

**EXPERIENCING RADHA-KRISHNA**  
**A GUIDE FOR ENTERING INTO THEIR PLAY**  
**or CREATE YOURSELF IN AN IDEALIZED REALITY**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW I LEARNED THIS PROCESS 4

*VRINDABAN, THE HOLIEST PLACE 4*

*STARTING THE DELHI TEMPLE 16*

*DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERY 18*

*LIFE AT RADHA DAMODAR TEMPLE 27*

*ON THE ROAD AGAIN 29*

*BUILDING THE KRISHNA BALARAM  
TEMPLE 35*

*HYDERABAD 40*

*PILGRIMAGE 42*

*MY REAL DISCIPLIC SUCCESSION 49*

*BHAKTIVINODE THAKUR - MYSTIC LOVE  
POET 55*

*THE HIGHEST TEACHINGS 58*

*TOWARD THE END 60*

## HOW I LEARNED THIS PROCESS

This section tells how I gained knowledge of this means of creating yourself as a participant in Radha-Krishna's idealized world of Braj and became the first Westerner of my generation to receive *siddha-pranali/ekadash bhav* initiation. When you see the difficulties involved, you will understand why I think it best to make the information available in this form so that Westerners can readily avail themselves of it.

I became a disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (Swamiji) in February, 1967, Haight Ashbury. I opened my first temple in Santa Fe, New Mexico that summer, the "Summer of Love." I became a *sannyasi*, renunciate, in 1970 and was named Subal Das Goswami by Swamiji. I did a five month speaking tour of Europe. Then Swamiji called me to Bombay to do the public relations for a large festival he and his followers were planning.

## VRINDABAN, THE HOLIEST PLACE

In April, 1971 after the successful Bombay festival, I went to Delhi with Khirodakshayee, an Indian devotee who had lived in London. Kirodakshayee was going to help me get my visa extended, and then we were to start a temple in Delhi. We went to the Minister of the Interior to get a three month tourist visa so I could be in the country legally since my entry visa already expired.

Mr. Sharma, an old friend of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's arranged for us to stay at the Devidayal Dharmashala which was an inn where groups of people came for weddings and other occasions. Sharma provided meals at his nearby apartment. He had two teenage sons and had promised Swamiji one of them.

Mr. Sharma asked if I wanted to go to Vrindaban, the birthplace of Krishna. I heard about Vrindaban from a hippie in Santa Fe who had been there, and ever since I cherished a desire to go there. I wanted to experience Krishna consciousness at its roots in the native culture. Vrindaban is the main place of pilgrimage for Krishna devotees and is said to be non-different from the spiritual abode of Krishna. Of course I wanted to go! I would have walked eighty-five miles down the banks of the Jamuna River to get there. Sharma took me on the train.

Arriving in Mathura, we went on a bicycle rickshaw the remaining eight miles to Vrindaban. A crow shit on my shoulder as we drove out of Mathura. I did not know if this was a good sign or not. It was a long hard drive, and I felt sorry for the rickshaw driver who worked like a beast of burden. The country was arid, with sparse vegetation.

When we entered the outskirts of Vrindaban, I asked the driver to stop. I got out and rolled in the dust as I had read in the *Bhagavat* that Akrura, a great devotee of old, did when he came to Vrindaban.

We went to Keshi Ghat, a bathing place on the Yamuna River. I said, "You expect me to go in there?" as I stood looking at the huge tortoises lurking in the water looking at me.

"Yes, don't worry about them. They only pinch."

I got up my courage and went in. Yes, I only got pinched while saying *gayatri mantras* in the sacred waters.

Sharma had relatives who were Goswamis, priests at the Radha Ramana temple. He arranged for me to stay at the house of one who was out of town. It was right across the street from Seva Kunja, a walled garden where Radha-Krishna went to be served by their girlfriends after dancing in the forest all night. It was said that no one can spend the night there without going crazy or dying because Radha-Krishna still come there every night, and the sight is too much for a mortal to behold. There are a number of stories about devotees who spent the night there and went mad or died.

Radha-Krishna's pastimes are eternal. They are said to have incarnated 5,000 years ago in the town of Vrindaban, which is a replica of their eternal spiritual abode. Krishna went into the forests around town and played his flute at night. His young girlfriends left everything and rushed into the forest to rendezvous with him when his flute song reached their ears. They yearned to be kissed by his lips and taste the nectar as his flute did while he played it.

Without reserve, they threw themselves in his embrace kissing his lotus lips and tasting his mouth, which was scented and his teeth stained red from chewing betel nuts, a mild intoxicant and aphrodisiac. They pressed their firm jug like breasts against his garlanded chest and entwined themselves around him like a creeper about a tree.

Krishna expanded himself into as many forms as there were girls and danced with them in the forest. The girls sang, and Krishna played his flute. After becoming weary from dancing, the girls laid down their *saris* and made love with Krishna for what appeared to be an eternity. They then went for a cooling bath in the Yamuna River. Splashing and playing, they appeared like a herd of elephants.

In the early morning hours, the band of young lovers went to the beautiful garden of Seva Kunja to be served sweet drinks, spicy pastries, milk sweets, and other refreshments by their girlfriends. Then, after more dancing, they slipped home to bed before their families awoke. Krishna and his girlfriends are said to be between the ages of thirteen and sixteen when these pastimes took place.

There were many tamal trees in the Seva Kunja garden. These trees have a blackish bark which is often compared to Krishna's skin color. One especially black one, the Shyam tamal tree, was the one Krishna clung to when he was weeping in separation from Radha. Although Krishna had many girlfriends, Radha was number one. Unless she was present, the dance or other love sports were not complete.

Sometimes, Radha-Krishna had a love quarrel, and she spurned him for awhile. At such times, he wept in separation from her. Once, weeping and clutching the Shyam tamal tree, where his hands touched it, *shalagrams*, black sacred stones, formed. This is the God of love who wept in separation from his beloved. Nearby was a golden tree where Radha similarly experienced separation from Krishna.

In the garden, there was a small temple, a pool that Krishna magically made with his flute to give water to the thirsty cowherd girls, raised platforms for them to dance and sit on, and many rhesus monkeys. The ground was packed white clay, and it was kept swept clean.

That evening, Sharma took me to some of the 5,000 temples that Vrindaban is famous for. Some are quite palatial while others are simple rooms in peoples' homes. First we went to Radha Damodar Temple which is where Swamiji lived before going to America. He continued to pay rent on his two rooms there, and when he didn't like the way things were going with his disciples, he threatened to go back there and live a simple life. In the meantime, the rooms were kept locked.

Radha Damodar temple was founded four hundred years ago by Jiva Goswami, one of the six main apostles of Krishna Chaitanya. In the back courtyard, were areas where the remains of Jiva Goswami, Rupa Goswami, and other saints were entombed. Devotees circumambulated the temple and

tombs, bowed down before them and chanted the holy names constantly.

When it was time, the deities were awakened from their afternoon nap and offered food, water, incense, flower, peacock fan, flame, conch shell, bells, chanting, etc. This ritual is performed several times every day and is called *aroti*.

Next, Sharma and I went to the Radha Balabha temple. The deities were still closed. Devotees came in and offered obeisance. Several musicians played beautiful music on traditional instruments and sang devotional songs near the back of the courtyard. Devotees milled around the courtyard chanting and talking. Sharma and I sat on a stone veranda in back of the courtyard waiting for the *aroti* ceremony.

Some older devotees came and offered obeisance to me and touched my feet. I felt unworthy of such treatment by people who engaged in devotional practices longer than me and lived in such a holy place.

When the doors in front of the deities opened, they were beautiful. The deity room was situated on a raised marble stage in front of the temple. There was a four foot high black stone deity of Krishna and a slightly smaller brass Radha. They were dressed and decorated gorgeously. It was said that they were self-manifested deities who revealed themselves to a great devotee. The worship and atmosphere at this temple was excellent, and it is one of my favorites.

Sharma took me to visit some of his relatives. Then we went to a temple in the home of a devotee. His deity was also said to be self-manifested.

A Krishna play was going on in an open theater. This was a regular occurrence. It was performed by children and teens in ornate costumes. People came and went freely.

After visiting a couple of other temples, Sharma and I went back to the house where I was staying. Sharma went to catch the train back to Delhi.

I heard the bells ringing at a nearby temple and rushed there for the last *aroti*. It was the Radha Raman temple founded by Gopal Bhatt Goswami. The deity was said to be self-manifested four hundred years ago out of a sacred stone known as *shalagram*. He is about nine inches high, and very attractive.

After the *aroti* and getting a taste of the food offered to Radharaman, I headed home. I took a wrong turn and wound up wandering around the maze like streets of Vrindaban. I found some other large temples that we passed on the way into town. I entered a walled garden and heard the eerie sound of peacocks crying in the trees overhead. I didn't know what it was. I was enchanted by the exotic beauty of the place with its stone pavilions. After wandering for some time, I finally found my way home.

The next day, I went to an old temple on the outskirts of Vrindaban that I passed on the way into town. It was deserted. The priests were killed or driven off by robbers known as dacoits. Beautiful peacocks sang and danced on its sandstone walls.

Near by, I found a lake of the Yamuna River where I swam. It was Akrur Ghat where the great devotee Akrur was said to have a vision of Krishna in the lake five thousand years ago. It was also where Krishna Chaitanya stayed on his visit to Vrindaban five hundred years ago.

There was a forest where cuckoos sang in the trees, cows wandered herded by young boys, and I saw a gnu, which looks like a cross between a cow and a deer. In many ways, life was going on here just like it was five thousand years ago when Krishna is said to have incarnated and displayed his pastoral pastimes.

This was why I joined the Krishna Movement and came to India. I was the only Westerner in town and was able to experience Krishna consciousness in its true homeland. This was where the original practices started and people lived them for thousands of years. Although Western influence was increasing, living in Vrindaban was like living in another time as well as another place. I wanted to drink it in and experience it on its own terms.

I felt at home here like I lived here in previous lives. I felt I was an Indian *swami* in my previous life. Why else was I so attracted to this austere foreign life style, and why did I feel so at home here? Swamiji said his early disciples were associates of Krishna Chaitanya in previous lives in India, and we took birth in America to help spread Krishna consciousness throughout the world. I believe this is true.

Walking through the bazaar, I was grabbed by a leper woman whose fingers and toes had fallen off due to the disease. She plead, "American *sadhu!* American *sadhu!* Holy man, save me!" She fell at my feet begging.

A *sannyasi* was not to be touched by a woman, what to speak of a leper woman. I didn't know what to do. I chanted and offered my blessings. Breaking free, I ran into the nearest temple. It was the Sahaji Temple, a large, ornate marble temple with crystal chandlers, and good deity worship. They kept a ping pong ball balanced on a stream of water from a fountain in front of the deity of Krishna for his amusement.

I sat in back of the temple collecting myself. A party of pilgrims came through to see the deity. As they left and saw me, they threw coins at my feet. I gathered them and threw half to Krishna. I took the other half and bought a large glass of hot milk in the bazaar.

I stopped carrying my monk's staff. It attracted too much attention. Most of the *sannyasis* in town didn't carry a staff. It is a sign of office and high position, one who can meet out punishment and interpret the law. The mood of the devotees of Vrindaban is to be "humbler than a blade of grass" as taught by Krishna Chaitanya. One is the "servant of the servant of the servant of the cowherd girls of Vrindaban" who were Krishna's greatest devotees because they gave their all to him. One should not

seek to place oneself above others. We should be servants of all.

I was torn between the depth of spiritual beauty and the depth of material poverty and harsh living conditions which exist side by side in India. It is a combination of heaven and hell. The Hindu scriptures say earth is a middle planet with aspects of heaven and hell. This is very apparent in India.

I considered returning to the U.S. I didn't get inoculations before entering India and would need them to get back into America. I went to a clinic in Delhi to get a smallpox vaccination. A number of Indians were also there for vaccinations, and it seemed like the doctor used the same needle on several people.

I went to another public health clinic to get a cholera shot. The nurse got the needle out of a box in her purse, wiped it off with cotton and what I hoped was an antiseptic, and injected me. To be pierced by a needle was forbidden for *sannyasis* by Hindu law. What to speak of being touched by a woman in the process! I didn't know one could pay to get the health certificate stamped without getting the shots, and I didn't think this nurse's touch was going to make me fall from my vow of celibacy.

That night, I came down with a fever and was very sick. The next day, Gunarnava and I went back to Vrindaban. The following day was Krishna's appearance day. There was a big celebration all over town. In spite of still being sick, Gunarnava and I made the round of temples. I met an American couple

who often came to the Philadelphia temple while I was in charge there.

The next day, they visited me. It was Bhaktivedanta Swami's appearance day. They invited me to join them in a visit with Niem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass' guru, whom they came to Vrindaban to see.

We went to his temple on the edge of town that featured a large Hanuman deity. Devotees at this temple chanted twenty-four hours a day over a loud speaker. We sat on the veranda and Babaji sat on a wooden cot wrapped in a blanket. He asked me to lead some chanting. Everyone joined in. Then we talked a while. Through an interpreter, Babaji asked what brought us to India and what we were doing there. I explained how my guru called me to India and how I fell in love with Vrindaban.

Gunarnava and I returned home. We prepared a feast for our guru's birthday, and had lunch. We fasted since the previous day. I couldn't eat much.

After lunch, we took a rickshaw to the Rama Krishna Mission Hospital on the main road leading into town. I was bright yellow, very weak, and diagnosed with hepatitis. I stayed in the hospital for a few days recuperating in a ward with many poor suffering Indians. Gunarnava had to bring me meals and medicine from the pharmacy in town. When I regained some strength, I requested to be discharged. They said I had to stay longer. I had Gunarnava arrange a rickshaw, and I walked out as they yelled for me to stay.

I was still very weak, and got a cane to help me walk. It was also handy for holding off the packs of wild dogs that roamed Vrindaban and attacked people when they were alone at night or in the early morning hours. Dogs are not often kept as pets in India. In Vrindaban, there were so many running wild that the police went around and shot them once a year.

There were also many wild pigs rummaging around town competing with the dogs for garbage and stool which piled up in the gutters where sewer water ran in open streams. Men and women came around daily sweeping the streets with handleless straw brooms and metal scoops picking up the garbage and excrement. They put it in hand carts which were dumped at a spot to be picked up by a tractor or oxen pulled trailer.

In the bazaars, shops lined the streets and were raised a couple of feet above the cement road to avoid flooding during the monsoon season. The proprietors sat on cushions in the open storefronts displaying their wares and dealing with customers. Other merchants had hand carts in the street. Most of the traffic was pedestrians, with some bicycles, rickshaws, ox carts and a few cars and trucks. There were no side walks, and the streets were about twenty feet wide. Most of the buildings were painted, stucco brick. It had the feeling of an old medieval town, especially in the evenings when people lit their dried dung burners in the streets to cook dinner, and a pungent smoke filled the air.

The native "Brijbasis" were born and raised there, but many people came from other parts of India, especially Bengal where there are many followers of Krishna Chaitanya. Many of the pilgrims were old and came to Vrindaban to die in the holy abode of Krishna. Others came as part of their life journey seeking purification and enlightenment. Large parties of pilgrims came for the major festivals. I wondered about the spirituality of some of these people when they were pushing and shoving to get on a crowded bus to Mathura or when I was harassed by them for being American.

That night, Gunarnava and I attended musical plays depicting Radha-Krishna and Chaitanya's pastimes. It was at the home of the head Goswami of the Radha Raman temple. We were the guests of Dr. Kapoor, a god-brother of Swamiji's. He translated the gist of the plays for us. I was impressed and moved by the depth of devotion presented in a simple yet highly artistic manner. We returned several nights for continuing performances of the plays.

## STARTING THE DELHI TEMPLE

Swamiji sent a group of devotees headed by Tamal Krishna to Delhi to help start a temple and organize a big festival like we had in Bombay. He wrote me, "What are you doing in Vrindaban? Return to Delhi immediately."

Gunarnava and I took a night train. We traveled third class unreserved, which was the

cheapest way to go. I got out of the hospital about two weeks earlier and was still very weak. I climbed into the luggage rack to get some sleep.

The devotees lived in a large apartment. Since I was too weak to go out and do much, I was made treasurer. I was instructed that when devotees asked for money I was to say I didn't have it and disburse only what was required for essentials. This was considered necessary to keep overhead down and have enough money to expand the preaching programs. I didn't like being in that position.

Sometimes I was so weak I laid on my blankets on the floor holding my staff and prayer beads feeling like I was going to die. I went to homeopathic and ayurvedic doctors seeking a cure. I have little faith in Western allopathic medicine since it deals with the symptoms through chemical and surgical intervention rather than getting to the source of the disease. Finally an ayurvedic physician cured me using a combination of herbs and precious metals ground together into a medicine. I got most of my strength back within a few days.

One day in Swamiji's room, I and a couple of other devotees sat with the mayor of New Delhi and Swamiji. The war between India and Pakistan was going on over the independence of Bangla Desh. There was an air raid and blackout. Swamiji said to close the shutters, but don't turn the lights off. "If they want to drop a bomb on us, let them. We will see it as Krishna coming in the form of a bomb to kill us." The mayor didn't object.

Brahmananda Maharaj was sent to West Pakistan and Gargamuni Maharaj was sent to East Pakistan to preach after spending some time preaching in Florida. Their lives were in danger in Pakistan due to the war and religious persecution. They came to Delhi for refuge. Gargamuni was held at gunpoint at the airport in Pakistan, and Brahmananda was in a temple that was strafed by machine gun fire. Swamiji said, "You should have stayed, but now you are here and safe, so that is all right."

The festival was just as large and successful as the Bombay one. The special guests included the mayor of New Delhi, the Minister of Defense, and the Canadian High Commissioner. The *sannyasis* formed a circle around Swamiji and used our staffs as a barricade to keep the throngs of people seeking blessings from crushing or tripping Swamiji as he walked from his car to the stage. Many people tried to touch his feet as he walked by.

## DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERY

A swami who owned a vacant Sanskrit school in Vrindaban offered the use of it to Swamiji. It contained a treadle operated letterpress. Swamiji wanted me to take charge there and see about starting a Hindi edition of *Back to Godhead* using the press. I was glad to get permission to live in Vrindaban again. I was joined by Australian and Indian disciples.

It was a stucco building. The front door opened on a long narrow room. Then there was a courtyard with two rooms and a veranda on one side and one large room containing the press on the other side. These rooms only had bamboo slat lattice work for walls on the courtyard side. Sometimes, while we were out, the monkeys broke in and ransacked the place. Sometimes, when we ate on the veranda, monkeys jumped from the courtyard walls and stole food from our plates. There was a small lockable room in the back which served as a kitchen. It opened on another courtyard. There was no toilet. We used the alley or the river bank.

We slept on the veranda on hot summer nights. I lay on the concrete covered by a thin piece of cloth which I wore during the day. Mosquitoes swarmed around, and any part of my body which wasn't covered got bit. Sleep was difficult.

We sometimes begged door to door for food. This was a common practice for those devoted to religious life in India. Most people were glad to give a little, especially if one asked in the name of Radha by calling out "Radhe!" to get the people's attention. The residents of Vrindaban consider Krishna's lover, Radha, to be higher than him. Swamiji said, "In Vrindaban, if Krishna comes without Radha, the devotees will say, 'Go away and come back when you have Radha with you.'"

I went to Mathura to see Brijabasi & Sons who published beautiful devotional posters which were popular with Krishna devotees. I was happy to be

able to see the original paintings of some of my favorite prints in their home. I wanted advice about what to do with the printing press. They advised it was not worth bothering with. A bigger more modern press was needed for the job. I agreed with their assessment. The two other devotees left, and I was in Vrindaban alone again.

I became friends with O.B.L. Kapoor, Ph.D., a large man with white hair and glasses. He wore a traditional white *dhoti* and *kirta* as many married Indians did. Dr. Kapoor spoke English well, as he was head of a college and a philosophy professor. He was also a learned devotee who wrote books and gave talks around town regularly.

He was warm and friendly to me. Both Swamiji and Dr. Kapoor separated from the Gaudiya Math, the institution founded by their spiritual teacher Bhakti-siddhanta Sarasvati. It had been corrupted by Tirtha Maharaj, a disciple who became the manager.

After the death of Bhakti-siddhanta, Dr. Kapoor took another spiritual teacher. He was from a disciplic succession of *babajis* whose approach was entering the mood of the cowherd girls who are Krishna's greatest devotees. I was very interested in this.

Dr. Kapoor referred me to Gouranga Das. He lived alone at the north edge of town in Raman Reti. He looked like an impersonalist *sannyasi* in his saffron robes with a shaved head lacking the lock of hair in the back that devotees kept and no clay *tilack* marking

on the forehead, but he was really a great devotee of Radha-Krishna.

As we sat on the flat roof of his home, he told me that some gurus tell their disciples what their spiritual identity is and how to meditate on their pastimes with Krishna. He didn't want to tell me that without Swami's permission. He asked how many rounds of beads I chanted. I said, "Sixteen."

Gouranga advised, "You should increase your chanting to sixty-four rounds a day minimum, but if you don't know your relationship to Krishna, how will you maintain that? If someone you don't know does something very wonderful, you will think, 'O, so what.' However, if your son does something ordinary, you think, 'How wonderful.' So we must know what our relationship to Krishna is. For the time being just think, 'I am his. He is mine.' as you go on chanting Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare." I took his advice.

He also recommended, "Never leave Vrindaban. In Vrindaban, you will gain energy for developing your Krishna consciousness. Everywhere else you will be drained. Here people are chanting Hare Krishna twenty-four hours a day. They are always remembering Krishna's pastimes."

I became a friend of another god brother of Swamiji named Purushottam Das. We talked about developing the amorous relationship with Krishna. We translated charts which outlined the chief girlfriends relationships with Radha-Krishna as well

as other information that was not available in English. Neither, Purushottam nor Dr. Kapoor were aware of Bhaktisiddhanta ever revealing a disciple's relationship.

When Swamiji visited Vrindaban, I got Dr. Kapoor to come with me to ask about revealing the eleven moods of my devotion. He was the one who introduced me to the concept. He acted as my advocate and argued the case for me. Prabhupad said, "This is not done in our line. One must realize his relationship for himself. One cannot just jump ahead. When one is ripe and ready, it will be revealed from within....I am a cowherd boy."

I wasn't satisfied. I knew there was more. I knew by this time Swamiji held his disciples back from getting too involved with the amorous relationship with Radha-Krishna and engaging in the reclusive meditative states used to develop that mood. Swamiji wanted his disciples out collecting money and building temples, "spreading the movement," not sitting around chanting and meditating on their own salvation and enlightenment.

Swamiji had his own way of doing things. He was businesslike and authoritarian. He started the Krishna movement in the West single handedly. It was run by his disciples, and he had the final say on everything. We listened to him or risked the wrath of God.

Gargamuni Maharaja came and moved in with me. We enjoyed each other's company and engaged in devotional practices.

It was several days since I went to the Yamuna River. When I got there, I was amazed to find it rose thirty feet and was a mile wider. Melons and squashes floated downstream. Farmers were evacuating the huts in their fields by boat. What was a quiet stream, knee deep and fifty feet across, was now a raging torrent. Gargamuni and I enjoyed jumping in and riding the current downstream to Keshi Ghat.

Brahmananda Maharaj and a photographer couple named Bishaka and Yadubar came for a visit. Gargamuni and I gave them a tour of Vrindaban. We circumambulated the town along a trail that devotees walked bare foot as an act of devotion. We went to Akrur Ghat.

We three swamis wanted to see if we could make it to the other side of the river and back. The first part was easy wading. There was a sand bar in the middle. From there to the steep crumbling sand bank on the far side was a hundred feet of fast moving deep water. We swam hard and made it to the bank grabbing on to it and pulling ourselves out of the water to keep from being swept far down stream.

The shore was covered with dry thorn bushes. We made our way up stream with bare feet so that we would have a better chance of getting back to the sand bar before being swept down stream to where there was no sand bar or hope of getting back to the other shore.

We dove in and swam as hard as we could. Brahmananda and Gargamuni made it to the sand bar. I seemed unable to make much progress. I was

swept down stream to the end of the sand bar. As my strength gave out, I thought, "This is a great place to go. Drowning in the holy Yamuna should liberate me back to Godhead."

I relaxed and let my feet drop to tread water for as long as I could. My feet hit sand! I walked onto the sand bar. The three of us made it back. Bishaka and Yadubar watched all this through their telephoto lenses not knowing what to do.

Another time, we three monks went to Seva Kunj and sat down in a grove of small trees towards the back. Shortly, we realized we were surrounded by Rhesus monkeys. Gargamuni said, "Let's move carefully and try not to excite them and get out of here!"

We got up and started to walk away. The monkeys followed. We started to run. We dropped a couple of things but were not going back for them. The monkeys were in hot pursuit yelling and shaking their fists. We made it to the gate where there were sticks for just this purpose. We managed to hold the monkeys at bay.

Brahmananda, Gargamuni, and I went to Goverdan Hill, which the *Bhagavat* says Krishna lifted to protect his devotees from torrential rains Indra, the storm god, sent as a punishment for their not worshipping him. We got a room in an inn for the night, but there were so many mosquitoes in the room we could not sleep. We got up in the middle of the night and walked to Radha Kund. It was eerily

beautiful walking down the road in this mysterious spiritual place.

Radha Kund is holier than Vrindaban. It is the bathing place of Radha, Krishna's lover. This is the holiest place on earth for her devotees. It is a deep pool with a stone walkway and steps going down into the water all around it. When we arrived, there was a *Bhagavat* reading going on in one of the temples on its bank. We went in and joined the audience.

When the sun came up, we swam in the kunda. We noticed a tree on which hung large bats with red heads. There also seemed to be a large serpent in the water with a rippling black body. We dove in. I swam down as deep as I could go. It got dark and cold with no sign of bottom.

Winter was coming, and it was getting cold. Gargamuni and I bought rope net cots and quilts. Still, it was cold and hard to sleep at night in our open unheated rooms. There was only cold water to bathe with in the mornings.

Another festival was organized in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Gargamuni and I attended. Jaipur is a beautiful city in the high desert built by Hindu kings who resisted the Moslem conquest. Some of the main deities from Vrindaban, such as Radha Govinda, Radha Gopinath, and Radha Damodar, were brought there for safe keeping. The Radha Govinda temple is the largest and most popular. They hosted the festival there.

The evening worship and chanting was incredibly beautiful. The devotees chanted "Govinda

jai jai, Gopala jai jai, Radha Ramana Hari, Govinda jai jai" or all glories to God, Krishna. Swamiji lectured. In the mornings, there was a smaller program.

Swamiji and his disciples were invited to many people's homes and restaurants to eat. It is considered good *karma* and a duty to feed those who dedicate their lives to God-dess. It was especially prestigious to feed the famous Bhaktivedanta Swami and his Western disciples, whom he called his "dancing dogs."

One afternoon, I asked Swamiji if I could not go to eat again. He said, "No. You are a young man. You can take it. You should go." He did not go. Sometimes the food was excellent and sometimes too spicy and oily which made us sick. This time, it happened to be real good.

Gargamuni and I told Swamiji about the difficulties we had living in the Sanskrit school. He told us we could live in his rooms at Radha Damodar temple. This was a great honor. He had a living room/bedroom, and a kitchen with a seat that looked out a decorative grillwork to the tomb of Rupa Goswami; both these rooms opened on a veranda joining the main temple courtyard. There was also a toilet with a cold water tap. We bathed by pouring water from a bucket over the head or crouching under the tap.

These were the rooms Swamiji lived in before going to America. He always kept up the inexpensive rent on them. He arranged for the Delhi temple to send us one hundred rupees a month to live on and

pay the rent for him. This was about ten dollars American. We would be his caretakers. The rooms had not been lived in for several years. We were excited by this and anxiously returned to Vrindaban.

## LIFE AT RADHA DAMODAR TEMPLE

Gargamuni Maharaj and I gave Swamiji's quarters a good cleaning and moved in. We were excited to find copies of "Back to Godhead" published before Swamiji went to America. They were four or eight page tabloids. Some of them contained an on going debate between Swamiji and Dr. Radha Krishna, the philosopher President of India. We also found unpublished manuscripts of Swamiji's and typed them for publication.

We were joined by a god-brother of Swamiji's named Ananda Prabhu. Ananda was a very humble devotee who spent his life cooking for devotees. He moved into the kitchen and cooked for us. The meals were simple but nourishing vegetarian fare cooked on a charcoal burner. All the food was offered to Krishna, and we took his remnants.

Gour-kishor Goswami, the head priest of the temple, lived across the courtyard with his large extended family. They inherited the position and earned their livelihood from the temple income which included some rental properties. The temple was not wealthy like some. However, its history made it special to those in Chaitanya's line of disciplic

succession. Gourkishor gave tours to pilgrims and got donations from them.

The rooms were warmer at night than the Sanskrit school had been. Gargamuni and I got great pleasure living in such a holy place and having the opportunity to follow in our guru's footsteps. We visited other temples and holy places regularly. I now chanted sixty-four rounds of Hare Krishna mantra daily. I also studied the philosophy intently and discussed it with other devotees.

Gargamuni returned to Delhi, but I stayed in Vrindaban. I loved living there absorbed in devotional practices twenty-four hours a day. This was the path to perfection I sought. The scriptures confirmed this was the surest way to go to the spiritual world of Radha-Krishna and not reincarnate again. Pure love of God-dess was the goal as well as the means, and living in Vrindaban was a great aid to devotional practices.

Swamiji visited because land was donated in the Raman Reti area at the edge of town. When Swamiji visited me, he said, "Ah! Subal you are living just like I used to. This is very nice. This is very nice."

The next day, I told him, "I want to stop living in your rooms and receiving an income from the Delhi temple. I just want to wander around Braj begging for a living and chanting the holy names constantly." I wanted to follow in the footsteps of many great devotees and be free of material obligations.

"Oh no. You must not think like this. It's not enough to just come and say you love Krishna. Krishna wants to see what you are going to do for him. What have you brought him? You are an American. You must build a skyscraper for him."

"No, Swamiji. Please don't make me do that. You have so many disciples who are raising money and making temples. Just spare me so I can live here and engage in my devotional practices."

"You must do it. It is my order."

"I have no money. My clothes are ragged. I'll need a brief case and train fare. I don't speak the language very well."

"How much money will it take?"

"One or two hundred rupees."

"Here's one hundred. I'll also tell Rohini-nandan Maharaj to travel with you." Rohini-nandan was Mr. Sharma's oldest son who was recently initiated by Swamiji and made a monk. Sharma promised him to Swamiji before he left for America. Now, he claimed him.

## ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Rohini-nandan Maharaj came to Vrindaban to join me. After a couple of days, we took a train to Agra. There we got a room at a dharmshala inn and went downtown to raise funds from the merchants and business people to build a temple in Vrindaban. We could see the Taj Mahal in its' splendid white shimmering beauty across the Yamuna River, but we

didn't visit it as it wasn't a holy place to us, and we weren't tourists.

We met a businessman who knew Swamiji before he went to America. Swamiji also came to him asking for money. It was difficult fund raising there, especially since we weren't used to it. We soon continued on to Gwalior.

Gwalior was a quaint little town that still had much of the beauty of the time when India was ruled by wealthy kings with ornate palaces and forts. Swamiji tried to establish the League of Devotees there before moving to Vrindaban. He only gained a couple of disciples. Rohininandan Maharaj and I stayed at a dharmshala again.

Another Westerner was staying there. He lived in India for years and was very thin. He may have been strung out on drugs. He told us about Rajneesh, and how he made Westerners sannyasis without requiring they give up drugs and sex. I thought this was an absurdly cheap trick to get followers who weren't serious about spiritual life. This was a real perversion of the Vedic version of *sannyas* or renounced life.

Rohininandan and I preached and did fund raising in Gwalior. We continued on to Kanpur after a few days. Kanpur is a bigger city on the Ganges. We stayed with a businessman who knew Swamiji and helped him when he was in Kanpur preaching and fund raising before going to America.

Rohininandan couldn't take the strain of life on the road fund raising. He begged me to let him return

to his family in Delhi. I wasn't into dragging anyone along with me and let him go. I felt a certain exhilarating thrill following in Swamiji's footsteps, traveling alone in India under the orders of my guru.

I visited the large, opulent Radha-Krishna temple the Singhania, a wealthy textile manufacturing family, built. When Swamiji went to New York, he tried getting them to fund a temple there. He was unsuccessful. I went to see one of the younger Singhania and got a donation from him.

I continued on to Allahabad where Swamiji lived most of his married life and had a pharmaceutical business. Allahabad is at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati Rivers known as Triveni.

I stayed at the *ashram* of a Krishna devotee in the line of Chaitanya. It was across the Ganges from the city. I walked down the banks of the Ganges to where the three rivers converged. It was the middle of summer, so the water was low. Farmers grew melons and squashes on the sandy bank. They dug holes about ten feet deep to the water level and used buckets to water their crops from the holes.

They also placed many human skulls on poles like scarecrows. Indians often threw bodies in the river. I saw one being eaten by vultures and dogs. I bathed in the waters of the confluence and prayed for purification and Radha-Krishna's blessings.

Living in the ashram on the banks of the Ganges, I concluded a commentary on "Sikshastakam," the eight verses in which Chaitanya

is said to have written the essence of his teachings. They are considered to be the only writings Chaitanya left. The rest of his teachings were passed on through the writings of his disciples, like the writings of Jesus' disciples. Chaitanya's followers wrote extensive theological works that delve deeply into the subject of love of God.

My commentary was published in "Back to Godhead" in two installments as "Lord Chaitanya's Mission and Precepts." I received many compliments on this piece of writing and considered it my best.

I went to Benares and visited a Shiva temple Chaitanya visited on his pilgrimage five hundred years earlier. I stayed in a dharmshala and visited other parts of the ancient holy city. I also continued fund-raising.

From there, I went to Bihar. After a stay with a businessman, I decided to go to Vrindaban for a rest, to renew my energy and see how construction plans were progressing.

Not much had been accomplished. Gurudas and Yamuna were in charge there. They only put in a well with a hand pump. No construction was begun. They had gone to Calcutta with most of the other devotees to celebrate the Rathayatra Festival of Lord Jagannath.

I got sick and went to the Delhi temple with another American disciple. It was a bare room at an inn. All the devotees were in Calcutta. We laid our blankets on the bare concrete floor and rested there. We lay there sick for a couple of days. We had very

little money and needed food and medicine. We only had enough money to buy one or the other.

We decided to risk spending the money on cab-fare to go downtown and raise more money. We went to the shoe shop of a life member. There we met Gurudas and Yamuna who were on their way back to Vrindaban. They gave us money and assured us the Delhi devotees would return soon. We went to a restaurant, ate a good meal and then got medicine. We were soon feeling better.

The Delhi devotees informed us that Tamal Krishna Maharaj had been recruited to raise money for the Vrindaban temple also. He was planning a trip to Hyderabad in southern India for this purpose. I phoned and arranged to join him in Calcutta.

Tamal Krishna, three *brahmacharies* (celibate male students), and I took a train to Hyderabad which is a Moslem stronghold that sought to be part of Pakistan when India became independent in the 1940s. We took literature and slide shows of ISKCON's activities around the world. We also had letters of introduction from two Calcutta businessmen to their Hyderabad branch managers instructing them to provide full assistance to us.

The managers met us at the train station. They arranged our stay at a good vegetarian hotel and meals at their homes. They also provided introductions to the leading businesspersons of Hyderabad and a chauffeur driven car for our use.

Tamal and I arranged a press conference and got front page coverage. We received many speaking

invitations and did two or three programs a day. We also paid personal visits to prominent businesspersons for fund-raising. We quickly became celebrities and were busy from early morning to late night.

At one night program, we were chanting on an outdoor stage while the large crowd sat on rugs on the ground. We encouraged people to get up and dance, but the security police used sticks and told everyone to stay seated and maintain order. We stopped chanting and said we would not continue unless the people could get up and dance. The police had to give in.

The Shankar-acharya of Puri, a powerful religious and political leader of India, was in Hyderabad giving a series of lectures then too. He wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper saying, "Hindus beware! CIA agents and Christian spies. Anyone who sees their faces will go to hell." I replied with a letter to the editor. A prominent businessman who had been a follower of Shankaracharya said, "I don't know why he is saying these things about you. He must have gone crazy."

We had a couple of large outdoor events which about eight thousand people attended. The Sankar-acharya's henchmen came and distributed leaflets with a similar message as his letter. When they got on stage and tried to disrupt the program, people from the audience dragged them off.

We raised 35,000 rupees in three weeks. Our reception was so good, we said we would return soon with Bhaktivedanta Swami.

## BUILDING THE KRISHNA BALARAM TEMPLE

We returned to Calcutta and hired an engineer named Sharma. Tamal and I went to Vrindaban with him. There we hired a Moslem labor contractor. I became the onsite manager and started construction of temporary living quarters and offices. They were brick buildings with straw roofs. Tamal went to Delhi to hire an architect and order building supplies.

I stayed in a house across the street from the land while construction began. One afternoon, a snake charmer did a show out on the street for a group of locals. After taking a collection from them, he came in my office wanting a donation. I said no. The snake charmer sat on the floor and took a cobra out of a basket. He put it on the floor. It started crawling towards me. I sat at the desk and stared the snake charmer down. He grabbed the cobra just as it was reaching me. The cobra bit him in the neck as he pulled it back. It didn't appear to bother him, however. He put it back in the basket and quickly left.

The engineer showed me a hoop snake that was in a stack of bricks. He said it could put its tail in its mouth and roll down the road like a hoop. He also showed me a king snake which had a head at either end of its body. The laborers found a milk snake which they chased into a tree. It was said to be able to

wrap itself around the hind legs of a cow and suck the milk out of its utter.

An old monk died at a neighboring ashram. They dressed him up and carried him on a chair as they chanted in procession to the burning *ghat* by the river.

Some Western devotees stayed at the Radha Damodar temple. One of them, Biharilal was an under water demolition man during the Korean War. He had been thrown out of a number of temples and was a disturbance.

Being a construction manager and riding herd on a group of ruffians was not why I wanted to be in Vrindaban. In disgust, I took my staff and begging bowl and started walking along the banks of the Yamuna planning to leave and live as a mendicant. The water level was high, and I walked in chest deep water to get around areas where the trail was washed out.

After walking for sometime, I headed back thinking I couldn't desert my duties like that. When I reached my office, I heard arguing coming from inside. Again, I decided to leave and just walked on by. Chaitanya Das, the Sikh cab driver who was the treasurer, came running down the street after me.

"Maharaj! Maharaj! Biharilal is trying to steal the cash box."

I handed him my *sannyas* staff and begging bowl. Furious, I ran back to the office, grabbed my walking cane and told Biharilal to put the cash box down and get out. He did.



The temporary buildings were soon finished, and several devotees including Ananda Prabhu, the cook, Sharma, the engineer, and I moved in.

There was an incident when a truck load of steel re-bars for the foundation arrived. The driver demanded to be paid for the steel before unloading it. The shipment was prepaid, and I wasn't going to pay again. The driver threatened to take the steel to Mathura and dump it there. I jumped on the truck, opened the hood and threatened to pull out the distributor cables if he did not go call his company and confirm that the order was prepaid. He did and the matter was settled.

Workers began digging the foundation of the Krishna Balaram Temple. It was done by hand with laborers carrying the dirt out in pans on their heads. Swamiji wanted to pour the first concrete when he came to give a series of *Nectar of Devotion* lectures which would be attended by devotees from around the world at the Radha Damodar Temple.

*The Nectar of Devotion* is Bhaktivedanta Swami's rendition of Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti-rasamrita Sindhu* which is the introductory volume to *Ujjval Nilamani*. It contains elaborate descriptions of devotional principles, their benefits, and various stages of progress on the devotional path. Devotees looked forward to this series of lectures with great

anticipation due to the sweetness of the subject matter and their location at Rupa's place of devotion.

Arrangements were made for devotees to stay at the Maharaj of Bharatpur's palace at Keshi Ghat on the Yamuna River. It was a beautiful old sandstone palace where many people went to bathe on the steps which led down into the water. There was also a small temple where worship of the Yamuna was carried on regularly.

Swamiji came and stayed in his rooms at the Radha Damodar Temple. The lectures were given in the courtyard by Rupa Goswami's place of worship. However, the whole thing became marred by a couple of unfortunate incidents.

The Maharaj of Bharatpur was offended when a deity throne he sent and wanted to be paid for was returned. He sent thugs from Delhi. They harassed and beat up some devotees in town, then went to the palace.

I was at the construction site in Raman Reti, when a devotee, who managed to slip out the back of the palace, came and informed me of the situation. He said Biharilal suggested pouring burning kerosene off the ramparts onto the attackers. Things did not look good.

I got a rickshaw to take me out of town the back way to the highway to Mathura. Reaching the highway, I hitchhiked and got a ride to Mathura with some Westerners in their Land Rover. I went to the District Magistrate's office and requested police protection, which he provided. Things quieted down,

and the lectures continued with police guards on duty.

A young Bengali caste *brahmin* came and wanted to join us. Swamiji put him in my charge. He lived in the room next to mine with three Western devotees who were helping me. They complained that he would not work, slept late, and did not follow devotional practices.

I was chanting my rounds early one morning when a devotee came. He said this *brahmin* was still sleeping and they could not get him up. I took my water pot with some water in it and poured it on his face saying, "This isn't a hotel. If you want to stay here, you'll have to get up early, chant your rounds, follow the devotional principles, and do some work." He just laid there silently fuming, and I returned to my room.

When I came out a short while later to urinate, he was waiting there with a bucket of water which he threw on me. Yadav-acharya, a black devotee from Detroit, saw this and laughed. However, when the *brahmin* raised the metal bucket to hit me with it, he did not think it was funny and ran to my assistance.

I avoided the blow. We fought with the *brahmin*, who was no match for the two of us, and yet, he kept fighting. Yadav-acharya was a good street fighter and pulverized the *brahmin's* face and gouged his eye. Finally, the *brahmin* gave up and ran off.

In India, to beat someone with bare hands is not a crime. The *brahmin* went to the nearby police outpost at the edge of town and told them we used a

knife on him. His face was such a mess they believed him. They came and arrested us. I accused the *brahmin* of attacking me. The three of us were marched through town and taken to jail. After a while, we all dropped charges and were released.

When Swamiji heard about this, he was furious. He ordered me to apologize to the *brahmin* and beg his forgiveness. I did, but I didn't like it at all. Swamiji chastised Yadav-acharya and I in front of our god-brothers. He called us *gundas* or ruffians. This was humiliating.

However, after he calmed down, when we were alone, Swamiji realized I was burned out. He said he could understand that being a construction manager was not my line of work. I was a preacher at heart. He suggested I go to Hyderabad with him when he left Vrindaban. This was a welcome invitation.

Work on the temple foundation progressed satisfactorily. Swamiji poured the first cement into the forms before leaving.

## HYDERABAD

Tamal Krishna and I, along with others, accompanied Swamiji to Hyderabad. We stayed on the estate of a prominent life-member. We held a festival that attracted much attention. Along with a large amount of cash donations, we were given a plot of land in downtown Hyderabad to build a temple on.

Swamiji asked another American *sannyasi* to manage the project, but he refused. Swamiji then asked me.

"I thought you agreed that construction management wasn't my line of work," I objected.

"We must be prepared to do anything in Krishna's service," he argued and pressured me to take the position.

A wealthy contractor built a house for himself and his family to live in. It was a luxurious modern home situated in the hills overlooking Hyderabad. It could just as well have been in the Hollywood hills. One wall in the stairway, ten feet wide and two stories high, was covered with natural amethyst crystal. The driveway was steep. One day, while going down the drive with his family, the brakes on the owner's car failed. They crashed into a stone wall and were injured. They concluded the house was haunted, and they shouldn't live there.

They allowed several devotees and me to stay there. We also felt it was haunted. I really was not into managing another temple construction. Tamal Krishna sent Keshava, an experienced American manager, to take over. He created dissension and tried undermining my authority as spiritual leader of the group.

I told him, "I don't need big houses and temples. If you want them, you can have them. I'm going on pilgrimage."

## PILGRIMAGE

By train and bus, I went to the temple of Lord Narasingha-dev known as Singhachalam near Visakhapatnam. The deity presents himself in a two-armed, threefold-bending human form with the head of a boar and tail of a lion representing the boar and half-lion-half-man incarnations of Vishnu.

The priests daily apply layer upon layer of sandalwood paste on the Lord's body to cool his great anger. The sandalwood is removed once a year during the Vaishaka period (April/May), bringing thousands of pilgrims on that day to see the Lord's form. Otherwise, when you come close for *darshan*, what you see is the deity covered by a mound of dried sandalwood paste.

The square shaped temple's architecture is incomparable and the spire is beautifully carved. The temple buildings are black granite, and carved into the rock are the forms and pastimes of Vishnu, especially in his incarnation of Lord Narasingha.

In 1512, Krishna Chaitanya is said to have visited the temple and left his foot prints at the entrance while on pilgrimage in South India. Chaitanya sang and danced before the deity of Narasingha-dev in great joy. That night Chaitanya told those present with him how that deity of Narasingha-dev became manifest. Sitting around Chaitanya, all the devotees heard about Narasingha-dev's pastimes with rapt attention.

This temple is on top of an 800 foot hill. A bus goes to the top of the hill. You can also approach the temple by climbing the hill, which has 800-1,000 steps. I was sure Chaitanya walked up the steps. Even though I wasn't in the best physical shape, I did too. I made stops along the way to catch my breath and admire the view. I felt it was well worth the climb to visit this sacred temple and figuratively walk in and literally touch Chaitanya's footprints.

From there, I continued by train to Puri on the East coast in Orissa. This is where Chaitanya made his headquarters after entering the renounced order. I stayed at the Gaudiya Math on the seashore near Haridas Thakur's tomb. I visited the room where Chaitanya stayed, Tota Gopinath Temple where Gadadhar Pandit stayed and other holy places. I was not able to enter the Jagannath Temple, however, because I am not a Hindu, even though I had carved, painted and cast a number of Jagannath deities which I worshipped. Haridas Thakur, a close associate of Chaitanya, was not able to enter either, so I did not feel bad.

Walking along the beach, remembering Chaitanya's pastimes there when he threw himself in the ocean, watching the waves and the fishers was relaxing and rejuvenating.

From there, I went on to Calcutta and stayed at the ISKCON temple for a short while. My next stop was Mayapur, the birthplace of Chaitanya. ISKCON had land there. Jayapataka Maharaj was constructing a guest house-temple. I stayed in a small thatched hut

near the cow barn with Guru-kripa and Yasodanandan Maharajas. They introduced me to Lalita Prasad Thakur, the son of Bhaktivinode Thakur and brother of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's guru.



We surreptitiously took a train to Birnagar, the birthplace of Bhaktivinode. Birnagar was famous within Bengal as the wealthy village Ula at the time of Bhaktivinode's birth. However, the village was devastated by cholera in 1857. Many died and others like young Bhaktivinode and his surviving family members fled. The village became a ghost town and was taken over by jungle and wild animals.

Lalita Prasad told how after retiring, he went to his father's birthplace to live. He cleared the jungle and faced down wild tigers and snakes. The compound was walled. There were a number of small Shiva temples and a Durga temple which were for the most part ignored. On the roof was a Gaur-Gadadhar temple where Lalita Prasad worshipped until he could no longer climb the stairs. Then, his disciples continued the worship.

Lalita Prasad was in his early nineties when I met him. He could walk only with assistance. He spent the day sitting on his wooden cot in a small room. His frame was a bit hunched over, and he read using a small magnifying glass. His clothing might include the white babaji style *bahirbas*, a white tee

shirt, beige sweater and black blazer that he called his office coat, which he used to wear in government service. As I sat on the floor at his feet looking up at him, he looked a lot like his father, Bhaktivinode Thakur. I was in awe of him. Here was the fountainhead of wisdom I was looking for.

Lalita Prasad was happy to see us. He told us many things that broadened my perspective of devotional yoga. His presence and the person that he was deeply touched me. However, he would not give me ekadash-bhav initiation without Swamiji's approval.

"I wanted to teach him these things, but he was not interested in hearing them. Even my brother, his guru, did not know these things." Lalita Prasad said, "What can I do?"

We visited Lalita Prasad a couple of times. He had given Guru Kripa a piece of a *gunja* and *tulsi* bead necklace his father, Bhaktivinode Thakur, wore. Guru Kripa broke off a small section and gave it to me. It remains one of my most cherished possessions.

I stayed in Mayapur until Gaur Purnim. I was a *pujari* for the brass Radha-Krishna deities in the cottage temple at the front of the land where Swamiji had stayed. I especially liked bathing and dressing Radha in the morning.

A devotee advised me to return to the West where I could preach to a receptive audience rather than fundraising and building temples, which was all that was going on in ISKCON India. After all, how long could I stay in Mayapur doing *bhajan* before

being ordered to go on another mission? I was advised to contact Jagadish, the Governing Body Commissioner for Canada.



Jagadish arranged my airfare to Toronto, where he lived. I flew out of Calcutta, March 27, 1973. I changed planes in New York. I was shocked to see how businessmen looked. Most of them had long hair and wore bell-bottoms. Had the hippie revolution succeeded while I was away for three years?

Jagadish bought a new, large school bus the devotees were setting up as a traveling temple complete with kitchen and shower. I was to travel west, across Canada, with Bala Krishna and several other *brahmacharies*. They would chant, cook and serve prasadam, distribute books and other things like incense. I would preach.

The bus was not quite ready. So, Jagadish flew me to the Montreal and Vancouver temples to preach and enliven the devotees with my tales of India. I especially liked Vancouver and the hippie atmosphere there.

When the bus was ready, we set out with high spirits. We spent a night at a lake with a hippie couple in their geodesic domes which were nicely furnished and decorated in an Asian motif. We chanted and had *prasadam* with them. It was wonderful to see the Northern Lights there on a clear starlit night.

We made our way westward. I was not happy to learn of the new "*sankirtan*" techniques people like Tripurari and Rameswar introduced to ISKCON. Men who had shaved heads wore wigs and "*karmi clothes*" to avoid being identified as Krishna devotees because people avoided them. They often distributed things like incense and flowers at events to get donations without people knowing who they were giving to. They learned change-up, con, and hustle techniques.

We were well received in Regina, Saskatchewan. Some interested people from there went with us to Saskatoon and then to the Calgary Stampede, a big rodeo. The bus was parked in an open area near the Stampede grounds. There was *prasadam* distribution, chanting, and I preached.

However, I was unhappy with the way things were going. From what I heard about life in the Toronto temple, I could not in good conscience advise them to go to the temple to be used and abused, chewed up, and spit out.

I went back to Regina, rented a house and started a temple. It was good for awhile preaching to these new devotees, some of whom had a rock band. However, as a renunciate, I was not interested in running a temple. My duty was to travel and preach. One of the men had a station wagon. Some of us drove to Toronto. He decided to stay in Toronto and gave me the car. Some of us went to the Buffalo and Boston temples.

Going down the Massachusetts Turnpike in heavy rain at about 80 miles per hour with me driving

and three other guys in the car with bad tires, we started to hydroplane. I tried to maintain control, but we went into a spin. We spun around three times. When we came to a stop, I said, "Jesus Christ!" We wound up parked on the shoulder, facing the right direction with some minor scrapes from the guard rail and a blown tire. We had a spare and continued on our way at a slower speed feeling very thankful. Fortunately, traffic was not too heavy allowing me room to maneuver and pull us out of the spin without crashing into anything.

In Boston, I was joined by a new devotee who had studied violin at the Boston Conservatory. He gave me a generous donation and wanted to travel with me. I explained the rigors of the road and how my destination was unknown. He wanted to come with me. Jananivas, a *brahmachari*, went with us too.

We traveled down the East Coast, stopping at the New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. temples. Then we traveled and preached our way through Virginia and Kentucky. We wound up at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a university town. It was Christmas break however, and there were not many students around. We were parked in the car at night. I wondered what I was doing there. I decided to go back to India, perhaps to spend the rest of my life there. I thought it was much easier to live as a mendicant sannyasi there than in North America. I also wanted to see Lalita Prasad again.

I left the new devotee at the Washington temple. The *brahmachari* and I drove to New York. I

sold the car to the temple, got an entry visa, and bought a round-trip ticket to Delhi. Jananivas got money from his parents and went with me.

## MY REAL DISCIPLIC SUCCESSION

It felt good to be back in India. Jananivas and I landed in Delhi, December 12, 1973. It was almost nine months since I left India to go to Canada. The smell of dung and spices in the air as I got off the plane was exhilarating. It was like being home again. The weather was sunny and crisp. The exotic sights and sounds seemed very familiar. I had an entry visa which would allow me to stay in India for years. I considered spending the rest of my life there.

We took a cab to the ISKCON Delhi temple and stayed the night. Delhi held no attraction for me. The temple was engaged in business and politics.

The next morning, we went to the holy town of Vrindaban by train and horse cart. The weather there was colder than previous winters I experienced. Heavy clouds kept the sun from warming the day. Even the best inn had no heat. The temperature was in the thirties and forties Fahrenheit.

After a few days of visiting holy places and enduring the cold, we took a second class train to Bombay which has a better climate on the ocean. The devotees at the ISKCON temple told me there was nothing for me to do there. Tamal Krishna and Keshava were in charge. Business and politics were their way of life, and they knew it wasn't mine.

However, they wanted my assistant Jananivas who they could use.

I bought a first-class train ticket to Puri, on the other side of the subcontinent. I stopped-over at the Hyderabad temple briefly, and reached Puri two weeks after my arrival in India.

An elderly God-brother of Swamiji's rented me a room at the Gaudiya Math ashram on the beach of the Bay of Bengal. The weather was pleasant. I spent two weeks walking on the beach, swimming, body surfing, chanting, and visiting places of pilgrimage associated with Krishna Chaitanya and his associates. I enjoyed being on my own, free of ISKCON'S influence.

I took advantage of this freedom to see Lalita Prasad Thakur, the brother of Swamiji's guru, who I met before going to Canada. ISKCON devotees weren't supposed to visit him. Some of the things he said were controversial and considered offensive by Swamiji and conservative ISKCON leaders. I knew he was the only one who could teach me what I wanted to know about my relationship with Radha-Krishna and how to develop it.

I took the train to Birnagar, Bengal. I passed through Calcutta without stopping at the temple. A rickshaw brought me to Lalita Prasad's house located on a quiet residential street in this small town. He lived in a large walled compound with several buildings and trees. It was his father's birthplace and ancestral home.

Bhakta Ma greeted me at the door and invited me in. Bhakta Ma was around fifty, had short hair, and didn't speak much English. She took care of Lalita Prasad for twenty years. She was born when his mother died. His mother charged this newborn girl with the care of her son. Lalita Prasad was a lifelong celibate. He allowed her to move in with him only after he was seventy so people would not be suspicious.

Lalita Prasad Thakur sat on his wooden bed wearing his black office jacket, a beige sweater, and white lungi chanting Hare Krishna on his japa beads just as he was a year earlier when we first met. He had a large frame, short white hair, and stubbly beard. He was now ninety-three. The room was dim and dingy, but it seemed like heaven to me.

I offered prostrated obeisance to him. He was the fountain of wisdom whom I returned to India to see. This old man looked very beautiful. He had a warm radiance about him.

"Oh, Subal Maharaj, you've come back!" he said with a big toothless grin.

"Yes, I want you to teach me how to develop an amorous relationship with Radha-Krishna. I couldn't ask my *guru maharaj* permission to study with you because he would say no. You're the only one who can tell me what I want to know. I came here without anyone's knowledge and can stay with you. Please be merciful."

Lalita Prasad replied, "Well, since you have no one else to teach you and are eager to learn and

you've come all by yourself prepared to stay, I'll tell you what you want to know. I wanted to tell these things to your guru maharaj, but he didn't want to hear them. Even my brother didn't know these things. Our father never taught him.

"Before you can know your relationship with Radha-Krishna, you have to know your disciplic succession. The line that your *guru maharaj* listed in his *Bhagavad Gita* was made up by my brother Bhakti-siddhanta. He was rejected by our father Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur and his guru who was Bipin Bihari Goswami. Bhakti-siddhanta spoke against Bipin Bihari from the stage of a large public gathering in Calcutta. He called him a caste Goswami and a *sahajia* (a cheap cheater).

"When our father heard about this, he said, 'You should keep out of religious affairs. It would be better if you went and lived in Mayapur alone. Chant Hare Krishna and pray for Lord Chaitanya's mercy.'

"But, when our father Bhaktivinode Thakur died, I went to my brother and said, 'Who will carry on our father's teachings now that he is gone? You are the oldest.' I was working for the government like our father did, while he was doing his spiritual practices and was a scholar. 'You're the one to do it.', I told him. 'How can I do it when I've been rejected by our father and his guru?' was his reply.

"'You're smart. Make up a disciplic succession. Who will know?' He did it. When he went to Vrindaban to preach, the *babajis* there knew he made it

up. It did not jive with known historical facts and relationships between the personalities mentioned.

“Bhakti-siddhanta approached Gaur Kishor Das Babaji, a highly respected hermit saint who was an intimate associate of Bhaktivinode Thakur, for initiation a couple of times and was rejected. When Gaur Kishor died, Bhakti-siddhanta got word of it and claimed his body saying he was his only disciple. No one else had been initiated by him and Gaur Kishor was in no position to object.

“Bhakti-siddhanta said Gaur Kishor was a disciple of Bhaktivinode Thakur. Gaur Kishor studied under Bhaktivinode, but was initiated in another disciplic succession. Jaganath Das Babaji was said to have been Bhaktivinode's guru. Actually, he was his devotional guide, babaji guru, and a close friend and associate. Bipin Bihari Goswami was Bhaktivinode's real initiator guru.

“Bipin Bihari was in the line of disciplic succession from Sri Jahnava Devi, the wife of Lord Nityanand [fifteenth century saint, incarnation of Krishna's brother Balaram and associate of Krishna Chaitanya]. Jahnava Devi passed the teachings on to her step son, Ramachandra, who passed it on through the line of succession which included a number of other women--not the line of well known male saints that Bhaktisiddhanta made up.”

This is Bhaktivinode Thakur's and my true disciplic succession:

- (1) Nityanand shakti, Sri Jahnava Thakurani
- (2) Sri Rama-chandra Goswami

- (3) Sri Raja-vallabha Goswami
- (4) Sri Kesava-chandra Goswami
- (5) Sri Rudresvar Goswami
- (6) Sri Dayaram Goswami
- (7) Sri Mahesvari Goswamini
- (8) Sri Guna Manjari Goswamini
- (9) Sri Ramamani Goswamini
- (10) Sri Jogesvar Goswami
- (11) Sri Bipin Bihari Goswami
- (12) Sri Bhaktivinode Thakur
- (13) Sri Lalita Prasad Thakur
- (14) Sri Subal Das Goswami

Swamiji's line of "infallible disciplic succession" was not what it was cracked up to be. It was made of real people like you and I who were searching for truth and finding it to one degree or another. The original inspired teachings from Goddess were handed down reasonably intact, but definitely altered with the passage of time. I saw changes in the nine years I was in ISKCON. As I found out from Lalita Prasad Thakur, the organization and institutionalization of the movement was done in the 1920s by Bhakti-siddhanta Saraswati, my grand-guru.

Before that, gurus such as Lalita Prasad and Bhaktivinode Thakur took disciples and sent them off to lead their own lives. They were not pressured to live in monasteries dependent on the guru. Family life was encouraged. Bhaktivinode Thakur was a family man with many kids as well as a magistrate, poet, and

great devotee. He became a recluse after leading a very full life.

Bhakti-siddhanta revived Chaitanya's teachings throughout India and sent disciples to Europe. His disciples ran the Gaudiya Math centers that he started. Tirtha Maharaj was one of the most cunning and became overall manager in spite of Lalita Prasad's warnings to his brother, Bhakti-siddhanta, about Tirtha. Lalita Prasad dropped out of an active role in the Gaudiya Math then. When a beautiful marble temple became the Calcutta headquarters, corruption set in.

Tirtha Maharaj tried poisoning his guru, Bhakti-siddhanta, a couple of times, but Bhakti-siddhanta made it to Lalita Prasad who saved him. Finally, he was poisoned and locked in his room so he could not go for help. It was the kind of poison known as a "Russian heart attack." He was taken from Calcutta to Mayapur for cremation and burial to avoid an autopsy. A couple of unsuccessful attempts were made on Lalita Prasad's life also. In this way, the Gaudiya Math fell prey to money, power, and politics, just as ISKCON did in turn. Obviously, most organized religion and institutionalization are not good.

## BHAKTIVINODE THAKUR - MYSTIC LOVE POET

Bhaktivinode Thakur was born in 1838 with the name Kedar-nath Dutt to an aristocratic Bengali family in the house his son Lalita Prasad Thakur later occupied

in Birnagar, Bengal, a small town north of Calcutta. It was a gray cement stucco house with a walled courtyard in back containing eleven Shiva temples. There was a Kali temple in front. On the roof was Gaur Gadadhar's temple.

The Shiva and Kali temples were mostly unattended. Lalita Prasad's disciples worshipped Gaur (Chaitanya) Gadadhar regularly and sang Bhaktivinode Thakur's songs. Gaur Gadadhar (considered fifteenth century incarnations of Radha-Krishna) revitalized the devotional Radha Krishna movement.

Lalita Prasad was not able to walk without assistance, and even then, not very far. He did not go to the rooftop temple anymore. He sat on his bed chanting and meditating on the pastimes of Radha Krishna.

Bhaktivinode attended college in Calcutta, worked in a bookstore, and was a writer. After graduation, Kedar-nath taught school in Orissa and was one of the pioneers of English education in that state. He did not stay in education long. He studied law, passed his exams, and in 1862 entered the Bengal civil service. In 1866, he was appointed a magistrate within the provincial civil service and served as magistrate in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa for the rest of his government career until retiring in 1894.

Attracted to Western philosophers such as Emerson, Hegel, Spinoza, and Kant, along with Jesus Christ, he became Unitarian in his outlook. However, when he came across the teachings of Chaitanya, the

Eastern savior, through his biography, the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Bhaktivinode took a renewed interest in the devotional Radha Krishna movement of his homeland. He studied all the Gaudiya Vaishnav literature he could get his hands on, including the Bhagavat Puran with Shridhar Swami's commentary.

Becoming well versed in the real doctrines of the Vaishnavas, he fought the prejudices he imbibed during his British education. Bhaktivinode began to publicly espouse the Vaishnav teachings and encouraged educated Indians like him to closely examine them before rejecting them in favor of Western thought.

He carried a heavy case load, was a family man with thirteen children, and spent most of the night writing. Bhaktivinode published some hundred books during his career, most of them devoted to recovering and promoting the tradition of Chaitanya.

His energy was awesome. He got up at 4:30 in the morning, bathed, worshipped, answered correspondence, and so forth. He was at court from nine to five with an hour lunch break. From five to seven, he translated Sanskrit religious works into Bengali. Then he had dinner, took a couple of hours nap, got up and wrote all night from ten to four. After a brief rest, he started his day again. In this way, he worked eighteen to twenty hours a day efficiently. His British colonialist superiors wondered how they could keep India subservient if there were many more like him around.

Many of Bhaktivinode's books are lyric poetry meant to be sung. They describe the intimate amorous relationship with Radha-Krishna, which Bhaktivinode enjoyed, and how one might attain that relationship by following in the footsteps of the previous great devotees of Krishna Chaitanya. This was the information I sought.

Lalita Prasad described how Bhaktivinode discovered the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya in 1888. Everyone thought it was in Navadvip. He researched maps and records of the area, but he was led to the spot by a bright light he saw emanating from Mayapur across the Ganges from his house in Godruma. He went there with Lalita Prasad, Bhaktisiddhanta, Gaur Kishor, and Jaganath Das, who was so old he had to be carried in a basket by his disciple. Together, they were able to ascertain the exact birthplace of Krishna Chaitanya.

After leading a full life, in 1900, Bhaktivinode Thakur became a *babaji* and made his headquarters in Puri as Chaitanya had done. There he continued his devotional practices in the company of a couple of close disciples. Later, he returned home to Calcutta in ill health. He passed from this world in 1914.

## THE HIGHEST TEACHINGS

In his spiritual body, Lalita Prasad Thakur considered himself to be a *gopi*, a cowherd girl, maidservant of Radha. He said, the only way to attain this position is by the mercy of someone already in that position. It is

a very confidential circle that can be entered by invitation only. He entered it by the mercy of his father and guru Bhaktivinode Thakur, who entered it by the mercy of his guru Bipin Bihari Goswami.

I begged Lalita Prasad to initiate me into this confidential knowledge. He agreed to teach me because no one else could, but this was to be kept secret. If anyone asked who my guru was, I was still to say Bhaktivedanta Swami. He didn't want to go over my guru's head, but he wanted to bestow his mercy on me. He acted with utmost ethical integrity.

He described the eleven moods (*ekadash bhav*) to be adopted. One needs to know her name, age, abode, group, service, color, dress, protection, sustenance, attitude, and commitment. He said I could pick these things myself since I would be spontaneously attracted to my natural position. I wanted his guidance since he was much more familiar with these affairs than I.

He called Bhakta Ma to help pick a name for me. He had me pick an age I wanted to be from eight to thirteen. He told me my skin and dress colors, "a beautiful color combination." He asked me what service I liked performing best. That became my eternal service. He told me the name of my abode, a bower in Vrindaban, and the group I am in. Lalita Prasad and Bhaktivinode Thakurs are in the same group as me. We exist only for the service of Radha-Krishna. Lalita Prasad told me not to change any of these things without informing him and to always meditate on them.

From one of Bhaktivinode's books written in Bengali, Lalita Prasad translated the pastimes of Radha-Krishna during the twenty-four hours of the day. He used a magnifying glass to read due to his bad eye sight.

Radha-Krishna engage in a daily routine. The devotee, in her spiritual identity, improvises with and mixes herself into these pastimes through meditation and visualization during the day as the events unfold. In this way, one develops a spiritual life, gradually transferring consciousness from the material world to the spiritual world where these pastimes go on eternally in ever new, fresh ways. Lalita Prasad taught me this technique, and I applied myself to it.

After a couple of weeks drinking the nectar from Lalita Prasad's lips, Bhakta Ma told me he was tiring and needed to rest. He told me to teach in the West where it was more needed. He gave me a printed list of the disciplic succession with their spiritual identities and a place to add my name and information to the succession.

## TOWARD THE END

I went to the Mayapur ISKCON temple. I was given a room in the original thatch-roofed bungalow by the road. There I practiced the meditation Lalita Prasad taught me. I began translating a book of poetry by Bhaktivinode Thakur. I was torn whether to continue being a disciple of Bhaktivedanta Swami or go to Lalita Prasad Thakur and beg to stay with him. I

decided my loyalty was with Bhaktivedanta since he was my initiator guru.

It was spring, and devotees from the West began arriving for Chaitanya's appearance day. The new three story building was ready to accommodate them. I was glad to have separate quarters. Many became sick with dysentery shortly after arriving. Dinanath, a black devotee, lead wonderful kirtans in the first floor open air temple. He reminded me of James Brown at the Apollo.

Another black devotee, Sudam Maharaj came to Mayapur. I first met him in San Francisco when I received *brahmin* initiation. Now, he was Governing Body Commissioner for the Pacific region of ISKCON, headquartered in Honolulu. He invited me to Honolulu to help him develop a bigger temple.

Although I had thoughts of spending the rest of my life in India, I was realizing the impracticality of doing that. I wanted to preach to receptive Americans. I also witnessed the downhill slide of ISKCON, and I thought I would prefer leaving the movement in Hawaii rather than India.

Chaitanya's appearance day occasioned a riot provoked by instigators sent by *brahmins* in Navadwip. There were minor injuries and damage to property. The *brahmins* were envious of our influence developing Mayapur as the birthplace of Chaitanya rather than Navadwip as they claimed.

Bhaktivedanta was joined by Sridhar Swami, his God-brother, as guest of honor. Sridhar was a much respected Vaishnav scholar and devotee. He

avoided many of the scandals that shook the Gaudiya Math and established his own branch of the sect.

Bhaktivedanta and a group of his disciples went to Vrindaban and toured the surrounding area of Braj by bus. One of the highlights was bathing in the Yamuna River with Bhaktivedanta. It was a wonderful tour and a great way to end my stay in India except for one disturbing incident.

On a morning walk in Raman Reti with a group of disciples, Bhaktivedanta said, "Just like the Muslims converted people with a sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, we can approach people with the *Bhagavad Gita* in one hand and a gun in the other. 'Do you accept Krishna?' 'No.' Pow! Not now, but later when we are more powerful.

"*Arcye visnau*...when we will teach military art, with *tilak*, soldiers will chant, 'Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna...' (laughter) We want that. Marching with military band, 'Hare Krishna.' You maintain this idea. Is it not good?"

Hrdayananda, "Yes, Prabhupad."

Swamiji, "When there will be military march of Krishna conscious soldiers. Anyone who does not believe in Krishna, "Blam!" (laughter) Yes. The same process as the Mohammedans did, with sword and Koran, we'll have to do that. 'Do you believe in Krishna or not?' 'No, sir.' Blam! Finished. (laughter, Swamiji laughs) What do you think, Madhudvisa Maharaj? Is that all right?"

Madhudvisa, "Yes."

Swamiji laughing, "What these communists can do? We can do better than them. We can kill many communists like that. (laughter) Then it will be counteraction of communist movement. And, you think like that. 'Why you are sitting idly, no employment? Come on to the field! Take this plow! Take this bull. Go on working. Why you are sitting idly?' This is Krishna consciousness movement. Nobody should be allowed to sit down and sleep. They must find out some employment, either work as *brahmin* or as a *ksatriya* or as a *vaishya*. Why there should be unemployment?"

"The same example. Just like I am, this body is working. The leg is working, hand is working, brain is working, belly is working. Why there should be unemployment? You just stop this unemployment, you will see the whole world is peaceful. There is no complaint. And, they'll very happily chant Hare Krishna. Hm? Nobody's working in this field. They're all drawn to the cities to work in the factory. Condemned civilization. That communist emblem, what is that?"

Devotees, "Hammer and sickle."

Swamiji, "Yes. That is good."

Indian, "Yeah, good."

Swamiji, "But no hammer. Only this... What is called?"

Devotees: "Sickle."

Swamiji, "No hammer. That will be our emblem. Only sickle. Not hammer. The hammer has hammered the whole human civilization. So just

make a counter-emblem. The communists will appreciate.”

Devotee: “Sickle and tilak.”

Swamiji, “Eh?”

Devotee: “A sickle, and then a tilak.”

Prabhupada: “Yes, that is good idea.”



I was there. It was no joke! Of course he was smiling and using his cane as a gun, but it was just like he would talk about starting a new temple construction, how to sell more books, or whatever. He used much charm to get us to do things.

Why did he ask Madhudvisa if it was a good idea? Why did Madhudvisa say yes? What kind of guru tells jokes like that, knowing his disciples cling to his every word and that this was being recorded. Of course, most of his disciples were yes men.

As for me, I was shocked. I felt he really crossed the line. Yet what could I say? I started looking for a way out. I was happy when I was thrown out of ISKCON right after taking *sannyas* in 1970. I am happy to be out of it now.

It is just too bad Swamiji ruined the image of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the West. I don't know if he did more bad or good. All the suffering of his disciples and their children, and all the new disciples still joining. I don't know how they manage to survive as an organization.

This incident convinced me the time was coming for me to move on. Honolulu was one of the last bastions of a purer ISKCON. It did not last long, however. I was out of the movement by the end of the year.

