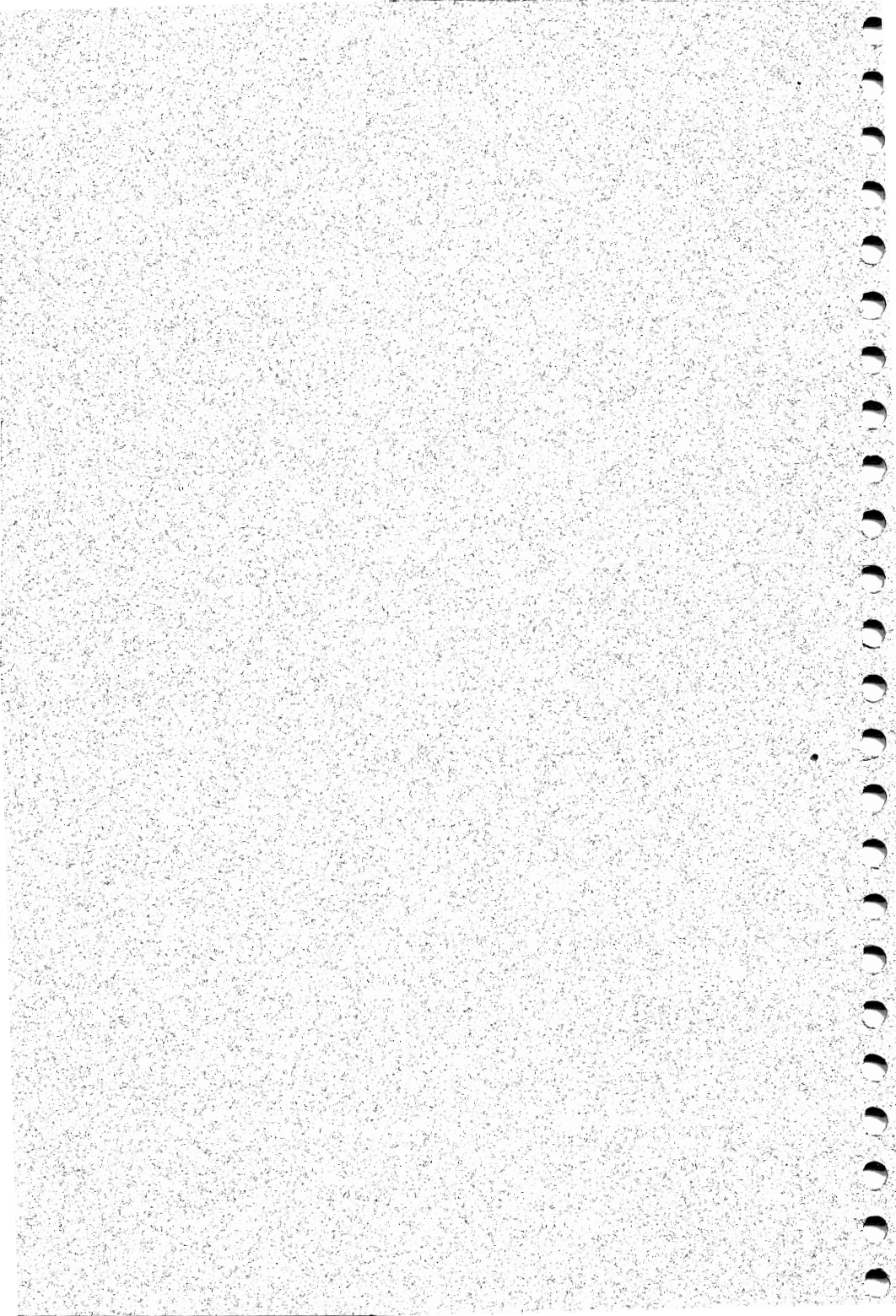


Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

**The Week Before
Gaura-Pūrṇimā**

(Revised Copy, June, 1994)

G.N. Press



**THE WEEK BEFORE
GAURA-PŪRṆIMĀ**

SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

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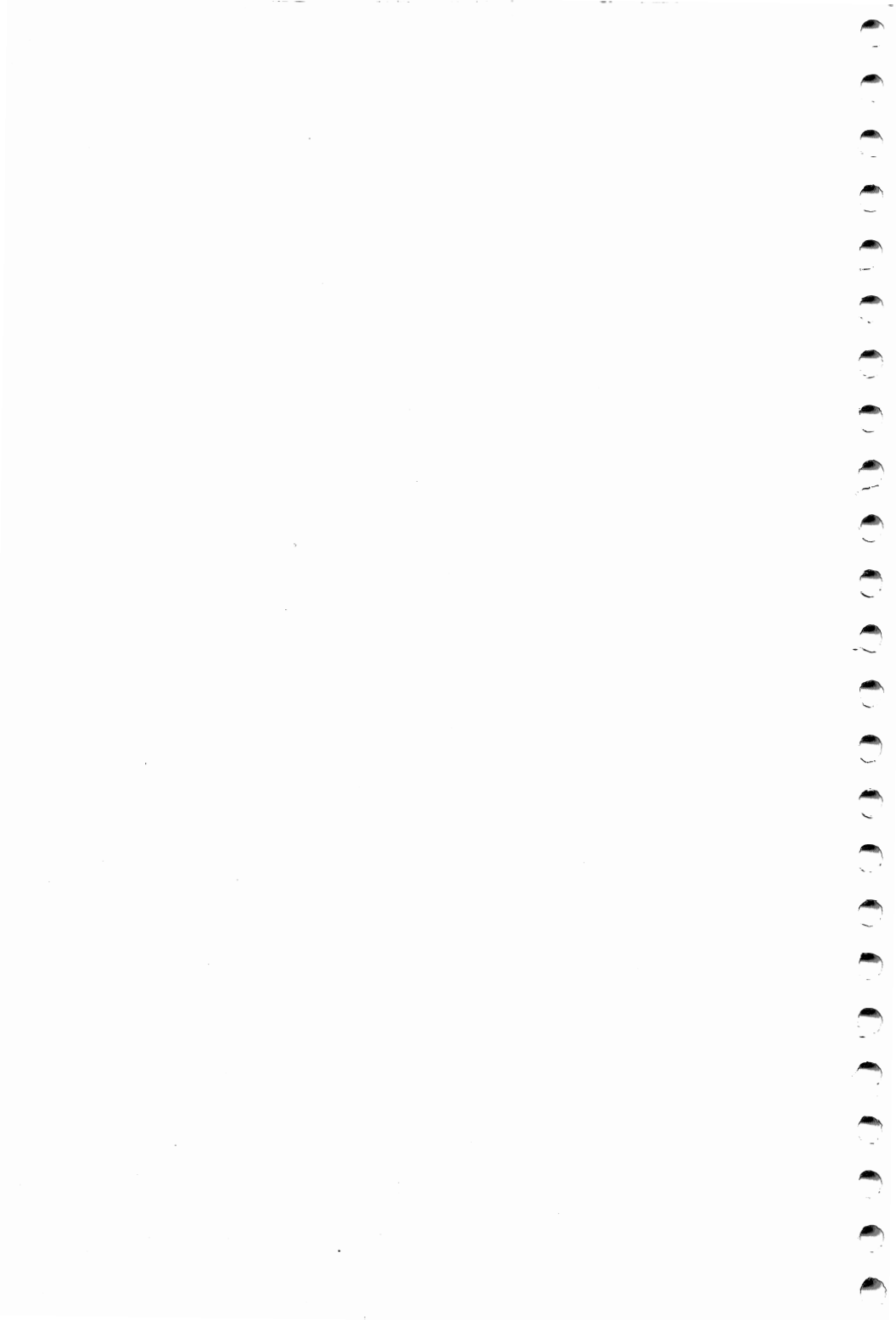
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Chapter One

Dear friends, this is the opening of a short story.

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Such strong emotions, such naked pain in the words of this spiritual song. It is a song not to be trifled with. Believers have to live in the world with non-believers who make fun of the most sacred things. One motivator made a slogan, "Sacred cows make good steaks." They don't know what they are doing, said Lord Christ to his father; please forgive them.

The devotee goes into the world to distribute books.

Nanda dāsa pointed his finger to one and ordered, "You go out today." The man obeyed like a soldier. Another man said, "I'm in a different mood. I'm in the agricultural department." He wanted to keep his spirit up; we all do.

The sun rose and the branches wanted to relax in the sunshine when it came out. All this is arranged by God. As part of the scheme of things, the author of a story feels responsible to get a character going in a plot. Yes, those are the elements, and a conflict to get worked out. In the absence of that, at least some essay, or whatever.

The people came home from Sunday Mass. They discovered their daughter had not gone to

Mass, and had instead gone down the lane and found a quiet place to sit and read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*.

"What's this?" they asked.

She said, "I've become a devotee of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's the same as Christianity, but we actually practice God consciousness. You should be happy I'm doing this."

They were not happy. They were also ignorant of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It certainly wasn't the Catholic Church or what people did in their town. Ah, but what can you do with young people? They want to go their own ways. Although the mother of the house was quite upset with her daughter, the father said, "Let it be." The daughter he loved in any case, and she explained that she wanted religious life, she believed in God and Christ and was doing it in this way. They didn't beat her or ostracize her. In fact, as she explained things to them, it seemed a little tiresomely religious. They didn't want to talk religion or be religious all day, even in the Catholic way, what to speak of these new zealous teachings from India their daughter wanted to tell them of.

"Okay, that's enough," said her father. "You can read it, but don't try to convert us." She agreed. Went to her room and prayed Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra on her beads as she had seen them do at the Kṛṣṇa temple.

This is one kind of story. The other I indicated by mentioning the tree that was waiting for the sunshine. Every creature wants to go on living,

especially in the *tri-vartika*, the three activities of religion, money-making, and sense gratification. The immediate end of life is to eat and sleep and have sex and defend. This must be done. But great saints like the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana and St. Francesco of Italy abstained or overcome these material desires. God helps one to do this.

The girl in this story is called Maria. She sighed to think, "How can I overcome the powerful drives of the material nature?" She'd heard the Gosvāmīs, headed by Rūpa and Sanātana, actually overcome or made nil the drives of eating and sleeping, *almost*, and they did overcome entirely the sex drive. For defense they took shelter under a tree and had no house. But the devotees told Maria she could live in the world and use things. The main thing is to attain love of God, awaken it within her. You do this by chanting the holy name, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, and by hearing topics of Kṛṣṇa from *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The universal spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, said, "It is not difficult, not at all." And Maria found this to be true.

It wasn't so difficult for her to begin. On Sundays at the temple, one woman displayed sweet pastries under a plastic cover. They were for sale. Books were also for sale. The devotees owned a big building, surrounded by some farmland. They were like normal Italians in many ways. The women had children and some of the women were pregnant. Their saintliness and preaching the

teachings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness impressed Maria.

She was told it is the time of the waxing moon. By the end of the week when it is full, it will be called Gaura-Pūrṇimā, the day when Lord Caitanya was born over five hundred years ago.

There was so much to learn. This is the opening episode in the life of Maria. The devotees in the Vicenza temple prayed every morning that by their distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, people might join and help them to expand the movement. Maria was a fruit of this prayer. A demon would say she was an insect caught in the cult's spider web, but the devotees saw her as a sincere person and wanted to encourage her. In many ways, the devotees were preoccupied with their own lives and duties in that building and in their families as devotees. But they had some time for Maria.

I have found time to begin her story. I know I shouldn't get in the way, but just tell the story. So this is Chapter One. The whole story is not finished yet.

Chapter Two

Maria was broadcast to the unit of heaven by all saintly persons in *paramparā* who wished her well. Saints of the Catholic kingdom of God would wish her well, or what kind of saints are they? I do wish her well, and I wish the saints may also bless her.

The kingdom of God has many realms. It is like a mansion with many rooms. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the delightful, multi-realm, spiritual planet of Goloka. We are rooting for all conditioned souls to make it back to Godhead. The first thing is to develop *śraddhā*, and then association with devotees. There will be trials and tedium and material nature doesn't easily give up its hold. But our story we want to tell and it may be the only story worth telling. Or rather, this story of how one comes first to Kṛṣṇa consciousness is only the beginning of it. Later there are episodes of how one was tested and showed sincerity and went forward in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Chapter Three

Each night the moon grew fuller, but not many bothered to see it. The *sannyāsī* said, "Normally we are not moon-watchers." Did he mean he wanted to be, but felt repressed by rules and regulations? He said, "But if you ever wanted to watch the moon, this is your excuse. It will grow fuller until it is complete on Gaura-Pūrṇimā evening."

But will we see the moon even on Gaura-Pūrṇimā? There is a rabbit on the moon, you know, and that's why it's called *śaśicandra*.

The days dwindled down
to a last precious few . . .

How much can you see if you stay always indoors and only go from one room to another in

the house? Don't you need to get out? (That's for the *sannyāsī*.)

Others went out plenty. Bhakta Sal met people on the street and sold them books. He was following the mood of a prayer all devotees recite in the temple every morning. It begins, "Our only desire"—is to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. A very big leader visited the temple last year and left them with that prayer. Although it says, "Our only desire," it seems to me that other devotees in the temple do have other desires besides distributing Prabhupāda's books, but anyway, everyone recites the prayer. And it *should be* everyone's desire. Amen.

One lady in this temple travels every day after the morning program to Venezia (that's Venice to you non-Italians), where she plays oboe in the philharmonic orchestra. So you see, devotees aren't dopes. Some devotees from other parts of Italy have come for the week to be with the visiting *sannyāsī*. He's from America. He is skinny and wears a hearing aid. His name is Frank Sinatra. No, I'm only kidding. Me? I'm the author. I get my stories from dreams. We are all devotees and there are some white lies involved in the telling of this story. I want to be above board as much as possible (whatever that means). Can you see me and this story in the distance? I picture you squinting to see, like on a sunny day, looking in over the water. My motto is "Let's get it all out." And also I

know it might be advisable for me to keep out of the way. But that's hard for me to do.

Cars zip by. Birds are chirping in Italian air. The activities in this temple cannot be judged by the empirical standard. We talk of transcendental reality and we vibrate the holy names which come from Kṛṣṇa-loka. The small *mūrtis* of Gaura-Nitāi cannot be seen with blunt, material senses. The food we eat is transcendental, although we may eat it with some sense gratification. There is imperfection, mixed modes in some of the devotional service performed here. Our purpose in telling this story is not to judge, but savor it, communicate it, get to the heart of it.

The *sannyāsī* speaks each day on a verse from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. He is leading us by accumulating verses. Each day he adds one and we keep chanting the first ones he gave. So far, he has given *namo mahā-vadānyāya, kṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te* and *kṛṣṇa-varṇaṁ tviṣākṛṣṇaṁ*. He tells little stories and anecdotes of Lord Caitanya based on these verses, and then one devotee reads from *Ādi-līlā*, Chapter Thirteen, "The Advent of Lord Caitanya." Occasionally, the *sannyāsī* interrupts the reader and makes more comments that he has prepared and written on Post-its stuck in his book.

Maria is a shadowy figure so far, but she's coming in. She likes the idea that something is supposed to happen this week, leading up to Gaura-

Pūrṇimā. The man who does the reading in Italian in the classes is Gopa-gaṇa. I was going to tell something about his needing an operation on disks in his spine. I don't want to hurt him by personal disclosures, and yet I have to tell something. He will go for an operation in June when his wife gets off from teaching school so that she can take care of the children when he goes to the hospital. He has always been a hard-worker, big and strong, but something happened to his back. Another man has a father with a terminal condition. He goes to visit him in the hospital.

Two ladies have come from the South. They are disciples of the *sannyāsī* from America. They are cooking his lunch, today two kinds of spinach, and they brought some six-months-old sweets from Rādhā-Rāmaṇa temple in Vṛndāvana. To eat them, you need firm teeth and a lot of faith, as when you eat dirt from the land of Vṛndāvana. The *sannyāsī* preferred eating some date balls made today—and he offered them to his deity of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The wife of a devotee named Dhāma dāsa, asked the American *sannyāsī* how she could speak to her adolescent son and daughter. They are not so much interested in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa anymore. She tried scaring them by telling them of a devotee acquaintance who got AIDS. But then she realized that was too negative, scare tactics. The *sannyāsī* said, "Your children need to see that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is fun and has something in it to attract them, something they

can give their lives to more than what the *karmīs* have." I think that's what I'm getting at in this way I write.

Chapter Four

I went to hear the *sannyāsī* speak to his disciples last night. He spoke on *japa*. They smiled when he said that *japa* would be his topic because they all want to improve. One asked, "You wrote in your book about a *japa* breakthrough. What is that?" He said, "You keep banging against a wall and finally you break through, but not by your own endeavor. Kṛṣṇa's mercy descends."

They all chanted a round together. *Japa* is funny because you can't read people's minds while they chant, so all you can observe is the outer appearance, like the tip of an iceberg.

Who knows the evil
that lurks in the hearts of men?
The Shadow knows.

Yeah, they sat with him and chanted. He said, "Let's be cheerful." The translator turned that into, "*allegro*." The *sannyāsī* said, "Hmm, cheerful implies that things may be going against you, but you keep up your spirits."

Dhāma dāsa then translated it as "*optimismo*." Dhāma was getting a pain in his back and he had to stand and try to adjust it. He was cheerful.

The *sannyāsī* said, "Let's think positive and think good about whatever little beginner's progress we have made." He listed the things to feel good about: 1. You chant sixteen rounds a day; 2.

you have discovered the open secret of early morning *japa*; 3. you stay awake and alert; 4. you begin to control your mind; 5. even if you can't control your mind or be alert, you are chanting and you're sure that Kṛṣṇa will appreciate your attempt—the effort you make without the reward of higher taste.

The *sannyāsī* said he usually tells audiences that the first step in chanting reform is to *notice* you are inattentive and to feel regret. But he thinks now that regret is too advanced a stage for us to really know at the present moment. It will come, probably mixed in with tears of joy, when that stage arrives naturally. "Oh, when will the day come when by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, tears will flow from my eyes?" He read to them from *Begging For the Nectar of the Holy Name*, and finally they chanted another round—again the faces not revealing the inner thoughts, but you can be sure there was plenty of distraction and some sincerity to be cheerful about. Then he gave out what they called biscuits, but in America, we call them cookies. The *sannyāsī* said that every night until Gaura-Pūrṇimā, he would hold an evening class like this. Then I saw him go to his room to prepare notes for the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* class.

This week has reached Wednesday, which is Ekādaśī. There is an article on Ekādaśī in the *BTG* magazine that just arrived. It was nice and encouraging in that cheerful mood of *optimismo*. The

writer suggested that you should think a day in advance what you will do on Ekādaśī.

"Who is in charge of this story?"

The author is. Why do you ask? Also, the author doesn't want to be a big dictator. He's trying to be a humble scribe and let the events flow. He's trying to find out what the events are.

"Okay, but what's the story?"

Who are you who is asking?

"I'm a story investigator from the bureau of responsible Authors, Editors, and School Teachers. I am the tradition headed by great story-writers."

Oh. Well, Sir, there's nobody here except us devotees. What you say, Sir, that is all right. We will try to follow your recommendation, but we are not attempting to publish anything or compete. We figure we have a right to write.

"Yeah, well, don't think that I'm like the Nazi Gestapo. I'm just trying to help you upgrade your efforts. A story has to have a plot and characters. It all follows from some basic conflict."

Yes, Sir, what you say, that is all right.

"For example, Chechkov says that if in your opening sentence you describe a shotgun hanging over the fireplace, that shot gun has to be fired before the story is over. Edgar Allen Poe and Henry James made every single element in a story work to contribute to the whole. You see? It has to be a work of art. Not shoddy. And use symbols like in *Death in Venice*, by Thomas Mann. So what

about this Mary? She seems to be just a stick figure. Where is she?"

She's not here right now. She went home. But I don't think you need to be so concerned with our characters. This is a religious movement . . .

"That doesn't excuse you from following the rules."

I mean to say, this isn't even a story. For your story standards, you need ambitious characters and an upright author. As you can see, these are just young people mostly, and we are interested in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. You need people who are into sex and love affairs and who are capable of violence and all that.

"You are just trying to avoid me," said the investigator. "Don't think you are exempt. But I'll take you at your word. It's a pity, though. You *could* write a story if you were serious enough to work it out under our tutelage. We could send representatives to teach you. But you have to be willing to rewrite everything at least ten or twenty times."

Well, I don't think I have time or inclination for that. I also don't like to put characters into conflict. I want to offer them respect. Our writing is mostly just a front to praise Kṛṣṇa and the process of *bhakti*.

"I see." The investigator took out his notebook and wrote, "Fatally parochial" next to the name Satsvarūpa dāsa. Then he tried to shield what he wrote, but I saw it, "Author appears to be a slouch."

I gave him a *prasādam* cookie and he left. Whew.

All hands on deck. This is a square dance for Italians. Ring the monastery bell at 4:00 A.M. Everyone please attend *maṅgala-ārati*. Be up and chant your *japa*. It's another blessed day of Kṛṣṇa consciousness on the way. Be quietly joyous, or loudly joyous, in *kīrtana*. Think of Lord Caitanya's mission and how you can serve. A Vaiṣṇava is in the spirit of Advaita Ācārya, who was aggrieved to see the suffering in the world. He wants to help people by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Wake up, sleeping souls. The night has ended, almost. Get up early. How long will you stay on the lap of the witch Māyā? *Tamasi mā jyotir gamah.*

Let's be hopeful of this day and banish fear that the *karmīs* or the blues or the lows will get us. No one can get us because we are spirit souls. The soul can't be cut or dried. Even Yamarāja cannot punish him. He's aloof from all suffering. Spirit souls, devotees, let us cry out for shelter to the holy names: "I simply wish to serve You. All glories to the holy names of Kṛṣṇa."

Chapter Five

A phone call came from India. The annual meeting of devotees had been controversial. The *sannyāsī* (the one in Italy) was linked to a ring who were accused of *rasika* Vaiṣṇava leanings. A diary of his had been produced as evidence.

Hearing this, the visiting *sannyāsī* became worried that an even more intimate diary of his not be discovered. They had broken into someone's drawer to find the one they now had as evidence. So the *sannyāsī* ordered his trusted secretary to go at once to India to a room on top of a tenement building in New Delhi where the *sannyāsī* had a cache of his writings.

"You must get this before they do and burn my writings," said the *sannyāsī*. The secretary said, "Yes." He was not like Kafka's friend, Max Brod, but thought that his friends writings should be burned as he requested, to protect him. So he set out quickly to catch the first available plane of Alitalia to New Delhi.

What happened in India shall be narrated by the Omnipotent Narrator.

The secretary's name was Narahari. He'd been active as an Irish Republican in his youth, sympathetic to the cause, if not the tactics, of the IRA. On the plane he worried that he might not be allowed entry because the government of India (he'd learned this only when he bought his ticket at the airport, or so it was rumored) now required visas from those with Irish passports. Narahari got into a discussion with an Indian man who sat beside him, about the nature of the *ātmā*. The man said the *ātmā* was One and that we conceive of it as two—as God and the individual soul—only because of our defective material vision, which is

like the eye disease whereby a man sees one as two.

"No," said Narahari, and he reddened as he spoke. "You cannot attribute that disease to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the Second Chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā* that 'yourself, Myself, and all the persons on this battlefield have always existed.' If Kṛṣṇa is mistaken, then the whole *Bhagavad-gītā* has no meaning."

"That's your interpretation of the verse," said the man. To make matters worse, he ordered a non-vegetarian meal, when the stewardess asked his preference.

Narahari got his *Bhagavad-gītā* from his book bag and showed the man the Sanskrit word-for-word—*na tu eva ahaṁ jātu na āsam . . .*

The man said that Narahari could not know Sanskrit because he was newly interested in Indian culture. One had to be a Hindu to know the actual tradition, "which is that *ātmā* is one. The gods, including Lord Kṛṣṇa, are manifestations of ignorance."

Narahari said, "Since when does a Hindu eat meat?"

Finally they decided not to talk about it. They exchanged only occasional words for the rest of the nine-hour journey.

"*Damned Māyāvādīs*," thought Narahari, but he felt good that at least he didn't let the man get away with his nonsense. "Maybe he'll think next time before he uses those arguments."

Narahari got through immigration all right. He took the first taxi and told him to go to Caṇākya Purī. Once out of range of the airport, the driver, who had two friends with him in the front seat, stopped the car. He turned on the rear seat light and leered at Narahari. "Is this your first time in India?"

"No," said Narahari. "Why have you stopped?"

"I want Rs50 charge for late night driving." The driver's friends frowned, looking tough.

"That's ridiculous," said Narahari. "No. Drive on!" Narahari shouted, "Drive on!" and looked mean. "Drive or I'll call the police."

"India is a mischievous place," said the driver, who looked less than thirty years old. "If you call the police, we will tell him it's you who accosted us. They will put you in jail and take your watch."

Seeing the tightness of the situation, Narahari went to open the back door. One of the men grabbed his wrist. Narahari hit him in the side of the face and broke free. He exited from the car and ran away.

Meanwhile, back in Italy, the Polizia came and abducted Maria from the temple. It was the work of Maria's mother, who had consulted an anti-cult group through a church contact. She'd arranged a complex deprogramming maneuver and gotten the Polizia to cooperate on the plea that the daughter was being abused by the devotees.

Maria had been peacefully chanting *japa* in the temple room when they entered and grabbed her.

"Nṛsiṁhadeval!" her friend cried. The Polizia grunted, and when she resisted, they resorted to twisting her arm and finally hand-cuffing her. The men protested, but didn't dare fight with the Polizia, who wore pistols in holsters.

They took Maria to a hovel on the edge of town and threw her in a locked room. The Italian de-programmer was new on the job. He had a few anti-cult books which he hadn't yet read. He spoke to Maria through the door because she was too wild to sit and hear.

"This Kṛṣṇa cult is from the devil," the man said.

"What is the devil?" asked Maria. "Do you know? I think *you* are from the devil."

He tried a few more lines, but each time, she hurled back something saucy and logical.

"*Bene.*" he said. "I'll leave you alone for a few days without food and water and see if your Kṛṣṇa comes to help. Then we'll talk again." He and the Polizia left her alone in the hovel. They thought no devotees had followed them, but a boy on the street saw what was happening. He had visited the temple and liked the devotees. He got on his motorbike and rode to the temple to tell the devotees Maria's whereabouts and predicament.

Meanwhile, the *sannyāsī* was alone in his room in the temple building, preparing for his evening meeting with his disciples. His mind was in Delhi, wondering how Narahari was doing. Now devotees were asking him what to do about Maria. This was

before they knew her whereabouts. The *sannyāsī* wanted to be aloof from it. He thought of the time the friends of Gopinātha Paṭṭanāyaka came to Lord Caitanya and told Him that Gopinātha P. was going to be killed by the government and Lord Caitanya should do something to save him. Lord Caitanya said, "I'm a *sannyāsī* and shouldn't be troubled by the affairs of materialistic people," but this was different, wasn't it?

Still, the *sannyāsī* was expected to give his nightly class as usual. He picked out some *bhajan*s to sing. It would not be the same without Narahari playing the *mṛdaṅga*. But the routine must go on, the peaceful *sādhana* must be prosecuted despite the unsteadiness of the times.

Chapter Six

The *sannyāsī* and his disciples had a simple meeting on Ekādaśī evening. He arranged a line-up of *bhajan*s, some of which he sang and some he asked others to sing. They were all on the theme of Lord Caitanya and His associates. The temple owned an excellent Indian harmonium, and the young man who played *mṛdaṅga* kept a steady, no-nonsense beat.

First they sang the "*Ṣaḍ-Gosvāmyāṣṭakam*." Through a translator, the *sannyāsī* commented on some of the verses. He said we cannot imitate the six Gosvāmīs, but we love to hear of their ideal, saintly life. He meant what he said; he loved the brief portraits of *gosvāmī* life given in those verses, and he knew Śrīla Prabhupāda sang it of-

ten and recommended it "if you want to know what is a *gosvāmī*."

Then he asked Dhāma dāsa to sing. Dhāma's back was forcing him to make unusual facial expressions and to sometimes stand and stretch and to sit in different positions seeking relief. He sang *jīva jago* in a gruff, but sweet voice.

The *sannyāsī* said, "We get a nice picture in this *bhajana* of Lord Caitanya going on *harināma-saṅkīrtana* at dawn. We can't go out at dawn or people would call the police or yell, 'We're trying to sleep!' We go out in the streets when the people are up. We have confidence that if they hear the holy name, they will be benefited."

There were about ten devotees in the room. The harmonium chords swelled up and the drum and *karatālas* and voices carried them through their mental tedium. You could tell that the participants were into it as they sang with faces absorbed in the mellows. Of course, you can't read minds, but they looked pleased to be together, and in the *kīrtana-rasa*.

Next the *sannyāsī* sang "*Hari haraye nāma-kṛṣṇa*." He said verse seven was one of his favorite prayers, *tādera caraṇa-sebi-bhakta-sane bās*. Then someone sang "*Parama-koruṇa*," then he sang "*Gaurāṅga bolite*," and finally, "*Ye anilo prema-dhana*." After that, he told them his plan to go to Māyāpura at the end of the year and said they could join him if they were free.

"Is there any *prasādam* to distribute?" he asked. One of the women handed him a large bowl containing four apples and a knife.

"Just like 26 Second Avenue," he said, and he began cutting the apples into slices and then giving them out.

He went back to his room and thoughts about Narahari and India came to his mind again. He had to take care of his personal items without the assistance of Narahari. He gathered his clean clothes for the next day and put water in the hot water bottle. One of the devotees came to tell him the latest news about Maria. But the *sannyāsī* didn't want to talk about it much. He just wanted to take rest and end the Ekādaśī in the mood that was generated during the evening *bhajana*.

At midnight, the *sannyāsī* rose and began writing. He was composing a series of memoirs of Śrīla Prabhupāda based on letters Śrīla Prabhupāda had sent to him. But he paused in that work to think of the classes he had to give today. Again there would be one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning would be a reading of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, but he would interrupt the reader and make comments. He saw one comment he wanted to make about *sahajiyās*. Another section was Advaita Ācārya feeling sorrow for the suffering of the conditioned souls. For that, the *sannyāsī* selected statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda's book, *Renunciation Through Wisdom*. Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended that industrialists

in India should arrange for Deity worship in their factories, and they should distribute *prasādam* to their workers. Other statements stressed that complex material problems can be solved only by people turning to devotional service. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If the number of Lord Kṛṣṇa's devotees even slightly increases, there will immediately be a resurgence of peace and prosperity in the world." The *sannyāsī* found a great quote by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in the book. It stated that the neophyte's ringing of the bell during Deity worship is a million times more valuable spiritually and materially than charitable workers building many hospitals or feeding thousands of the poor. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated that "when devotional service to the Lord is neglected, every other activity is illusory and futile."

And so the time passed and the *sannyāsī* was busy, even taxed, but in a pleasant way, although he didn't leave the temple building.

The devotees pressed him for his opinion what to do about Maria. They wanted to stage a break-in and rescue her from the hovel. He said that sounded okay. Was she an adult or a minor? He didn't know the laws or prevailing attitudes of this country, he said, so couldn't venture an opinion. Besides, he wasn't a media expert. The devotees were determined to rescue her and told him they would do it, and there would be nothing illegal about it. They were also approaching lawyers and government people.

"We know you don't want to get entangled in this, but at least we want to let you know what's happening. After all, she's a devotee."

They also asked the *sannyāsī* if he would go with them on Saturday for *harināma* in the streets of Verona, the day before Gaura-Pūrṇimā. He agreed. He thought, "After my advocating *harināma* in the lectures, how can I refuse? It's the best way to observe Gaura-Pūrṇimā, especially since I couldn't go to India."

By late morning, he received a phone call from Narahari in India. It was a decent phone connection and he could hear and speak without shouting.

"Mission accomplished," said Narahari.

"You burned it?"

"Yes. Not without some complications, but I'll tell you when I get back. I want to be back with you for Gaura-Pūrṇimā."

"What complications?"

"Nothing really. More like adventures. I had some scuffles with people who were looking for the diary. I shouldn't call them complications . . ."

Chapter Seven

On Thursday morning, only three days before Gaura-Pūrṇimā, the *sannyāsī* spoke on *vande śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-nityānandau sahoditau* (Cc, Ādi 1.2). Since the temple Deities were Gaura-Nitāi, he told stories of Śrīla Prabhupāda visiting ISK-

CON Gaura-Nitāi temples in Caracas, Miami, and Atlanta.

“Śrīla Prabhupāda said on his arrival there, ‘You are very fortunate. These two Prabhus, Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Lord Nityānanda, are with us tonight. . . . *Parama-koruṇa pahu dwijana* . . . He is so kind. So take shelter of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and be happy.”

Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says the first wonder is that the two Lords appear simultaneously. The second wonder is that they dispel the darkness within the core of the heart. In the question period after the lecture, Dhāma dāsa, who was translating, asked, “If we worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as They are in Vaikuṇṭha, how will that ever develop into the spontaneous stage of Vṛndāvana?”

The visiting *sannyāsī* replied that awe and reverence (the Vaikuṇṭha mood) toward Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa was prescribed by Śrīla Prabhupāda for our temple Deity worship. This refers to punctuality, gorgeous dress and food, saying prayers, cleanliness, bowing down, etc. It’s good for us. We cannot imitate Sanātana Gosvāmī and put the Kṛṣṇa *mūrti* in a tree and give Him only stale *capātis*. Be confident that the way Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us to worship Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is the most direct way to attain Goloka Vṛndāvana. In *Nectar of Devotion* and *Kṛṣṇa* book, we hear of the spontaneous mood of Kṛṣṇa’s *mādhurya* pastimes. Eventually, by devotional service, we will enter Vraja-*bhakti*, not Vaikuṇṭha.

Someone asked, "You said that we should only hear about Kṛṣṇa from Śrīla Prabhupāda and not from mundane scholars. But what about hearing about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa from Vaiṣṇavas besides Prabhupāda?"

The *sannyāsī* replied that hearing from others was risky. No one is as wise and experienced as Śrīla Prabhupāda in preaching to Westerners. "The stakes are high and we shouldn't gamble," said the *sannyāsī*, but Dhāma dāsa couldn't comprehend the idiom, "stakes are high."

"It's like in gambling. If you bet a high sum of money, then if you lose, you go way down."

"Oh!"

"If you mistake Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa for ordinary boy and girl and imitate Them, you will lose everything."

The farmer next to the temple has a high-powered hose attached to his tractor. He parks the tractor, aims the pipe, and a hundred-foot-long arc of white water gushes out high over his plowed and seeded field. The earth and olive seeds within soak it up. The hose slowly arcs from left to right. The farmer stands and watches. Whoever passes watches, the power in the arc of water, its spray underneath, the darkening of the earth from dry tan to wet brown.

They rescued Maria. Two householder couples with their three little children were the guerrilla troops. They wielded weapons of full *prasādam*

including pasta and sweet creamy pastries. When they arrived at the hovel, they found the door open—lock broken—and Maria inside with her mother. The mother greeted the devotees warily, but not fanatically. She couldn't resist the children, who were immediately interested to explore the hovel and its backyard and to befriend the dog chained outside.

Maria's mother was commiserating with her daughter about the way the deprogrammers handled things.

"I thought he would only talk with you," said mama. "I didn't imagine that he would lock you up alone with no food. I'm very sorry."

The *prasādam* was a hit. The *mātājīs* were expert cooks. If the *samosās* were a bit odd to the mother, she had to admit the lasagna was very good. They had a picnic feast in the backyard. Mama Mia agreed that Maria could go back and live with the devotees. Yes, Mama would talk with the police. After two hours together, the devotees drove Maria's mother home. Daughter and Ma embraced, promised to visit each other regularly, and the devotees took Maria back to the temple. She was happy.

"I chanted the whole time. They took away my beads, but I counted on my fingers."

The visiting *sannyāsī* was glad to hear of it. The devotees held a *kīrtana* and planned another feast of Maria's return. They asked the *sannyāsī* would he like to meet with Maria?

He thought a moment and said, "I don't believe it's necessary. My policy is I don't meet with women."

"I know, but I thought you might want to make an exception. She respects you."

"She could write me a letter if she wants. That's what I usually do."

He didn't see why he needed to get drawn into a face-to-face talk. Maria was already doing all right. So the devotees dropped the subject. The *sannyāsī* said, "I'll give the class tomorrow about Lord Caitanya." They already knew that.

About four in the afternoon, the *sannyāsī* received a phone call from India. At first he thought it would be Narahari, but it was a Godbrother, Pañca-karma Prabhu. He said he had been appointed to an investigating follow-up committee as part of the Society's annual meeting. In regard to the topic of *rāgānugā* inclinations, he was appointed to talk with the *sannyāsī*.

"What is your schedule?" asked Pañca-karma.

"I'm here at this temple until right after Gaura-Pūrṇimā."

"Well, I can meet you there. I'm about to leave India to reach England by Gaura-Pūrṇimā. I have a flight tomorrow morning. I think I can reroute it via Rome."

The *sannyāsī* saw no alternative but to agree. It would be convenient for him. "They should have heard me this morning," he thought. "I spoke so loyally and conservatively, almost like a right-

winger. I think that way too, although my thoughts are more refined than what I can speak to a big group. I'm not afraid of an investigation. What do they want?"

The *sannyāsī* asked, "Is there anything I should do to prepare?"

"No," said Pañca-karma. He laughed all the way from Delhi. "Just be prepared to be grilled for a few hours."

The meeting would be Friday afternoon. Fair enough.

Toward evening, one of the devotees came to the guest room where the *sannyāsī* stayed. In the absence of his assistant Narahari, a temple devotee agreed to bring him a glass of milk at 7:00 P.M.

"Maria is missing," he said.

"Missing?"

The devotee said no one knew where she was. Her belongings were gone. A neighbor said he saw her walking down the road with her bag.

"So it's not the deprogrammers," the devotee said.

"Why did she leave?"

The devotee shrugged his shoulders. He said no one knew for sure. After all, Maria was a new devotee. Maybe she had some doubts. Something the deprogrammer said may have stuck in her mind. Maybe she got sentimental about her mother.

"Did she go home to her mother's?"

"We don't know yet. Someone has gone there to see. I know you don't like to get disturbing news before your bedtime, so I was not going to tell you until we knew . . . "

"Yeah."

Then the devotee looked sheepish and said, "Someone speculated that maybe Maria was disappointed because you wouldn't see her."

"That's ridiculous," said the *sannyāsī*.

The devotee shrugged.

When it was 8 P.M., when the *sannyāsī* was usually in bed with fresh ear plugs in place, inviting sleep, he was instead sitting in the dark and speaking with the author of this story.

"I have a complaint," said the *sannyāsī*.

"What?" The author was also usually disposed to take rest by 8 so that his subconscious could work on sending him messages for the next writing session.

"Why did you have the devotees say that I might be the cause of Maria's leaving? It's not my duty as a *sannyāsī* to see and take care of a woman. They make it out that I neglected her. But if anyone has neglected her, it's you."

"Me?" The author wasn't prepared.

"Yeah, if you bring a woman into a story, which you did right from the beginning . . .

*Maria, Maria, I've just met a girl
named Maria.*

*And suddenly that name
will never be the same to me.*

—then you have to take responsibility for her. But no one even knows what she looks like, not even a stick figure.



"No one knows her."

The author realized that he had been nailed, so to speak.

"It's late," he said, excusing himself. "Look, Swamiji, why don't the three of us, you, me, and Maria, have a meeting tomorrow morning? We can find out better who she is and try to make

her happy. I myself don't *control* her, you know. Characters are independent."

"You should talk with her," said the *sannyāsī*, "but why bring me into it?"

"You can't stay aloof from everything. I'm asking you as a friend to help me out. Maybe she does want to hear from you as a *sādhū*. You're not against women, are you? They're also spirit souls."

"I know that."

"So you can preach to her. It's in our mutual interest. The devotees want to see you show a little concern for Bhaktin Maria after all that they've been through. And you are right about me, I have to do something. These days are extremely crucial for Maria. For you and me, these days leading up to Gaura-Pūrṇimā are auspicious, but mild, not so eventful. We want it that way so that we can look within ourselves. But for Maria, it's not just another festival, but maybe the biggest trial and decision in her life. Maybe she's got some doubts. So let's try to meet with her. Whaddya say? Shall we team up?"

"I'm willing."

Friends parted for the night.

Chapter Eight

Maria had gone to her mother's. When the devotee who went to her house asked how come she had left the temple, she said maybe she wasn't cut out to be a devotee, maybe it was too austere for her in the women's dorm. She would be a dev-

otee living at home. But she agreed to go in the morning to speak with the visiting *sannyāsī* and that quiet devotee, the author.

She arrived for *maṅgala-ārati*. Her mother, of course, stayed home sleeping. That feast they'd eaten at the hovel caused Maria some belching. She subdued it.

"Why not have a meeting right away while she's here?" the author suggested.

The visiting *sannyāsī* didn't like to disrupt his schedule. Early morning after *maṅgala-ārati* was reserved for *japa*, but he had already completed most of his rounds, so he agreed. They met in the guest room.

This is being reported by a scribe, in case you care to know. He will try to act as an official amanuensis.

Maria was wearing a sweater and a long skirt. She is not sex object primarily, but a spirit soul in a woman's body. That spirit soul is as good as the *sannyāsī's* spirit soul, or the author's, although these last mentioned tend to get puffed up by the male ego in association with the soul. The soul is neither male nor female, but is female in the sense of being dominated (*prākṛti*) by Lord Kṛṣṇa (the *puruṣa*). So Maria is a designation for a soul.

You might as well tell us what clothes the *sannyāsī* was wearing. What do you think? That he wore a worsted tweed suit and football sneakers and a pork pie hat? No, he wore saffron, cotton *sannyāsa* dress. The author is dressed as a *brah-*

macāṇī. They are not used to being with a woman, but they are familiar with these types of meetings where you talk together in a room. And they are capable of seeing things above the material level. I assume that you, dear reader, are as capable and spiritually-minded as we are.

"Haribol." They exchanged greetings.

They sat on chairs.

"Who are you?" they asked.

"Who am I?" Maria asked.

She asked and they asked

Are you warm, are you real,

Mona Lisa,

*or are you just a cold and
lonely work of art?*

No kidding, Maria, are you part of us? Whew. Or are you to be seen as just a spirit soul and not questioned as to the origin of your existence? Are you a woman? That's like asking ourselves, "Are we mean? Are we men?"

Uh . . .

This is not a meeting of the Theosophical Society for Investigation of Literary Characters.

That guy, remember? The investigator on behalf of literature? He is not here. The literary critics, like ghosts, may be here or not, but we needn't fear them.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. We are trying to do our little service, damn it.

There was a sense of congenial cooperation and communication as soon as the three met.

They wished each other well, and knew they were capable, by God's grace, of solving the so-called fictive problems of Maria.

They smiled and even joked a little about the elusive nature and the realities of life in the material world and the aesthetic problem which they really weren't called up to solve. They realized that if they attempted to solve questions like that, it would be impossible for the frail girl, and the reclusive *sannyāsī*, and amateur author to get very far.

They were smiling about the fact that Maria had been neglected by the two because of their practicing *brahmacārya*.

She said, "I didn't expect to associate with you in any wrong way. But I did want to meet with you. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* says it is good to associate with *sādhus*."

Maria, why did you leave the temple? How can we help you?

Maria realized she needed to get married, but she wasn't over-anxious. She had some advanced symptoms of spiritual yearning. Wanted to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Wasn't sure she could live in a room with three other women. They spoke of this . . . Hmm. There was a room she could use in the *gurukula* building, a private room. Why not? "I like working at the *gurukula* with children," she said, "but I also like a little privacy and time to pray and read."

"I feel it would be best if I could live close to the devotees," said Maria.

"We are not temple managers," said the *sannyāsī*. "We'll have to check this out with the temple authorities. But I happen to know of that room. And there are also spare rooms like guest rooms in several *grhastha* houses. Someone can take you in."

"The temple president is away in India right now," said the author, "but his in-charge replacement said Maria can use that room as her own for now."

The *sannyāsī* said, "Please write me a note any time you have a question."

She said, "I have some friends among the women, one or two senior ones I especially look up to."

"O good soul, does not a thing applied therapeutically, cure a disease that was caused by that very same thing?" The *sannyāsī* quoted this from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.5.33. And this: "While performing duties according to the order of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one constantly remembers Him, His names and His qualities" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.36). He cited these while answering Bhaktin Maria's question about how to dovetail her talents and propensities. She likes to sing, to sew, to ride a bicycle, to play a guitar, to study books, to walk in the fields. She likes children, brooks and hills and beautiful pictures. She especially likes Kṛṣṇa and the *Kṛṣṇa* book. She would like to learn how to cook for Kṛṣṇa and do

Deity worship, and would like to sometimes preach and even distribute books like *Umā dāsī*.

She asked if she could attend the meetings the visiting *sannyāsī* was holding in the evenings with his disciples. He said she could attend, although it wouldn't imply a commitment on his or her part about a guru-disciple relationship. They wanted to accommodate her and not impose restrictions on her delicate, new devotional creeper.

She felt they did care for her and she could communicate with the *sannyāsī* if she liked. He mentioned that he was leaving in a few days, but she could write to him.

"Besides, there are many devotees here who can give you all good counsel."

The author didn't speak about himself because at that point, he wasn't asked.

So it ended, not sticky, their meeting. Author-jī felt glad, wanted to click his heels in joy. He was optimistic.

The *sannyāsī* thought, "If my evening meeting with the investigating committee man could go as easily as this."

Left alone, the *sannyāsī* prepared his morning class, but he had little time for it. The verse was *vairāgya-vidya-nija-bhakti-yoga*. He would tell what he remembered about Lord Caitanya's deliverance of Sārvabhauma, who wrote that verse, *vairāgya-vidya*. Śrīla Prabhupāda had said it's good to prepare a lecture in advance, but we

should also be ready to speak about Kṛṣṇa at a moment's notice.

Chapter Nine

Oh, my *sannyāsī* warrior Prabhu had a long morning. Yikes, he gave the class all right, telling up until the end—and one man said, “Thank you, your lectures have saved my life, increasing my devotion to the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and to Śrīla Prabhupāda.”

Then at noon he had to go out to take lunch at a householder's place. On the way, he saw the land the devotees farm with posts for grapevines and green grass, which he was told was wheat growing and grass for cows. The man served him a nice lunch. His stomach *agni* was burning enough to eat most of the *sabji*, rice, and *dāl*, and hot puffed *capātis* and *luglu*. Then he heard the troubles of the man who invited him.

He heard like this:

Got a big temple to maintain a few devotees to do it—to give an example, two were arguing today, twenty-five minutes before the meal to be offered to Gaura-Nitāi—one sez, “You suppose to cook.” The other say, “No, I’m goin’ on saṅkīrtana. It’s your responsibility.” So I came upon this argument, and told them it’s a privilege to serve Gaura-Nitāi, and it only takes half an hour to cook—so I went in and did it myself. But he’s tired, tired of pushing the others and pushing himself in a too-big place. Most older devotees have moved out, he’d like to too, maybe to a place like

Padma dāsa in the north, where one household couple goes and preaches to the area and not have to push a small band of reluctant and younger workers . . . You've heard this story before?

And it used to be better in the centralized days. Now devotees say, "You are not my spiritual master" when you try to advise them even in obvious ways like to a lady who's got another man lover besides her husband. And one leader of ISKCON has gone (like so many) to the New Age and got his own radio show, just by chance the other day, they turned it on and he's sayin', "Yeah, Bobby Dylan was the best. A musician's musician. Those were the days." And they even criticized the pure devotee, saying, "Kṛṣṇa is God, but He don't demand. He's cool and don't mind if you have extra sex and smoke a little pot."

The *sannyāsī* spoke up. "They are right that Kṛṣṇa doesn't demand. He'll let you have sex or do what you want, but New Age or Old got to take the ensuing karma. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to demand surrender for those who want to get out of all karma of birth and death." And he said, "Dear friend, I am only an visitor. I don't have the solution. If the palace-temple is too big and not enough devotees want to work"—here, the host man's wife spoke up, although through her husband translator while she played with her three-year-old daughter, riding her up and down on her foot like a see-saw ride—"some *sannyāsī* as head

of the project is what we need.”—Yeah, but who is that who wants to saddle himself with the same debt-incurred project and have to tend to the weak and push the semi-strong to collect money?

Yeah, the man-host said, “I don’t criticize those numerous devotees in this country who want to be peaceful and want to practice spiritual life without pushing. But many times they don’t really improve their lives by moving outside the temple. If I did it, I’d want to open a preaching center.”

“Yeah, but you have to be responsible,” said the ISKCON *sannyāsī*.

“We know that, so when the temple president comes back from India—and he also feels like this, fried, and that’s why he went to Vṛndāvana—we’re going to meet and discuss if we can actually keep pushing here with just a few older devotees and a few reluctant younger ones and no one with time to preach to a congregation. But if we have to sell, we’ll lose a lot of money because the economy is in a crisis and no one wants to buy such big buildings.”

Sannyāsī, he looked at his watch moving its hands constantly clockwise with no respite from that, and he says, “You have to be patient. But don’t make the big buildings an excuse that you don’t practice your own Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” He sounded decisive. They thanked him and drove him back to the big temple guest room where he had no assistant Narahari dāsa, but the investigating committee man had arrived and would see him in an hour. Okay, let me take rest and put

my Prabhupāda *mūrti* to rest, the same *sannyāsī* said. He hurried into bed, sleep, dreams, but forgot, woke up later, just in time, but feeling rushed, for The Meeting.

I don't want to trifle with a serious subject, but neither be a windbag or push through a scene I don't even like to be in, and an imaginary one at that.

But it's real enough.

The committee man adjusted his toggles and said, "I was just on a flight from India."

The *sannyāsī* adjusted *his* eyesights and tried easing a little the tight belt of his *kaupin* which pushed in at his waist.

"Eh?"

"Well, your name came up. We investigated certain devotees who were in a kind of sub-cult of too much inclination toward *rāgānugā* which you know can lead to *sahajiyā*. Even in Śrīla Prabhupāda's time, he squelched a so-called *gopī-bhāva* club. You know all this."

"Yes."

"Then we got a hold of a diary you kept, a long one."

"Nobody ever deigned to read it before. I guess it's poetic justice that I finally got readers."

"Well, we just read the good parts. I mean, those relevant to our investigation."

"Oh, you didn't read about me in Māyāpura and potholes in Calcutta and Ganges poetry, boys in a pond, the scene where rickshaws and camels get

in a traffic jam, and my general personal yearning to improve as Śrīla Prabhupāda's boy, the time I stopped alone in the empty former GBC hall in Māyāpura and felt the presence of old scenes and faces like ghosts and then got up and left it in favor of the present, diminished real self, and went to Śrīla Prabhupāda's grass *kuṭīr* and saw him looking back from out of the painting where he's dressing you down and simultaneously compassionate, your best friend?"

"No, we didn't read all that. We saw your confession that you were reading Rūpa and Raghunātha Gosvāmī's intimate work where *gopī-māñjarī* was featured, and you dared to aspire to it, to be Rādhā-dāsyā. Frankly, it's an open and shut case. We got the goods on you and the others who met and discussed this sometimes on the Rādhā-kuṇḍa bank and even when we thought you were downtown shopping, you were at Dāna-nivartana-kuṇḍa and other esoteric, celebrated places of intimate pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*."

"So what did you all decide at your meeting?"

"We passed a resolution that you should quit it."

"And . . . that's all?"

"We slapped the wrists of those present and yours too, by mentioning your name."

"Let me say it's true, I was doing all that, but for me, this news and resolution comes as anticlimactic."

Then our *sannyāsī* said, "I did that excess you have mentioned, and trod the *rasika* path, but on

visiting India this year, I heard my master's call. He said, 'Come back to me.' I was in his Samādhi Mandir and residence rooms, requesting him to speak. 'Come back to read my books alone, you don't need any others. Come back real soon and read the basics. They're actually the way for you to qualify to hear and enter true Goloka-dhāma.'

"Yes, I felt him drawing me," said the *sannyāsi*. "And I was glad to heed, and with no pain of withdrawal, I left off abruptly my chase to reach that *rāgānugā* by cramming it now and deferring my master's own books. So I admit to what you say, but have already desisted even before your meetings and decree."

The committee man sipped his water and said, "I heard a statement already to that effect. That makes things easier, but there are still some dues to pay. Can you give us the low-down on some of others in your ring so that we can be conscientious to make sure they too will adjust and behave as you say you are doing? Also, you may have to give some more practical proof that you are willing to bow to the will of the body parliament and major sons' desires for you."

"I can't give a lowdown," he said. "You have to ask them. I don't want to criticize anybody. Ask each one and deal with them like that. What more do you want from me?"

"Who do you answer to? What is your year's assignment?"

You might feel this meeting is just getting warmed up, dear reader, but I've already written

my minimum quota. Besides, I don't much like this controversy, and it's not so much your business to know. Excuse me if that's rude or put-offish. It's not my business to push on with this subject just to create some sensational copy, as does a tabloid writer. They can have another meeting if you really insist.

I know you don't insist.

"Who do you answer to?"

"I answer to you all," said the *sannyāsī*. "I also pray to Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda. I contribute to the movement as best I can in the brāhminical *āśrama* of lecturing and traveling."

"Why don't you attend more meetings?"

"I get headaches. I must have my own room, and that's not always available at jammed festivals. Even if I get it, when I stick my head out of the room or try to go to the bathroom down the hall, I meet two men from Africa who want to talk with me privately and they ask only, "When?" And when I say that I cannot meet with them, I move on two steps further, dressed only in my *gamchā*, and meet two women from America, one with a wrinkled face about fifty years old who says, "Remember me? I like you a lot." But her friend says, "Remember me? I'm angry at you. You were temple president when I collected thousands for that temple and I never got a cent for myself. Pay me back." Then when I reach the bathroom, in there I see a man from Russia who wants me to be the guru of his son, who he introduces to me, and wants to know not *whether* I can meet

him, but *when*. Then a messenger comes from the Big Room and says the Parliament has called you to appear as witness. When this happens, I get a headache and go back to my room and lie down and don't see nobody no matter what they ask. The next day I leave. That's why I don't even go."

"Who is your boss?" asked the committee man.

"Whaddya mean?"

(So that's about as far as I'll go. Suffice to say it was a little demanding and a trifle threatening, but the *sannyāsī* thought there would not be too many repercussions, "because I am basically on course, so let them come down with any final decrees and I'll pay the fine as best I can.")

The committee man said that there would be some follow-up and they would notify him. There is always some possible new development or decision. You can't resolve it ever or completely close a chapter on this sort of thing.

"I'll transcribe this interview." The committee man surprised by showing a tiny microphone and recorder—"and submit it to the larger body, and it will judged by another committee who will tell you if there's any more action in your case."

"Okay. But you can put me on the record as 'off a *rāgānugā* binge.'"

"As you say." The committee man wasn't giving our man any real hearty assurances. Left a little menace in the air.

The official meeting ended and the devotees parted civilly. The *sannyāsī* had to rush to get

ready for his 6 P.M. meeting with disciples. They had submitted questions to him on slips of paper, per his request, and he wanted to go over each one quietly and make notes for a reply. But there was no time for that—he'd have to take the questions cold. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, be ready to talk of Kṛṣṇa at a minute's notice.

Sannyāsī's poem on the run:

Sorry (I say this in jest)
 I didn't give more blood
 or enter a dog fight
 in the meeting. Rest assured I
 am worried about such things,
 but also I am trying to keep
 aloof and I'm sure
 dear reader,
 that's what you want from me—
 that I don't over-fear
 but keep flying above the water
 and present to you
 real stuff.
 Hare Kṛṣṇa.
 I am afraid, but not.

Chapter Ten

In the question and answer session, he picked up each slip of paper and read it. Without his eyeglasses, he could see only a smudge of lines. If he were an airline pilot, he wouldn't be able to read any gauges. Soon you have to retire if you get something like a brain cyst, as one man here has, who is not even old. Life is no joke. One thinks,

"If that happens to me, that I must drop all other activities and be consumed by disease or face the end quickly by another way, I hope I can 'retire' in the *sannyāsa* sense of the word and simply chant like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in his very last days when he stopped outer communication and entered *samādhi*. But be realistic, how can you expect the same last stage as a great saint?" So until then, be busy, friends, with your good work. And be sure your work is connected to Kṛṣṇa and guru and is the best effort.

The visiting *sannyāsī* answered a question, "How can we keep friendships amid quarrels and problems?" He replied that we should consider the devotee as a person in a solitary room early in the morning. He does his *sādhana* for a few hours and then opens the door and faces the world. He has gained inner strength to face the problems. He is an *ātmārāma* (to some degree) and can be charitable. Such persons, who first perform their own *sādhana*, can then lead others and communicate or absorb the shocks of life together.

Someone asked about prayer. The *sannyāsī* wished he had a life of prayer, but he answered anyway from the general tradition. He said, "Chanting is the best prayer, two and a half hours a day at least."

Someone asked, "In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says His devotee will never perish. What does this mean exactly?" The *sannyāsī* said it doesn't mean that a devotee never loses a battle to the de-

mons. But finally, the demon dies and the devotee dies. The demon is then vanquished and the devotee's good acts make him triumph over death. Śrīla Prabhupāda once compared ISKCON devotees to Jatayu who was defeated and killed by Rāvaṇa, but who was brought back to Godhead by Lord Rāma.

During Friday night, while the *sannyāsī* tried to sleep, he sometimes woke and heard noises. He heard voices outside on the road and passing cars. He heard a door creaking open and shut. He heard someone clear his throat and he knew that was his assistant, Narahari, returned from India. Finally, the visiting *sannyāsī* fell into desired sleep. He thought, "I hope I'm well enough to go on *hari-nāma* Saturday night because they are expecting me to go."

The *sannyāsī* was up early as usual, just like the man in the example he gave in his answer last night, the man who stays alone in his room to practice *pre-maṅgala-ārati sādhana*. At 3:30 A.M., Narahari knocked on the door and entered. The *sannyāsī* was glad to see his friend, but suddenly realized it meant going through more of the agitating issue about the investigation.

Narahari looked tired, but hyped up from his passionate activities taken on behalf of the *sannyāsī*. He told his story.

Running down the street, he grabbed an auto-rickshaw and told him, "Drive anywhere, fast! I'll

give you a big *baksheesh!*" He shredded the diary manuscript as they drove.

Then after fifteen minutes of bumping through the congested Delhi tenements, Narahari stopped and made a fire of the manuscript's remains while a crowd gathered to watch.

When Narahari arrived back at the devotee's tenement building, the Delhi temple president was there and was upset. He demanded of Narahari, "What is going on?" A *sannyāsī* also arrived and said, "What was in that book?"

Narahari politely declined to say.

"Then the Swami got heavy and I replied in kind," said Narahari. The Swami made a derogatory remark about our visiting *sannyāsī*, and Narahari snapped back a derogatory remark toward the offending *sannyāsī*. Narahari finally left the scene. The temple president was sympathetic to Narahari. At that point, Narahari went to the temple and phoned the *sannyāsī* saying, "Mission accomplished."

Narahari in his room now in Italy, unshaven for a few days, looking a bit dirty, was angry. He was hurt by criticism he'd heard, and he thought that too many leaders were involved in an unseemly way in a controversy that should have been handled gently or at least gingerly and confidentially. The visiting *sannyāsī* managed to pacify Narahari and told him what's done is done, so now be calm and enter your usual routine, especially regular chanting.

"This afternoon, we are all going on *harināma* in Verona. They are even bringing an ox and a cart. So recover and come with us. Now you should shave and bathe and get some extra rest."

The author is sitting with Narahari. They speak briefly regarding the *sannyāsī* who is their mutual friend.

After awhile, the author changes the subject. He asks, "Do you know any songs about Mary?"

Pausing a moment, Narahari began singing "The Rose of Tralee." He was suddenly filled with emotion, such that he had to pause for split seconds a few times in the midst of the ballad's lines—or perhaps he paused from an emotion of effort to reach the right notes. He sang a bright Irish tenor:

The pale moon was rising above the green
mountains

The sun was declining beneath the blue sea
When I strayed with my love
Near the pure crystal fountain
That stands in the beautiful vale of Tralee.

She was lovely and fair, like the rose in the
summer

Yet it was not her beauty alone that won me.
Oh no, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever
shining

That made me love Mary, the rose of Tralee.

The visiting *sannyāsī* was in the next room and overheard the singing. He soon began humming to

himself, "Yeah, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever shining/That made me love Mary, the rose of Tralee. That made me love Kṛṣṇa, the rose of Tralee, that made me love Rādhā, the rose of Tralee, that made me love Lalitā, the rose of Tralee, that made me love Rūpa- and Rati-mañjarīs, the rose of Tralee, 'twas the truth in their eyes ever shining that made me love the devotees, the rose of Tralee . . .

Today's verse is *tṛṇād api sunīcena*. This is discussed in the last chapter of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Lord Caitanya says, "I will now tell the easiest way to attain the ultimate goal, *kṛṣṇa-prema*." What is that? It is *tṛṇād api sunīcena*.

The *sannyāsī* was a little behind in his schedule and had no time to write careful Post-its for his lecture. He would have to count on what he already knew theoretically. Be smaller than a blade of grass and more tolerant than a tree if you want to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Tolerate people's criticisms of you the way the tree tolerates people's cutting it and the tree, when thirsty, never even asks anyone for water. Follow that example and don't mind what people do to you. You can defend yourself if necessary, but know that this is a world where people always criticize. Go on chanting with dependence on the holy name, as did Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Oh, but we can't do this unless we have a higher taste? No, that is not true. Even a little "lower taste" is sublime. It is not actually lower, it is a drop of the nectar from

above, from the lotus feet of Nāma Prabhu. Accept it gratefully. In such a state of mind, one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly.

Someone from Milan brought the *sannyāsī* a pack of pasta in noodle shapes. Someone else gave him a pair of maroon socks and a maroon knit cap.

I have not forgotten Maria. She will appreciate the lecture on *trṇād api sunīcena*. The *sannyāsī* should realize it's all new to Maria.

Remember your aunt Mary in the 1940s during WWII, playing that record glorifying the name, which is the same name as Jesus's mother? It was Mary, Mary, sweet as any name can be. . . . In society they say Marie . . . Mary, Mary, it's a grand old name! But everything becomes degraded, so many Bloody Marys and Mary, Mary quite contrary, how does your garden grow?

Nevertheless, this Bhaktin Maria is new generation to ISKCON. Face it, man, there is a new generation. Someone said in the ISKCON temples now it's mostly only gurus, GBCs, and temple presidents, and then all new devotees. The middle ranks have all moved out, although they may be practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness on their own. Sad that so many have left and ISKCON can't seem to provide. Maybe it's not supposed to provide that way. What will evolve? We are pioneers and won't see it all developed in our own lifetimes. But there is a new generation and Maria is one.

Welcome her. She is not a stick figure in your head. She is part of you and she represents, you can say, the youth who come gravely to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, just as you came twenty-five years ago. Make way for them. Be kind to them. Get ready to step aside. They will tire of your controversies. They will have their own issues. Show them at least a good example, that you are becoming attracted to the essence of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, chanting and hearing and you are not disturbed by current events, and you don't stop preaching.

Maria moved into the room they provided. She set up a little altar there. People befriended her. Even her mother visited her and thought it was okay, but asked if she could keep a picture of the Blessed Mother, Mary, on the daughter's altar, and, "What about marriage?" Maria said she'd have to ask the visiting *sannyāsī* about the picture of the Blessed Mother, but as far as she understood it, Mary and Jesus and Joseph were all "in" with Kṛṣṇa conscious people.

"That's good," said her mama. "I heard the *sannyāsī* was a good Catholic boy."

Mama said she would like to cook something for the devotees if Maria would tell her what she could not put into the food.

"No garlic or mushrooms. And of course no meat, fish, or eggs. Mama, could you come to our chanting festival tonight? We are going into the streets in procession, just like a Catholic festival."

Mama said maybe she and Maria's father could at least go to Verona and see it as by-standers.

"Don't expect us to chant," said her mother, "Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare."

"You know the mantra?"

"Yes, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare."

"Ah!" Together they said it: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare—and laughed.

Chapter Eleven

They left him alone for a few hours in the morning and he prepared for the next morning's class. This would be Gaura-Pūrṇimā among the devotees. He selected the fourth verse of the first chapter of *Ādi-līlā*, *anarpita-carīm cirāt karuṇa-yāvatirṇaḥ kalau*:

May that Lord who is known as the son of Śrīmatī Śacīdevī, be transcendently situated in the innermost core of your heart. Resplendent with the radiance of molten gold, He has descended in the age of Kali by His causeless mercy to bestow what no incarnation has ever offered before: the most elevated mellow of devotional service, the mellow of conjugal love.

He decided to lecture on the main Sanskrit words in the verse. The verse is a blessing to the readers from Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's spiritual master, Rūpa Gosvāmī. The phrase, *anarpita-carīm*

cirāt indicates that for a long time, He did not bestow His mercy upon the *jīvas*. Not since He appeared as Lord Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. This implies that no other incarnation could give this intimate love of Kṛṣṇa.

Kalau means that He is the Kali-yuga *avatāra* and He will give *saṅkīrtana* as the method to attain love of God.

Ujjvala-rasa means conjugal love. He tasted Rādhā-*bhāva*, but offered *mañjarī-bhāva*—that is the revelation of the six Gosvāmīs, especially Rūpa and Raghunātha Gosvāmīs.

(Wait a minute. You just got cleared by the *rāgānugā* investigation committee, so be careful. In fact, you didn't even get cleared yet. But, what am I supposed to do when Prabhupāda gives out all this nectar?)

Puraṭa-sundara—this means He is golden like Rādhārāṇī.

Rūpa Gosvāmī hopes that He may enter into our hearts in the innermost core. He is called Śacīnandana here. This indicates that Mother Śacī is kind, so He will be kind to bless us.

The visiting *sannyāsī* decided to turn to a similar verse, also composed by Rūpa Gosvāmī, which appears in the same chapter, Text 58:

"By performing the sacrifice of congregational chanting of the holy name, learned scholars in the age of Kali worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is now non-blackish because of the great upsurge of the feelings of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. He is the only worshipable Deity for the *paramaharṣas*, why have ob-

tained the highest stage of the fourth order (*sannyāsa*). May that Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Caitanya, show us His causeless mercy."

We can also read a similar verse by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, which appears in his *Bhāgavata-sandarbha*:

I take shelter of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who is outwardly of a fair complexion, but is inwardly Kṛṣṇa Himself. In this age of Kali He displays His expansions (his *aṅgas* and *upāṅgas*) by performing congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord.

—Cc, *Ādi* 3.81

In this verse, the word *antaḥ-kṛṣṇa* means one who is always thinking of Kṛṣṇa in the same way as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "He preached the process of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and those who are under His feet are glorious."

Although these verses go deep into the nectar of Lord Caitanya's confidential identity, we will also not forget that He is teaching us to do *saṅkīrtana*. So here is a verse by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in the same chapter about that:

"Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya is the initiator of *saṅkīrtana* (congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord). One who worships Him through *saṅkīrtana* is fortunate indeed. Such a person is truly intelligent, whereas others, who have but a poor fund of knowledge, must endure a cycle of repeated birth and death. Of all sacrificial perfor-

mances, the chanting of the Lord's holy name is the most sublime" (Cc, Ādi 3.77-8).

Only the most fortunate and intelligent persons worship Lord Caitanya by *saṅkīrtana*. So how are we so fortunate? It is Prabhupāda's causeless mercy, as he was directed to give us by the previous *ācāryas*.

After preparing these verses, the visiting *sannyāsī* wondered if it was too internal a class, indicating his own preference for this mood. Maybe he should be more outgoing, tell of the necessity and the glories of spreading the holy name according to Lord Caitanya. Then the *sannyāsī* remembered that he would also have to give an afternoon Sunday feast lecture, since Gaura-Pūrṇimā fell on a Sunday this year. That would be an excellent time to glorify the *saṅkīrtana* movement and it would also be appropriate that in the morning, the devotees hear a little more intimately about the combined mercy that Lord Caitanya gives: He gives us His own beautiful pastimes in the mood of separation from Kṛṣṇa, pastimes which we can never imitate. At the same time, He also gives us the method to attain *kṛṣṇa-prema*, the chanting of the holy names of God.

"Yeah, it will be all right," thought the *sannyāsī*. He looked out the window and saw that the day was all gray. He hoped that they could go on with their *harināma* plans. He wanted to be part of them very much.

Chapter Twelve

Author's *harināma* report:

It was nice. I joined them. Saw the *cāmara* waving and was surprised, and maybe even embarrassed, that such an intimate worship of Gaura-Nitāi was being done in public. It was the civilized old city with fashionable shops on either side of narrow, cobble-stoned streets. It was a mild spring dusk coming, and people strolling around, non-violent. The police were gentlemen, and one gray-haired officer with his officer's cap walked in front as the procession began.

One ox was black and one tan, both big. They wore orange cloths. They were completely under control with a ten-year-old boy at their heads and a devotee driver with reins and stick up on the cart. It was a simple, yellow-painted cart with non-rubber wheels. A throne on top for Gaura-Nitāi and the main temple Gaura-Nitāi Deities were there, just as They appeared in the temple in the morning, Lord Caitanya in pink and Lord Nityānanda in blue. Both had sun designs embroidered on Their dresses, reminding you of the verse, the Brothers have arisen together like the sun and moon over Gauḍa.

About a dozen young children sat peacefully on the cart, and one *grhastha* played harmonium and sang Hare Kṛṣṇa. It was amplified through a loud speaker on the rear of the cart. Maybe a total of fifteen or twenty adults were there, and we strung out double file behind the cart, singing in unison with *karatālas* and *mṛdaṅgas*. A few devotees

wandered up to people with baskets of cookies and cards to hand out, and books.

The oxen set a naturally slow pace, just perfect. The police were satisfied with it and no one was going to speed up or slow down the oxen's steady gait. They dumped their wet dung occasionally, which landed in splotches on the Verona road.

We walked past an aqueduct and into an open plaza adjoining an ancient stone stadium. Many people here. The cart stopped and devotees made a circular procession around the cart, always steadily chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare or Nitāi-Gaurāṅga, Nitāi-Gaurāṅga, or Nitāi-Gaura *haribol!*

The visiting *sannyāsī* clapped his hands and sometimes raised his hands and sang along, taking his place directly behind the cart while they were moving, and when stopped, he stood where he could see Gaura-Nitāi's feet. His attitude was, "I'm here and I'm chanting." As an American, he sensed his distance from the Italians in the plaza. He imagined someone approaching him and asking him a question and he would have to say, "I don't speak Italian." But no one approached. Everything was mild, in order, but the main purpose was accomplished—distribution of the mercy of *harināma*.

One guy was showing off to his girl and other guys and girls. Maybe he was drunk. He came up to the oxen and patted them, and then teased

them a bit, poking near their eyes and looking to see if they had testicles, and touching some of the children on the cart. When the cart started up again, this guy disrupted by leading the oxen in a direction opposite where the driver wanted them to go. The driver said something like, "Hey, cut it out." And the show-off made a big bow and blew a kiss to the oxen, and quit his performance.

Cultured people, sitting on park benches, at the tables in outdoor cafes, some on the high ramparts of the stadium looking down. Many took photos and all of the cookies were given out and many cards. I saw our women and men talking to groups of people.

As it darkened, we made a last lap around the plaza. Two gentlemen from Verona, policemen, came up to the biggest devotee, Dhāma dāsa, and inquired politely. He told them we would be leaving soon. They took his words mildly and like brothers in agreement.

The oxen were the special attraction, so all glories to them. When we all stood, they pissed into the street and no one objected. They drooled, but I don't think it was such a strain for them. They endured it easily when people came up and dared to pet these tall, horned beasts. Maybe the oxen even enjoyed the attention, but they certainly did valuable service. All the devotees were lucky to serve this evening by public distribution of the holy names. We've been hearing every morning that there is no other way in Kali-yuga but chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, so we did something,

showed our belief, paraded on behalf of Lord Caitanya on the eve of His appearance day.

Now we are driving in the car back to Vicenza. It's still gray, no sunlight, no trace of the moon. Hope to see it tomorrow.

Maria? Yes, she was there too. She was wearing a red jersey and over that, a sleeveless, padded jacket. She wore a *sarī* and gave out cookies from a wicker basket. People asked her questions, "What is this? What is the chanting?" She gave simple answers, "They are names of God." She handed out a few books. Her mother and father came to the plaza and did a little shopping. It was good that they saw how people did not mind the presence of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and that the children of the devotees looked so normal and darling. The oxen showed that we are down to earth, like rural people, like Maria's parents. When the cart was stopped and the kīrtana-ers were going around it in a dancing step, Maria's parents came a little closer. Dhāma dāsa spoke with them. The *sannyāsī* was introduced to them and he greeted them with his folded hands and a smile.

Narahari had a good time, relieved to be back in his routine, non-political activities. He clapped and sang, grew red-faced in a good way (not in anger), and was photogenic as someone "into" the joy of *kīrtana*, arms upraised. He was glad to be out and with the party and in such a civilized place as old Verona.

The fat, strong-man statue on the horse, and other statues in the park, did their frozen, dead thing. I know most people didn't take the Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting so seriously, but the devotees tried and made a good showing. Śrīla Prabhupāda likes it when we do that, make the effort and get out and chant. Maybe someday the movement will really gain hold. We can only try.

That's about it, dear reader. I will close tomorrow with a description of the Gaura-Pūrṇimā temple festival.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said the festival should be observed like this:

1. The picture of Lord Caitanya with His party should be nicely decorated with flowers and garlands and *saṅkīrtana* should be performed regularly from morning til evening. Just after seeing the full moon on the sky, the day's fast should be broken. I mean, the devotees should observe fasting the whole day. In the evening, the devotees should take food as in the Ekādaśī days.
2. The next day you can celebrate feasting on account of Lord Caitanya's appearance and read about His life as given shortly in my *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and you can read also from the *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*.

—Letter, March 14, 1967

Dear readers, may you have a good Vaiṣṇava year in *vairāgya-vidya nija-bhakti-yoga*. May you live in the spirit of the *harināma* verse, there is no other way. May we learn meekness and tolerance

of *trṇād api sunīcena*. May Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda bless us in the core of our hearts, driving out the darkness of cheating. May we get the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda, which is Lord Gaurāṅga's *prema*, distributed so freely by Gaura-Nitāi. May we join the *harināma* party again and again.

Chapter Thirteen

Gaura-Pūrṇimā, March 27, 1994, The sannyāsī's impressions:

At *maṅgala-ārati*, Gaura-Nitāi looked a bit ro-tund from Their dresses, violet-maroon and pink. We feel closer to Them because we were out on the streets together yesterday night. Now we are back at Their temple on the appearance day of Lord Caitanya.

A few new faces at *maṅgala-ārati*. I notice the paintings on the wall better. Kṛṣṇa is playing His flute in Vṛndāvana. Think of devotee friends in America and elsewhere. It's an ordinary day with some differences. Fast until moonrise. A little extra time to pray. Shake sleep from your eyes, it's Gaura-Pūrṇimā.

Delay in scheduled time for *guru-pūjā*. We stand outside the temple room, chanting *japa*. Nice and relaxed. No conversation is needed. Just Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, waiting for last floral arrangements. Then inside, *guru-pūjā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda has big roses and daisies on his garland. He looks happy and handsome. After *guru-pūjā*, the tempo

gets noisy and agitated with *karatālas*, drums, and even shouting. Waiting for the curtain to open. All over the walls are big leaves, the closest thing you can find in Italy to banana leaves. It reminds you of Māyāpura.

Then the curtains open with a fanfare. Gaura-Nitāi have new pink-colored outfits and we are able to see Their lotus feet. The altar is filled with nice flower arrangements.

Frankly, I don't feel much like giving the afternoon lecture to the guests. I wanted to give class this morning, felt purified, and like I was giving them something, but now I feel put upon to speak in the afternoon. I would rather stay and get back into reading Prabhupāda's books instead of lecture-planning. But Prabhupāda wanted us to preach. I'll do it. Start by thinking how it is a great privilege. We are lucky to have Gaura-Pūrṇimā fall on a Sunday this year, so we get extra guests. Come on, man, do it nicely. You can feel for Gaura-Nitāi, can't you? Don't you want to tell the people?

My reluctance is that I don't think I have anything in me anymore. I have told all I can. My stores are empty. That's my problem, I'm afraid I'll be theatrical rather than sincere, and that's the last thing I want to do—give a phony speech on Gaura-Pūrṇimā.

Pounding drums I hear while I massage and bathe Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*. I'm up in my room while the *abhiṣeka* for Gaura-Nitāi goes on below.

I will turn on a tape of Śrīla Prabhupāda while massaging him. He will know my condition. Be patient, your well will fill up again and you will have something to say at 5 P.M., and on an empty stomach too. (Is that why you're complaining?)

The clocks changed overnight to daylight savings time, but only half of the devotees here agree to follow it for today's program. There is a happy kind of chaos and anxiety going on as the various departments prepare for the festival. "Everything is running an hour late," they say, but what time is it now? Some say 2:30 P.M. and some insist that it's only 1:30 P.M. The theater director hurried to add one more rehearsed song to the tape which will be the background to the children's play, but she pushed the wrong button and erased the whole tape. Now they are hurriedly re-recording them all. And I am outlining a lecture.

Start with *kṛṣṇa-varṇaṁ tviṣākṛṣṇaṁ*. Yes, I'm repeating what I already did, no harm in that. Then the simple and main points from the verse *ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam* and *nāmnām akari bahudhā . . .* Chanting cleans the mind of false identity. It puts out the fire of *saṁsāra*. Our spiritual life grows to good fortune like the moon to full. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the best knowledge. It increases the ocean of bliss. Do I speak these from conviction? It's easy to say, "No, I'm only repeating it." But why would I care to repeat it unless . . . The Lord has put all His energies into His holy names and there are no hard and fast rules

in chanting. Despite all this—here's the part I do realize—I commit offenses and cannot taste the nectar. But the chanting is the sweet cure for the jaundiced patient.

On my way to the lecture I met P. dāsa from Naples. Last year he had a terrible job as a night watchman. I felt sorry for him. He was trying to earn some money by teaching *haṭha-yoga* then. Tonight he told me he's doing the *haṭha-yoga* and earning, but things are much better. "I have more time to read. I get up early and meditate."

I reach for my beads. "And you are chanting?"

P. smiled. He's got a little beard now. "I'm a rascal," he said. I didn't pursue the conversation, but I got his drift. Sounds like he's taking his role as a *haṭha-yoga* teacher seriously, as if there is spiritual benefit in it and he's not chanting the Lord's names. Better to be an unhappy night watchman chanting furtive *japa* in your pocket than a "liberated," goateed yoga instructor.

But I shouldn't gloat. I'm lucky to have gotten the firm grip of Prabhupāda's hand on my life-rudder. Please continue to steer me, Śrīla Prabhupāda. And on your behalf, if I denounce *haṭha-yoga*, you will know that it must be done. We don't say to the *yogīs* that you are good and we are good. We say only we are good who follow the orders of the Supreme Lord and chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the *dharma* for the age.

Sitting on the floor before the improvised stage for the children's play. My lecture is done. I spoke okay, *paramparā*, very introductory, but I felt convinced telling them they must approach Lord Caitanya to reach Lord Kṛṣṇa, and that the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is the way. I made it sound reasonable and wonderful, as it is. Just imagine, if by a simple process of chanting, you can gain all the perfection attainable by hard endeavors. It appealed to me and I wanted them to give up foolish ways and become a Kṛṣṇa conscious chanter. P. dāsa was listening attentively. But maybe ten people got up and left during my talk. Afterwards, there were no questions at all.

The children's theater music has an electric bass. Now a *mātāji* is reading from a book, rapid Italian. Why so much narrative reading from a book? I often see this in ISKCON skits. They try to jam in the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* plot in a reading or explanation to an audience. Meanwhile, the audience—the same people who walked out on my lecture—are fidgeting and waiting for some kiddie action on stage, and some *bhāva* of happy spirits and play.

"Señor Caitanya" and "mahā-mantra" is almost all I understand from the rapidly read speech. Give us a break, Ma. At the keyboard is the *mātāji* who plays in the symphony in Venice. I'd like to hear her play in the language of music. (Better shut up, wise guy. Your pen is too cynical and doesn't understand.)

I'll sign off now. Narahari and I will be leaving this temple tomorrow. Glad to be here and glad to leave. A rolling stone gathers no attachment to women or politics. Maybe we will meet in the future, dear reader.

Appendix

Compilation of the *ślokas* or verses which the visiting *sannyāsī* spoke on in the seven days of morning classes in the week before Gaura-Pūrṇimā.

1. *namo-mahā-vadānyāya,
kṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te
kṛṣṇāya kṛṣṇa-caitanya,
nāmne gaura-tviṣe namaḥ*

“O most munificent incarnation! You are Kṛṣṇa Himself appearing as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu. You have assumed the golden color of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and You are widely distributing pure love of Kṛṣṇa. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You” (*Cc, Madhya* 19.53).

2. *kṛṣṇa-varṇaṁ tviṣākṛṣṇaṁ,
sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadam
yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair,
yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ*

“In the age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Kṛṣṇa. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Kṛṣṇa Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons and confidential companions” (*Bhāg.* 11.5.32).

3. *harer nāma harer nāma,
harer nāmaiva kevalam
kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva,
nāsty eva gatir anyathā*

"In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the only means of deliverance is the chanting of the holy name of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way" (*Bṛhad-nāradiya Purāṇa*, 3.8.126).

4. *vande śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-
nityānandau sahoditau
gauḍodaye puṣpavantau,
citrau śandau tamo-nudau*

"I offer my respectful obeisances unto Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda, who are like the sun and moon. They have arisen simultaneously on the horizon of Gauḍa to dissipate the darkness of ignorance and thus wonderfully bestow benediction upon all" (*Cc, Ādi 1.2*).

5. *vairāgya-vidya-nija-bhakti-yoga,
śikṣārtham ekaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇaḥ
śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-śarīra-dhārī,
kṛpāmbudhir yas tam ahaṁ prapadye*

"Let me take shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who has descended in the form of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu to teach us real knowledge, His devotional service and

detachment from whatever does not foster Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He has descended because He is an ocean of transcendental mercy. Let me surrender unto His lotus feet" (Cc, *Madhya* 6.254).

6. *tṛṇād api sunīcena, taror iva sahiṣṇunā
amāninā mānadena, kīrtaniyaḥ sadā hariḥ*

"One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honor but is always prepared to give all respects to others, can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord" (*Śikṣā-ṣṭaka*, 3).

7. *anarpita-carīm cirāt karuṇayāvatīṃṣaḥ kalau,
samarpayitum unnatojjvala-rasāṃ sva-bhakti-
śriyam*

*hariḥ purāṇa-sundara-dyuti-kadamba-sandīpitaḥ
sadā hṛdaya-kandare sphuratu vaḥ śacī-nandana*

"May that Lord, who is known as the son of Śrīmatī Śacīdevī, be transcendently situated in the innermost chambers of your heart. Resplendent with the radiance of molten gold, He has appeared in the age of Kali by His causeless mercy to bestow what no incarnation ever offered before; the most sublime and radiant spiritual knowledge of the mellow taste of His service" (Cc, *Ādi* 1.4).

