America, Europe, and India, he recorded hundreds of Prabhupada's lectures, and compiled them into small, popular books: The Perfection of Yoga, Beyond Birth and Death, On the Way to Krishna, The Path of Perfection, and others. In Back To Godhead magazine, his articles and essays proclaimed the broad cultural base of Krishna consciousness, and served to link Vedic philosophy with Western transcendentalism, particularly in American literature. In 1968, he helped found the New Vrindaban Community in West Virginia, and, until 1973, served as President of New Vrindaban, and charter member of ISKCON's Governing Board Commission. In 1976, in Hawaii and Los Angeles, his conversations with Srila Prabhupada formed the basis of a major work in comparative philosophy: *Dialectic Spiritualism: A Vedic View of Western Philosophy*.

"Racy, eyewitness reporting on the explosive birth of spiritual consciousness in America. As a teacher, Prabhupada was fearless, patient and masterful."

JAMES QUINA, Ph.D.
College of Education, Wayne State University

This is a joyful, intimate chronicle of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's founding of the international Hare Krishna movement, drawn from the daily notebooks of his senior editor. Its lively, immediate style verbally films the grandfatherly "Swamji," the bhakti-yoga master from India, as he shepherds his American flock through the turbulent, rebellious, zany, hippy counter-culture of the sixties. The scenes: New York's Lower East Side, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, and Prabhupada's own New Vrindaban Community in the West Virginia hills. Here at last is a dramatic, on-the-spot portrait of a perfected holyman and his first disciples, revealing that even today the founding of a new religious consciousness is based on faith in a mahatma, a great soul.

"The personality of Srila Prabhupada is certainly evoked in these pages. Hayagriva has captured the exciting spirit of the wonderful, innocent days of the Krishna consciousness movement as it expanded personally from His Divine Grace"

SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI

"Spiritual India meets hedonist America. Cross-culture buffs will love it!"

DR. VIBHAKAR MODY,
Executive Director, Hindu Alliance