

## **Introduction**

For about the last fifteen years I've contemplated writing a book about my personal spiritual journey. Over the years I've gained many insights that were important - and sometimes essential - to my advancement in Krsna consciousness. I have also learned significant lessons from the continual mistakes I've made. My motive in writing this book is that others benefit from these experiences. When I began Krsna consciousness in 1969 at the age of nineteen, the journey was often like learning to swim by being thrown into the water. There were no devotees around who had "been there, done that" to tell me what to expect and how to deal with the innumerable situations I would encounter. Because I have now been down the same road that many devotees have yet to cross, I believe this book will be useful to the devotee community, especially those who have yet to travel that road.

There are two other purposes this book fulfills, and I didn't realize this when I started writing it. Although I had association with Srila Prabhupada, I didn't spend enough time with him to warrant writing an exclusive book about my memories of him. In this book I have ample opportunity to describe my association with Srila Prabhupada as it relates to the events I describe. You will read stories that would have otherwise not been recorded. Secondly, I relate details in our movement's history that most devotees have never heard. These stories reveal the excitement of developing a fledging movement into an international organization, and relate the enthusiasm, surrender, and self sacrifice with which we did this. Many of these stories will amaze you. Some will make you laugh, others will inspire you, and many will make you think we were crazy. As you hear these stories you will often think, "I can't believe they did that."

I believe these stories will be of special interest to future generations. The Krsna consciousness movement has already changed much since Srila Prabhupada's disappearance and it will undoubtedly continue to take on new faces in the future. Developing Iskcon during Prabhupada's physical present was a unique time for the movement. Anything written about this period will be of great interest and importance to future generations of devotees, academics, and anyone interested in Krsna consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada said we should write for our purification, not for money, fame, etc. We execute devotional service to please guru and Krsna and for our own self purification, not for any kind remuneration. So another purpose of writing this book is my own purification.

I do not consider myself anything other than an ordinary person who had the inconceivable fortune of receiving Srila Prabhupada's mercy and engaging in his service. Whatever I have achieved in Krsna consciousness is by his mercy, not by any special "qualification" of my own. If I can do it, so can you. Whatever little success I have had is because I have shown Krsna and Prabhupada a little desire to serve them and advance. They are ready to help all of us; we just need to be willing partners.

## **Chapter One**

### **Krsna Makes All Arrangements**

It is the fall of 1969 and I am going to school at the University of California in Berkeley. Why am I going to school? My parents are paying for it and paying all my expenses, so it is the best thing I have going. Plus, it prevents me from being drafted in the military. So here I am aimlessly attending classes with no idea what I want to do with my future.

One day while walking down Telegraph Avenue on my way to campus, for reasons I can't explain, I am drawn into a bookstore. This is really strange because outside of required class textbooks and a few magazines, I only read one book my own in my entire life ("Siddhartha"). As I walk through the store wondering what I am supposed to do in there, an edition of *Bhagavad-gita* catches my attention. It looks Indian and mystical. As I look at the book a voice inside of me says, "You should read this book." I didn't have the money on me to buy the book, but that voice made a big impression on me. I wouldn't forget its good advice.

A constant inner frustration accompanied me during. No matter how good things got, there was always this nagging question in my mind: What's the point of doing this? I played guitar and had written songs since I was thirteen years old. But now as I would write new songs an underlying frustration accompanied me: "I really don't know what to say. I really don't know what's true. These words are pointless." Even while attending an interesting class I think, "What's the point of learning all this anyway? No one is telling me why I am here and what I am supposed to do." This empty feeling surrounds me even during good and happy times. The conclusion of everything I do is, "So what?"

### **Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll**

Although not a big drug user, I experimented with psychedelic drugs since high school in order to find enlightenment. At Berkeley I have the opportunity to take the drug mescaline with some friends and my girlfriend. The mescaline is making me feel really, really happy. The happiness is completely upsetting me. It bothers me so much because all I intuitively know that this state of consciousness must be attainable without drugs, through some kind of meditation or spiritual practice – and I really need to find out how to do it. I am sitting there in a total state of happiness feeling that I am copping out, that drugs are entirely unnecessary.

This experience begins my obsession with finding a spiritual process that would bring me this same kind of happiness. I just know it exists. Now I just have to find it.

At this time I had just met a girl at a San Francisco "Be-In" that I was immediately attracted to. I meet a few weeks later and as we part I tell her I want to see her again. The next day she shows up at my apartment ready to move in. I don't know what to think. But I soon learn that she wants to enjoy sex with me and I feel that perhaps this is what's missing from my life. So I welcome her to stay with open arms and an innocent heart. Yet after a while the same feeling that seems to accompany everything I do enters the sexual arena. As we live and "enjoy" together I constantly ask myself, "what's the point."

I go through the motions of what I believe will bring me pleasure, but it's doesn't work the way I envision. I try harder and it gets worse. I didn't realize at the time that this is part of Krsna's plan to help me become detached.

### **Bhagavad Gita – Four Units**

During the first week of the fall semester, as I register for classes, I see someone sitting on campus behind a small table with a sign that reads "*Bhagavad-gita Study - Four Units.*" Wow. There is the *Bhagavad-gita* that I had promised myself (and the little voice inside of me) that I would read – and it is being taught as a four unit philosophy class. I stop everything and immediately go over to the table. The devotee sitting there is named Howard (later to become Hrdyananda Goswami) and he tells me that he arranged, through the philosophy department, that the Hare Krsnas will be teaching the *Bhagavad-gita* as part of an outside study philosophy course. In other words, the Monday, Wednesday and Friday night Gita class that is already being held at the temple now is becoming an accredited University of California philosophy course. What more could I ask for (talk about Krsna making arrangements)? I immediately sign up for the class.

Unknowingly I had created an ideal situation for me to practice Krsna consciousness while going to school. During this semester I tell the university I have an outside job. Actually, I don't have a job, but I tell them this because it allows me to take less than the minimum requirement of twelve units. As a result, all I am taking this semester is an English literature class, a music class, and the Bhagavad-gita class. With this schedule, my total workload, including classes and homework, is about fifteen hours a week. With all this free time on my hands I am in an optimal situation to get deeply into something other than school. Krsna consciousness happens to fall into my lap and I have plenty of time to pursue it.

Howard and I grew up in the same neighborhood and went to the same schools. Although we were never personal friends before moving to Berkeley, we had many mutual friends and our families knew one another. In fact, I am living in a house with five other students who are all his good friends. They are all well aware of his involvement in Krsna consciousness and sometimes talk about him at home after seeing him preaching or chanting at the university.

One of my roommates, Paul, is enthralled by Krsna consciousness and talks to everyone in the house about it. When he meets Howard on the street he comes back to the house full of spiritual enthusiasm and tells everyone what Howard had just told him. So there I am, just starting to get into Krsna consciousness, and I am living with someone who is preaching about Krsna to everyone in the house.

### **The First Gita Class**

The first Bhagavad-gita class, which is really an introduction to the basics of Krsna conscious philosophy, is attended by about 250 students. Practically everyone there came because they figured this would be an easy class; and there wouldn't be homework or tests. The class started with a kirtan. Devotees gracefully danced in abandon as if they were the only ones in the room. The students are not phased since devotees chanted like

this every day on campus. Next, Hansaduta Prabhu, sitting cross legged on a big table about a foot or two above everyone's head, gives a lecture on how Krsna owns and controls everything and how everyone is meant to serve Krsna. The only problem is that he doesn't explain who or what Krsna is. So I am thinking Krsna means everyone and he is speaking about some kind of communal consciousness in which everyone works for the good of the community and everyone owns everything. I think this is totally cool. Sounds like living in a commune.

Yet, there is one statement he makes that hit home so hard that it totally alters my perception of myself and the world. I could never deal with the concept of death. The idea that I would not exist at some point in the future was so foreign to my way of thinking that the thought was totally unsettling. I just could never deal with the idea that my individual existence would dissolve into nothingness for eternity. It made no sense (neither did going to hell to burn forever). So when Hansaduta Prabhu explains that we are spirit, and as such we don't die, I immediately thought, "Yes this has to be." That one statement resonates so deeply with me, that one statement is having such power over me that it uproots all my confusion and apprehension about death in one instant. Immediately I became relieved. "Of course I don't die. How could I just cease to exist for ever? That makes no sense. Death is not really a problem!" Boy, am I happy to hear that good news.

*Brahma bhuta prasannatma*, when one realizes he is *brahma*, spiritual, one becomes happy. It seemed that I was having some kind of instant *brahma bhuta* experience (no I wasn't on drugs). And that experience altered my perception of reality so drastically that after that class I never again saw things the way I used to. I walk away excited and relieved to know that I don't die. I actually felt like a liberated soul.

But this happiness and realization doesn't come without problems. The more I intellectually understand I am not the body, the more my ego fights back. I am young and attractive. I am talented, intelligent and likeable. Now I am confronted with the reality that I am not really any of these things. And this started to hurt. Although I can clearly understand I am not the body, I am having a really difficult time not acting and thinking like a body. My false ego is being stripped and it started revolting. Still, the truth that I am a soul is so liberating that it gives me the strength and determination to deal with my false ego.

Of the several hundred students who registered for the course, only three finished— and two of us became devotees. Even though the only course requirements are to attend three Gita classes a week and read the abridged Gita, the class quickly goes from two hundred, to sixty, to thirty, to fifteen and finally dwindles down to three. Why is it that an easy A or B doesn't motivate students to hear the Gita a few hours a week? The reality is that the devotees who give the class know so little of the philosophy that every class is more or less the same. This one-dimensional presentation got to be boring for everyone after a while. Plus the devotees are trying to convert students rather than educate them. This reflected a paradigm that existed then - and still exists to some degree today - that our goal is to convert rather than to educate. This idea was so strong in the early days that in some temples if someone came to the Sunday feast three times and didn't join, devotees

wouldn't bother speaking to them anymore. They would look for new guests – potential devotees - to speak with.

Of course, it's not expected that all two hundred students would have remained in the class no matter how Krsna consciousness was presented, because most students who took the class were not that interested in Eastern religion. Still, there are ways to bore people to death with almost any subject, even interesting ones. There are many more people interested in Krsna consciousness than we may realize. But many are not attracted or inspired by a highly negative or philosophical presentation.

The devotees chant regularly on campus and I join them whenever I see them. Whenever the kirtans became ecstatic, I feel that this chanting is as good or better than the best things I have ever experienced in my life. Krsna is kindly giving me a taste so I can renounce my attachments. What I am getting from these kirtans convinces me that Krsna consciousness is real. It pushes me over the edge; and it instills in me faith in the philosophy and process of devotional service. I think that if kirtan is such a powerful and effective process, all the other aspects of Krsna consciousness must be equally effective. Thus, through the holy name I develop faith in the entire process and philosophy of Krsna consciousness. *Vidya vadhu jivanam*, the holy name is the life of all transcendental knowledge.

The combination of regular kirtan and classes is gradually chiseling *maya* out of my life. Things start looking different. Going to school is becoming more and more meaningless to me. I sit in class and think that I am not learning anything, that none of the professors know anything. My interests are strongly shifting to Krsna. I also feel that I am learning more at the temple than I am learning in college. (I don't mean to imply that there is something inherently wrong with going to college or there is nothing to learn in college; but at this time I am not looking for the things college has to offer).

### **Meeting Prabhupada**

Krsna is making all facility for my progress. All I have to do is go along with the program. And this is what I do and it just keeps getting better. By the end of the semester I decide to join the temple. But first I plan to go home to Los Angeles for Christmas to return the car my parents gave me (I know they'll want it back when I move into the temple). And, of course, I will tell them I am moving into the temple in Berkeley and dropping out of school.

We live in West Los Angeles, and by Krsna's mercy the LA temple is less than a mile from our home. The day after I arrive in LA I go to the temple. As soon as I walk through the doors I find the devotees getting ready go to the airport. I have no idea what's going on but am told that Srila Prabhupada is shortly arriving in LAX. I am invited to join them to greet Him (talk about timing). Krsna is making so many arrangements for me to become a devotee that being in the right place at the right time to see Srila Prabhupada seems normal.

Practically minutes after I arrive at the temple I am in the van on the way to the airport to see Srila Prabhupada for the first time in my life. During the entire ride to the airport, two devotees, Visnujana and Kartikeya are arguing. I don't know what they are arguing about, but I find it awkward that devotees argue. This is something I didn't encounter in Berkeley. The movement is so surcharged with bliss and enthusiasm that it seems so out of place for devotees to argue. But even though they are arguing I think it petty. It doesn't bother me. I want so much to be a devotee that nothing about Krsna consciousness appears negative to me.

Seeing Srila Prabhupada is a powerful experience. When I first see him I am overwhelmed and cry. I don't know why I am crying, but I am amazed that Prabhupada's presence is having such an effect on me, considering that I am hardly spiritually advanced, know little about Krsna, and am not following all the principles or chanting many rounds.

Prabhupada's presence is so powerful that it stirs up spiritual emotions in me as well as solidifies my determination to join the movement. Otherwise how can such a fallen soul as myself be released from the powerful clutches of *maya* and surrender with determination and joy? Just seeing Prabhupada makes me want to give my life to Krsna. I feel that whatever I lack to make spiritual advancement will be given to me by serving Prabhupada.

### **Confronting My Parents**

From about the age of sixteen my parents had little control of my life and rarely told me what to do. I expect they will try to talk me out of joining the temple but won't make a major effort to stop me. My intention is to inform them of my plan to drop out of school and return to Berkeley to join the temple. I don't want to discuss this much with them because I know they won't understand why I am making this decision. And they definitely won't appreciate my newly chosen way of life. I feel that joining the movement is something I have to do with my life, and since they are not devotees they will not understand this need. They will see it as the foolish idea of a nineteen year old who is going through some weird phase. I see it as the end to my cycle of birth and death and the perfection of human existence. I cannot allow any family attachment to get in the way.

My decision to become a devotee is the biggest and most unexpected blow I had ever given my parents. Although I had done things to upset them before, this seems to be the worst thing they could have ever imagined. I am sure they could handle me being a drug addict better than they handle this news. They are completely shocked. Still they are kind and liberal enough to not argue with my beliefs and just ask that I continue with Krsna consciousness while remaining in school and living outside the temple. And they asked that I not dress like a devotee. So they are quite generous and understanding with me.

From the moment I decided to be a devotee I never entertained the idea of practicing Krsna consciousness at home and staying in school. I am already doing that and it wasn't enough to get me "over the hump" of *maya*. I am bored with school, alienated from my friends, and only want to be with the devotees. I can't imagine living outside the temple

any longer. I know myself well enough to know that I can't follow the four regulative principles and chant sixteen rounds if I live outside the temple. It's 1969 in Berkeley. It's the heart of the drug and sex culture.

As I am speaking with my parents, explaining to them my intense desire and need to live in the temple, I am thinking that if I don't become a devotee now then I will be in the same situation in my next life telling a different set of parents that I want to become a devotee. So although they are totally devastated as I speak, it doesn't bother me much on the surface. I think of Arjuna on the battlefield and how he had to kill his relatives. AS we talk I continually think; "These are not my real parents; I have had so many lives with so many other parents."

I really needed a mature older devotee to help me in that situation. My mother was so traumatized by my joining the temple that her health slowly deteriorated and she died six years later. My sister repeatedly told that my moving into the temple killed my mother. Living in the temple, shaving my head, wearing a dhoti and kurta and dropping out of school were too much for her to handle. She could no longer relate with me and she practically broke off all ties with me. It became so bad that several years later when I married and had a son, she wouldn't even touch the baby.

I am turning off many of my emotions in an effort to detach myself from my family and the world. I think that to become detached I must neglect my negative emotions and also the negative emotions of others. But not valuing other's feelings as well as denying my own has caused me many problems in relationships over the years.

I think many devotees are afraid of acknowledging their emotions out of fear that those feelings are material. When Srila Prabhupada left the planet I was in charge of a women's sankirtana party. When I informed them what happened they asked me, "How should we feel?" It is so sad that they had to ask this question. They were so afraid of their feelings - so afraid that they might feel the wrong thing - that they didn't even know what to feel when their own spiritual master left this world. To make things worse, leaders often came to the rescue by telling us how to feel, thus re-enforcing our doubts about our feelings.

In 1986, Ramesvara Swami left the movement, I saw bitter emotions coming out of the hearts of some of his disciples, feelings that I never imagined they had. Resentment, doubt, anger and frustration poured out of the hearts of some of his most dedicated followers. I was shocked to realize that many of these feelings were there all along, at least on some level, but these devotees had no safe means of acknowledging and expressing them. Now that Ramesvara was gone, they could openly express them without fear. Recently I saw the same phenomena take place after the fall of another guru and it prompted me to ask a devotee counselor and psychologist about this. I asked if he thought it could be productive if devotees were allowed to honestly express issues they might have with their gurus. He said the feelings exist anyway, and creating a safe environment to express them would be productive. In some cases it would clear misunderstandings and bring the guru and disciple closer together. And in some cases it would demonstrate that a

disciple may need to create a closer relationship with a siksa guru and relate to the diksa guru from a distance. In either case healing would take place.

It is ironic that *bhakti*, which is all about feeling, would bring me to a point in which validating my own and other's feelings seemed antithetical to Krsna consciousness. I now realize that turning off my emotions is not the means to renunciation. Emotions are there for a reason. They tell us what is going on in our internal world, and if we allow ourselves to experience them they can tell us things that will bring us closer to Krsna and closer to Krsna's devotees. If we are sincere, everything will help us come closer to Krsna, even so called negative emotions. For example, if I dislike a devotee and allow myself to confront that, to look at what is causing me to dislike this person, how that negativity is affecting me, and how that is playing out in other areas of my life, it is likely I will confront something so distasteful inside of me that I will not want to continue feeling this way towards any devotee. However, if I don't confront the feeling, if I don't look at it openly and honestly, it is likely it will remain and thus play itself out in my life in a variety of other negative ways.

My family is paying for my education and room and board, and they live over 400 miles away, so in one sense it is a good situation for developing Krsna consciousness while continuing my education. But I don't have the interest or energy to stay in school; I want to cultivate Krsna conscious full time and I want to give it to others. I need to live with devotees. I am too weak on my own. I want my parents to respect that decision. But that is too much to expect. My mother and father subsequently distance themselves from me and practically reject me as their son. I ask my sister why and she says they feel I abandoned the family.

I have never regretted my decision to join the temple at that time. In fact, I doubt I would have gone far in Krsna consciousness if I didn't. I have, however, regretted how I dealt with my parents. It was immature and lacked foresight. What would I have done differently knowing then what I know now? I would have taken more time to comfort them by listening to their concerns and letting them know I understood how they felt. I would have taken more time to explain why being a temple devotee was important for me at that time. I might even have postponed joining the temple and continued school another semester to give them time to adjust to and understand my newly accepted beliefs and practices. Or I might have considered telling them I am just taking off a semester or two to do this and will go back to school, thus pacifying them somewhat for the time being. And I would have made more of an effort to let them know I have not rejected the family.

Yes, I could have taken advantage of the situation and gotten a degree in religion or philosophy and used it for preaching. But no one was encouraging me to do that, guiding me through the process, showing me how to be Krsna conscious while living at home and going to school. Today our movement often encourages students with a strong desire to be Krsna conscious to complete their education, yet spend some in the asrama, stay close to their families, and then go back to school. If I did that my parents would have been happy. I might also be having an easier time today maintaining myself. And I might even



be doing more devotional service today as well. But I would have missed out on some of the most ecstatic and purifying times of my life in helping Srila Prabhupada establish the Krsna consciousness movement. I don't regret my decision to join, but I do regret how I dealt with my parents.

My father and I reconnected years later and our relationship became much better and closer. This commonly happens with time as devotees mature and parents become more accepting. Unfortunately my mother died before I was ready or able to patch up the relationship with her. But my ultimate solace is that my own devotional service has helped her. Plus, both she and my father saw Srila Prabhupada.

### **Berkeley, January 1970. Moving into the Temple.**

I return to Berkeley in January of 1970. Since I intend to move into the temple, I get rid of all the things I will no longer need and tie up loose ends. But then I hesitate moving in for some time. I was like a person lying awake in the morning when it's time get up but wants a few more minutes to relax. But one day I was visiting the temple and found out that two girls who had been coming to the temple for the past few months decided to join. That was all the impetus I needed. I thought if they are doing it now, then so am I. The next day I moved in.

Actually, a big reason I procrastinated is that I can't sleep when people snore. I figure that if anyone in the asrama snores, I will need to find a place in the temple building where I can sleep alone. So the first night in the temple I unassumingly slip downstairs to the prasadam room to take rest. But a few minutes later another devotee sets up his sleeping bag in the same room. He is the temple guard that night, so he has to sleep downstairs near the front door. As my fate would have it, this devotee snores like a locomotive and I don't get one wink of sleep. The whole night I am thinking, "Krsna, it's my first night so you are testing my sincerity. You want to see if I am serious and so you arranged for me to sleep next to a someone whose snoring sounds like they are gagging to death." And that is how I tolerated being kept awake all night by what was to me the most disgusting sound in the universe.

Whenever I face difficulties I always think Krsna is watching to see how I react. Krsna has put me through many difficulties in my devotional career, some so tough that I felt that if they got any worse I would crack. But I always intuitively felt that Krsna wanted me to go through these situations to help me learn, grow, develop strength, and become detached. They were all opportunities to show Him my devotion by tolerating difficulties and continuing with my service. If we blame our difficulties on others and don't see Krsna's hand in them, we are robbing ourselves of the opportunity Krsna is offering us to advance.

Howard is the most influential role model for me. He is the last one to bed, the first one up, and was always studying Prabhupada's books. He is also learning Sanskrit verses from the Gita. There are no Sanskrit Gitas at that time, so the only way to find a Sanskrit verse is off a lecture tape of Srila Prabhupada. So if one wanted to learn verses, they really had to be into it. Howard is into it. He gets the verses off the lectures, writes them

out phonetically, and then teaches me how to pronounce them. Seeing him rise early, chant rounds sincerely, always read and learn verses, and take devotional service so seriously has a powerful influence on me. I follow in his exact footsteps as best I can. I want to be Krsna consciousness and since he is so serious about advancing, I decide I should follow him. He had only been in the temple for about five months when I joined, but his *bhakti* was wearing off on me.

The term advanced association is sometimes misleading. Normally we wouldn't think of a new devotee being so inspirational. But I think it is a matter of allowing ourselves to be inspired. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta said that he learned how to improve his service to his guru by watching how his devoted disciples served him. Practically everyone has qualities we lack and thus can be an inspiration for us in devotional service. I find that when devotees are generous with praise, they instill a desire in my heart to cultivate humility. And every devotee has qualities that can inspire me. I just have to notice those good qualities.

Plus, seeing others faults doesn't help me. Prabhuapda once told Visnujana Swami that I can find faults in you and you can find faults in me, but there is nothing good that will come from this. We may enjoy some perverted pleasure, or feel some false sense of security, but ultimately we are only seeing our own faults in others and taking out our own frustration with ourselves on them. The more we are aware of this, the more we will be able to refrain from criticism.

Our lives are very regular. Monday, Wednesday and Friday we do harinama sankirtana from 10 am until 6 pm and have Bhagavad-gita class in the evening. Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday we do harinama from morning till until 9 pm. One of the highlights of our late evening sankirtana parties is that sometimes we do harinama around our neighborhood. Carrying torch lights, we walk through the streets around the temple while Howard goes into fraternities and to ask if we can come inside and do kirtan in their living rooms. When they let us in, Howard often plays their piano along with the kirtan while we madly dance around their living room. After the kirtan, Hansadutta Prabhu lectures to the frat brothers. Yes, it's a bit of a bold move. But Prabhupada encourages us to be bold. The fact that Prabhupada came to the West, went on the street and chanted, and turned hippies into sadhus was such a bold move that it infects us with a similar spirit. Plus, since most of us were former hippies we gravitate towards the unconventional.

By Howard's association I am only sleeping five hours a night. Srila Prabhupada felt that sleep is a waste of time and encouraged us to minimize our sleep. Before moving in the temple, I was sleeping close to ten hours a night, but I was so inspired in devotional service that I literally cut my sleep in half.

But there was a downside. After about three weeks on this schedule my body wore down and I became sick. I loved going to bed late and rising early to take a cold shower, but this combination, along with sometimes overeating, took its toll on me. It's interesting that I kept this regimen up for the next twenty five years despite the fact that I regularly would get sick, especially in the winter. Because Prabhupada had stressed sleeping no

more than six hours and taking a cold shower upon rising, it never dawned on me that this might be causing me to become regularly ill.

I don't know if this is a classic case of denial, but there have been many situations in my devotional life in which I was reluctant to make the compromises that needed to be made. I made assumptions that Krsna consciousness looks like this and it doesn't look like that, and acted accordingly. Of course, some of those assumptions were correct; but many were not. And I paid for the mistakes in broken health, broken relationships, improper engagements, burn outs, and shooting for Krsna conscious goals that were out of my league.

This denial was often tied to my self image. I needed to think of myself on a certain level of Krsna consciousness, and in order to do so I needed to act a certain way. It was often too painful to face the reality of where I was at and work from there; and I could avoid facing that by acting on a level that I wasn't on. Plus, by acting this way I wouldn't have to deal with the fear that I was failing Srila Prabhupada (although Prabhupada did not judge me as strictly as I judged myself).

### **March 1970, First Initiation.**

One day in March, out of the blue several of us were told we would be going to Los Angeles next week to receive first initiation. None of us had asked to be initiated and it was never even discussed with us. We all thought that this is just the way things happen when you live in the temple. So we saw initiation much like anything else going on: today we clean the temple, tomorrow we go on harinama, next week we attend a festival in San Francisco, and the week after we get initiated. So I happily accepted and went to the LA temple to receive initiation personally from Srila Prabhupada.

We arrived in LA the day before our initiation and were called in to meet with Gargamuni Prabhu, the temple president. He explained a little bit about initiation. Then he said, "Don't try to make spiritual advancement, just try to please Srila Prabhupada." I had never heard this concept before. It immediately resonated with me and I put it into practice. I had been constantly trying to make spiritual advancement, and I think this was because I had not yet developed a strong relationship with Srila Prabhupada. I was more focused on the process of *bhakti* - following rules and regulations - than I was on devotion.

That evening we stayed out late on harinama and thus didn't get to bed until 2 am. So on the day of my initiation I got up 8 am, quickly bathed and went into the temple room for the initiation. Five devotees were to receive first initiation and three would get second initiation. In those days, Srila Prabhupada chanted on each initiate's beads during the initiation ceremony. He also personally performed the fire sacrifice.

The devotee on my immediate right used to be a heavy smoker. After he recited the four principles, Prabhupada made a gesture as if he were smoking and said, "What about cigarettes?" Of course everyone laughed while the devotee said, "Oh no, Prabhupada." Then it was my turn. Prabhupada asked me to recite the principles, gave me my name and beads and said, "Mahatma is one who is always glorifying the Lord. Then it was time for the next devotee to get his name. Before joining the movement he was an acid head (one who takes lots of LSD). Prabhupada asked him to recite the four principles and then asked, "What about LSD?" As the audience laughed again I was awed that Prabhupada knew their past because to my knowledge no one had informed him about any of us.

Did Prabhupada know everything? He never said he did and never said that was the qualification of a guru. But many disciples say that Prabhupada knew what was going on in their hearts and minds. We didn't judge his qualifications by this standard - but it was hard not to notice it.

Everything changed for me after initiation. Now my service was based on pleasing Srila Prabhupada, not on making my own spiritual advancement. Of course, by doing that I made more spiritual advancement than ever before. In fact, focusing on Prabhupada's pleasure gave me the strength to perform the many difficult austerities that would soon lie ahead.

### **May 1970. Opening the San Jose Temple**

In Berkeley I worked closely with Chitsukananda Prabhu. He was great association because he came to Krsna consciousness under Hansaduta's guidance, and Hansaduta drowned him in nectar from his own personal association with Prabhupada. And I was fortunate to be the constant recipient of that nectar.

Chitsukananda liked to open new centers. In the spring of 1970 he went to San Jose, California with one brahmacari to open a temple. He found a small apartment and began his preaching. Within a few months he rented a house two blocks from the University. Now that he had a new house he needed devotees to help refurbish the house, convert it into a temple and expand the preaching. Since we previously worked well together, he requested the Berkeley temple president to allow me to join him. So one day I was told I would be joining Chitsukhanda in San Jose. Again, the idea wasn't discussed with me. It was handed to me like orders given in the military.

I didn't object because I liked Chitsukhanda and liked the idea of opening a new temple. Plus, I didn't think we were allowed to object. Again, I just thought this is part of the program: you get different services, you get initiated, you get shipped off to this temple or project. So the next day I was happily on my way to San Jose with my small box of possessions.

In order to prepare the newly rented house as a temple in the shortest time possible, Chitsukananda worked us around the clock. We would get up in the morning and immediately begin work (cleaning every nook and cranny of the house, painting walls,

framing and hanging pictures, polishing the floor, gardening, etc.). We would work the entire day without a meal and then at 10 pm we'd finally sit down for a sumptuous feast. Then we would start chanting our rounds. Sound crazy? It was.

We were so absorbed in thinking how pleased Prabhupada is whenever a new temple opens that we didn't burn out on this schedule. Prabhupada wanted 108 temples opened before he left this world and we were helping fulfill that desire. With that mission in mind, we were able to tolerate this insane schedule (of course, being twenty year old ex-hippies also helped). To this day I cannot remember ever feeling burned out by this. I can only remember the excitement and fun of opening the first Hare Krsna temple in San Jose. We were making history in Lord Caitanya's movement and becoming recognized by Him and Srila Prabhupada. A few weeks of hard work was a small price to pay for this reward.

Srila Prabhupada's ambition was to spread Krsna consciousness to every corner of the world and his desire entered our hearts. Although most of us had little worldly experience, we never doubted that this would happen. This faith quickly propelled the movement forward and enabled us to make huge sacrifices. Making the world Krsna conscious was our mission and nothing was going to stop us.

Devotees who lived through that era often look back at those days in wonder. They can't believe what they did, what they accomplished, how hard they worked, how much they tolerated, and the austerities they performed. Prabhupada pulled out of our hearts the best we could give the world - and the best we could give ourselves. His desire to spread Krsna consciousness took over our entire beings, just as a ghost takes over a body. Nothing else mattered to us because nothing was more important to Srila Prabhupada than spreading the movement. His desires played in our hearts and we danced to that song. He empowered us to perform beyond our limits.

After the temple was renovated we established a regular schedule. After morning sadhana, prasadam, and temple cleaning, the three of us (Chitsukhananda, Jayadeva, and myself) walked the four blocks to downtown San Jose for sankirtana. Our system was that two of us would chant and one would distribute Back to Godhead magazines. And when Chitsukhanada had to attend to other business, Jayadeva and I would distribute BTG's.

### **Learning to Preach**

It was here that I really learned to preach well. Everyday I picked a different point to explain to people on sankirtana and all day I only spoke on this one point. Then the next day I would explain another point to everyone. After a few months of this, I had no difficulty giving lectures on a variety of topics. I would explain to the audience exactly what I explained to people on the street. After all, I had already explained each point of my lecture at least 40 times before. As a result of this practice, I never feared speaking to audiences and found it easy to clearly articulate Krsna conscious philosophy even though I was both young and a young devotee.

Of course, not everyone will have the opportunity to learn to preach in this way. I also adopted another method for honing my preaching skills that anyone can practice; I would give lectures when I was alone, specifically when I was driving. I would pick a topic and then give a complete lecture as I drove down the street or freeway (open roads are best). It is common that new realizations come as we explain Krsna consciousness. It is as if we are listening and someone else is speaking. And this is true even if there is no audience present.

And I could speak on any topic I chose. This would help me clarify my thoughts and understandings on a specific topic or point and then clearly articulate them. So whenever it came time to speak on those subjects, I not only had a better understanding, but had already delivered a lecture on them (my lectures are usually better the second time around). Srila Bhaktisiddhanta said if there is no one to preach to, then preach to the four walls. In that spirit I preached to the four tires.

### **San Francisco, Summer of 1970**

Summer in San Francisco meant Rathayatra, and the devotees in San Jose participated in working on the festival. In those days the entire Rathayatra festival, including building the carts, was organized in only two weeks, as opposed to the several months it should have taken if we followed normal schedules. During those two weeks, no one slept more than four hours a night. In fact, Madhuvisa made a vow that he would not sleep for the entire two weeks it took to organize the festival. I remember seeing him keeled over on his desk after a couple of days without rest. Another common phenomena was Mekanlal's four hour gayatris. We would see Mekanlal chanting gayatri mantra in the evening just before we went to bed. When we woke up we would see him in the exact same place, his head on his lap - still holding his sacred thread! I think he holds the world's record for chanting the longest gayatri.

The rathayatra festival was a big thing. Devotees from all over the west coast came. And the highlight of the festival was Prabhupada's presence. The day Prabhupada arrived most of us were too busy to greet him at the airport; so we greeted him at the temple. The temple room was packed with the largest number of brahmacaris ever assembled in Iskcon to date. When Prabhupada arrived at the temple and saw this sea of saffron he stopped at the door, glanced at all of us and savored this wonderful sight while smiling from ear to ear. We were later told that he was so amazed and happy to see so many devotees that he called his Guru Maharaja to come see. Years later Prabhupada wrote in the Caitanya Caritamrita that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati is always seeing my activities.

As I am writing this I am thinking, "Wait a minute, I am putting in print a statement that I remember being told 35 years ago. What if it's not true or what if I incorrectly heard it? Maybe I shouldn't include it in this book." Then I remembered what happened after Prabhupada entered the temple. He sat on his vyasasana, closed his eyes, and chanted the Guruvastaka prayers to a melody that I only heard him chant that one time. Since it was around noon and there was no formal reason to chant these prayers at that time, it is

obvious that Prabhupada did ask his guru maharaja to come see and was absorbed in thinking of how by his mercy the movement was growing so quickly.

### **Rathayatra Day**

I don't know the details, but due to rumors about Prabhupada's safety, devotees advised Prabhupada not to ride on the Rathayatra cart but rather come to Golden Gate Park about half way through the festival to greet the Deities. Thus Prabhupada was waiting when the carts reached the halfway point. The carts stopped and he came out of his car to see the Deities and pay obeisances. I had positioned myself right next to Srila Prabhupada and I was looking at him while he was absorbed in looking at Lord Jagannatha. I could clearly see intense love and ecstasy in Prabhupada's expression. As I looked at his face while he was looking at Lord Jagannatha, my only thought was that he is definitely seeing God. I had never seen anyone gaze at another person in that particular way. I thought, "This is what a person's face looks like when they are seeing God."

Prabhupada then began to dance, but he was dancing in a way we had never seen before. He was shuffling from side to side. It was obvious he was ecstatic and his dancing was a manifestation of that ecstasy. When the devotees saw this dancing they went wild and the already ecstatic kirtan went off the charts as Prabhupada continually did this new shuffle dance. The amazing thing about this was that when I was growing up there was a kid's show called Soupy Sales. Soupy Sales was famous for doing a dance called the Soupy Shuffle, which he always did on his shows. And this is the exact dance Prabhupada was doing. I couldn't believe it. I was thinking, "Oh no, Prabhupada is doing the Soupy Shuffle!"

The parade then continued without Prabhupada. The entire parade lasted for six hours and ended up at the beach where prasadam was served. The only thing I remember from that feast was the "rubber puris." It seemed like there were zillions of undercooked puris, which to me looked and felt like rubber. Of course I ate a ton of them, as did everyone else. And we were all sick the next day.

After the feast, the program continued in the Family Dog auditorium. This was a huge auditorium at the beach where many big name bands held rock concerts. Prabhupada was on the stage and the auditorium was packed from wall to wall. While Visnujana was leading the kirtan, Prabhupada was jumping up and down encouraging everyone to dance. I was in the very back of the auditorium and I could see that every single person there had their hands raised and was jumping up and down. I have seen many an ecstatic kirtan in my day, but the nature and quality of this kirtan was in league of its own. When Prabhupada would rise and lift his arms gesturing for the crowd to dance, he would virtually lift everyone off the ground. And this is what happened that night.

As I said, after the festival everyone got sick. It was an accepted and expected part of the program; we'd work non stop with little sleep for two weeks straight and then we'd all get sick. It happened every year. We somehow always made it till the day after Rathayatra - and then we'd collapse.

There are many stories about Jayananda's great devotion in preparing the Rathayatra festival. I didn't personally work with him that much so I don't have much to relate. The main thing I remember during those two weeks was seeing Jayananda leave very early in the morning to work on the carts and then coming home late at night. He would then stay up even later to finish his rounds. He was always the last to bed and the first to rise. He loved to serve Prabhupada and hated to waste time sleeping.

A humorous event happened while we were working with Jayananda. In San Jose there were many new housing developments built on former apricot orchards. Everyday for about a week we would visit these neighborhoods and ask people if we could pick their trees. Since they had more apricots than they could use, they were happy to oblige. Plus there were many lots for sale that had plenty of trees with ripe apricots that were going to waste, so we just helped ourselves. Jayananda came down a few times to help.

We picked enough apricots to make all the chutney we needed for the festival. After all the apricots were cooked into chutney, the chutney was poured into huge garbage containers and the containers were kept in a rented refrigerated unit. The only problem was that the cooling system in these refrigerated units broke down shortly after we rented them - and nobody knew it. So when we came to pick up the chutney we saw the chutney splattered all over the unit. The heat caused it to ferment, and the fermentation caused a chutney explosion that decorated the walls of the unit with apricot liquor chutney. So we never got to taste the fruits of our labor - and we put days and days into picking those apricots. Oh well. At least we sincerely did our duty.

Shortly after the festival a group of devotees were given sannyasa, Madhuvisa included. In those days sannyasa meant no management, so Madhuvisa relinquished his post as temple president and Chitsukhanda replaced him. There were now about five devotees in San Jose, and because Chitsukhanda and I had a close relationship, he asked that I join him in San Francisco.

The San Francisco devotees were enthusiastic and austere. No one rested for more than five hours a night, and many slept less (we all slept in a tight space in the basement of a storefront). We did harinam sankirtana around ten hours a day, sometimes until 1:30 in the morning. The only personal possessions we had were our toiletries, bead bags and a few books. Our clothes were community property and we took what we needed on a first come first served basis when the laundry came back. There were about twenty four of us and there was one toilet and one shower, located at the far end of the kitchen, and we would line up in the morning for our turn in the shower (which had to be done in two minutes or less). Despite the austere conditions, we were all happy to be living together serving Krsna.

### **Vancouver**

In August I was asked to visit Vancouver for a week to run the temple while the Vancouver temple president went to a meeting in New Vrndavana. I was infected with San Francisco temple's enthusiasm and brought that mood to Vancouver. They really



needed encouragement because they were only three devotees and they were far away any of the big temples in Iskcon. So I made an effort to always be super enthusiastic. I felt sorry for them and thought how difficult it must be to live in such a remote place without the kind of good association I was getting in San Francisco. The thought of staying there for more than the week I was visiting was scary.

After my experience in Vancouver, I appreciated the San Francisco temple and its devotees even more. But what happened in Vancouver was that the devotees got a taste of the San Francisco mood I brought and they called Chitsukhanda and said, "We don't want the temple president to come back (he was very low key) If Mahatma doesn't come to be our president, we are all going to move to another temple. As much as I dreaded the thought of living in Vancouver, I accepted that this must be what Krsna wants.

At that time Karandhara was overseeing activities on the West coast and he came to Vancouver to help me get settled in. He took me to the bank and explained that there is \$500 in the bank and gave me a little advice on management, all of which went in one ear and out the other since I had no experience or inclination to manage. So there I was, twenty years old, eight months in the movement, now in charge of a temple over a thousand miles away from San Francisco with only devotees for association. To top it off I dreaded management.

Now these devotees were not your normal sweet and submissive types. These were heavy-duty characters who, although asking me to come, didn't put me on any pedestal. In fact, they often made my life hell. One of the devotees, the treasurer and cook, was a bit schizophrenic. He could be the nicest person in the universe, and a moment later make Hiranyakasipu look like a sweet heart. It was intense. The late Sridhara Maharaja was also there. He was senior to me and there was some tension between us because he was actually more qualified than I was. So having me in charge of him didn't always sit well with him. And he didn't like that I was better than him at playing mrdunga and singing, which came naturally to me whereas he struggled learning to get good at kirtan. Sridhara was no lightweight. If he didn't like what I did, he'd let me know.

Then there was Kapiladeva, bless his heart. He was a nice person and didn't really cause any problems for me on a personal level. But Kapila's mind was off in weird spaces and so he was not entirely present in the moment. In fact, he was the one who wrote Srila Prabhupada telling him to take shelter of Guru Maharaji, the so called incarnation of Krsna.

After a few days in Vancouver, I went to the bank to take out some of that \$500 that Karandhara so I could pay some bills. Well, Karandhara made a slight mistake. It wasn't \$500, it was \$50. So there I am with no money, three devotees who have special potency to cause me anxiety, no experience or interest in management, only twenty years old, and no desire to be away from the wonderful San Francisco temple and devotees I so much loved.

But it get's even worse (or better, depending on how you look at it). The temple was actually in a warehouse situated along railroad tracks, not the most picturesque place to live. The heating was centrally controlled and came on at 7 am and went off at 6 pm, not the best way to make it through a Vancouver winter. The temple had no vehicle, so we traveled everywhere by bus. And the icing on the cake was that we didn't have warm clothes because we had no money to buy them.

To say I was in anxiety wouldn't be a gross understatement. I didn't know what anxiety was before coming to Vancouver. All I could think of was how much I hated managing, how much I didn't like being with these devotees, how much I didn't like Vancouver, how much anxiety I was in, and how much I wanted to get out of there and go back to San Francisco. But I knew I shouldn't give up my duty. I knew Krsna asked me to go there and I couldn't cop out; at least not without a credible reason.

My hopes rose when eventually I was informed that to stay in Vancouver I had to get permanent residency. At that time Canada was full of American draft dodgers escaping to Canada to avoid being drafter into the Viet Nam war. Because of this my lawyer told me it was unlikely that I would be able to get permanent residency. That was actually music to my ears. I thought this would be an honorable way to leave my post and return to San Francisco. I would apply for residency, I would be refused, and I would be on the next bus to San Francisco. I was ecstatic! I couldn't wait to apply.

I actually put my best effort into preparing the required paperwork to present to the immigration officials. This included character referrals, personal history, financial records (and cash in hand), etc. I did all this because I wanted to make sure Krsna really didn't want me in Vancouver. So if I did my best to get immigration status and didn't get it, I would know for sure that He no longer wanted me there.

Even though I did my best preparing the paperwork, my case looked pathetic. But that looked good to me. When everything was ready, I borrowed a car and in the evening drove into the US and then back into Canada through Canadian immigration. I was really happy that evening because I knew that I would have to come back to the temple with the sad news that I didn't get permanent residency and would have to be out of the country within a week. I would be honorably discharged from the office of temple president and return to happily to be engaged in devotional service in San Francisco with a clean record.

When I arrived at the border I explained to the custom official that I was applying for permanent residency and handed him my papers. He looked them over for thirty seconds, and then said something to me in French that I didn't understand. I studied French in school and that was written on the application, so he was testing my knowledge of French since that is a contributing factor to getting permanent residency. I responded saying something in French, but it had nothing to do with what he said to me. He smiled, laughed and said something back to me. I think he thought I could speak fluent French. Next he asked to see my money (I had borrowed more than enough to satisfy their requirements). Then he merrily went into his office (I think he must have been drinking

that night) as I was waited eagerly for the good news that I would not granted Canadian residency.

When he came out two minutes later I figured that he looked over my paperwork and immediately saw that it was totally inadequate to grant residency so he didn't even bother to check my references or do any further investigation on my case. With a smile on his face he handed me my paperwork and said, "Welcome to Canada, your residency has been granted. I was in shock. I couldn't believe it. There was absolutely no reason I should have received residency. At that moment it was more than obvious to me that Krsna wanted me in Vancouver and thus He completely covered the immigration officer and made him grant me residency. At that point I remember feeling like Krsna was sitting in the car looking at me with a big smile on His face.

Seeing Krsna do this totally changed my view towards my service in Vancouver. It helped me accept and surrender to my role as the Vancouver temple president. As soon as I accepted that I was meant to serve there I became peaceful, happy and enthusiastic. Krsna had a plan for Vancouver, and although I had few material qualifications for the job, He obviously wanted me to be part of that plan.

### **Building Up The Vancouver Temple**

I was now ready to dedicate myself to pushing on the movement in Vancouver. Every night before I took rest I prayed to Krsna to send new devotees. Within the next year almost twenty wonderful new devotees joined. Besides that, the original three Vancouver devotees all ended up moving to other temples (I swear I didn't pray for that although I I was ecstatic when they left).

I believe that whatever success I had in Vancouver was due to my enthusiasm, not any personal qualification. Just by remaining as the temple president and being enthusiastic and sincere, things will expanded. As it is said, 80% of success is just showing up. As temple president I may have gotten credit for the expansion of the Vancouver temple, but I know that I wasn't doing it. I could see Krsna pulling the strings again and again. If He didn't, things would have fallen apart. There is much to be said about remaining enthusiastic and just sticking it out. Prabhupada once said in a lecture in Los Angeles that this movement will spread with us or without us, but if we stay we will get the credit.

### **The Bliss of Traveling Sankirtana**

Once I went on traveling sankirtana and was feeling especially blissful and enlivened in my spiritual life. When I returned and resumed my duties managing the temple, I found it much more difficult to be Krsna conscious doing that service. So I wrote Prabhupada and said that when I manage I am so busy I hardly ever think of Krsna, but when I am on the road things are more simple and thus it is easier for me to be Krsna conscious. So is it better to do less and think of Krsna more or do more and think of Krsna less? Sounds like a dumb question but I was dead serious. Prabhupada wrote me saying that the whole point of everything is to become absorbed in thoughts of Krsna. He said I should think that I am unqualified to be the temple president and thus I should totally depend on Krsna

to help me. I should think that if Krsna doesn't help me the temple will fall apart and everyone will leave. Thus in that dependency I will always think of Krsna.

Actually it was not difficult to depend on Krsna in that situation. I was so inexperienced that everything was a challenge. Thus I always had to depend on Krsna for guidance. As I became more experienced and thus more "qualified" and "intelligent", I would tend to depend less on Krsna and more on my so called qualifications. This was tantamount to telling Krsna that I don't need you, I can do it myself. Whatever I lack Krsna provides when I acknowledge that lack and thus acknowledge my dependence on Him. When I don't do this I can almost hear Krsna saying, "OK do it yourself if you want. I'll stay out of the picture if you don't want My help." And then everything becomes a struggle.

I was hoping Prabhupada would acknowledge my realization that traveling and preaching was an ideal way to become Krsna conscious, at least for me. Srila Prabhupada didn't go there. He always taught there are no material obstacles to becoming Krsna conscious. If he would have acknowledged that I can't become Krsna conscious as a temple president, he would have disempowered me. I would have then searched after ideal situations and blamed my spiritual shortcomings on the circumstances.

### **The Unofficial Bhakta Program**

I wanted to relate one story of how a group of people became devotees as this will illustrate how Krsna was helping me. A devotee from Montreal temple came to Vancouver and moved in with us. After a while he became restless and left the temple. He went to live with some friends who lived on Vancouver Island. They were getting into Krsna consciousness and he was helping them make their home a temple and training them in devotional service. One day he called and told me what was going on and begged me to visit him and his friends. I agreed, closed the Vancouver temple for a few days and took all the devotees with me on the ferry to Vancouver Island.

When we arrived we met three hippie families and several men, all living together in one house and practicing Krsna consciousness in their own unorthodox way. While we were there we established a regular temple schedule in their home that included arotis, offerings, classes, and yes, temple cleaning (we cleaned the whole hippie house). Then on Saturday, as we would do in every temple, we went out on *harinama sankirtana*. This was to be the first harinam party ever in the city of Victoria, and it proved to be exciting. Hundreds of people gathered around us as we chanted and they were literally pulling BTG's out of the book distributors hands. The crowds were so large that we blocked the street. After about three hours the police came, stopped us, and made us leave. But the fledgling devotees got their first taste of harinama and spreading Krsna consciousness. It had a big impact on them.

We returned to Vancouver that evening. About a week or two later I got a call from Vancouver Island. Everyone moved out of the house and into a rented house in Victoria, and they turned it into an Iskcon temple. Shortly after, Gaura Hari came up from San Francisco to run the new temple and the Victoria center became thriving with Krsna conscious activity.

And there were other occasions in which groups of two or three friends all joined the temple at the same time. I had no bhakta program, I had no recruiting program, I didn't really know what I was doing. All I did was pray to Krsna to send devotees and so many new devotees joined.

### **Totally Dependiant**

We were totally dependent on Krsna in those days because we had little experience and resources. We never knew how we would get money to pay the rent, buy warm clothes, make payments on the van (we bought a new van and because we often couldn't make the monthly payments, the dealers regularly tried to repossess it. Every time they would try to take it away we would jump in and drive off). It was not unusual that someone would join the temple around the time rent was due and donate just enough money to pay the rent or donate something we could sell to pay the rent. Often it was so bad that we would go on book distribution door to door in the evening and along with selling books we would beg for fruit. Whatever fruit we collected that night was the next morning's breakfast.

We were also totally dependent on Prabhupada's instructions. The advantage of being so young in devotional service is that we didn't have the "intelligence" to disobey Prabhupada. As we advance and more deeply understand Prabhupada and his mission, we run the risk of becoming "over intelligent." We didn't have that capacity. As a result, our tenderness in devotional service made us that much more dependent on Prabhupada's instructions, albeit often understanding them in a narrow or fanatical way. Still our strict adherence to Prabhupada was how the movement was able to grow in spite of our lack of experience in Krsna consciousness.

Temple presidents were encouraged to marry and the devotees in Vancouver were encouraging me to marry one of the top brahmacarinis there (I think they didn't like having unmarried women around and since I was the temple president, they figured I should be the one to marry her). I had not made a vow to remain brahmacari and so went along with the idea. She was also anxious to marry me and so I wrote to Srila Prabhupada to receive his blessings, which he graciously offered. Shortly after that I was married. I was twenty-one and she was eighteen.

Srila Prabhupada felt that if both husband and wife were good devotees, it would make a good marriage. The problem was that although we were learning how to be good devotees, we were not practically learning how to be good husbands or wives. Actually neither of us were mature enough to be married and this immaturity caused us many problems. Without the guidance of older experienced couples we were unsuccessfully fending for ourselves.

I remember asking my GBC questions about marriage and I received only a few ambiguous answers. So I had to learn the hard way, by doing the wrong things. The biggest challenge was maintaining my vows of celibacy. After all, I was only twenty-one and just a year and half ago I had been a hippie embracing the philosophy of free love. I

didn't understand how it was possible to sleep next to my wife and remain celibate and she took offence at my thinking like this. To her, be to married and not sleep next to your wife was a sign that you didn't love her. Needless to say this created conflict and there was no one I could find that knew how to deal with this. Without guidance, our marriage got off to a bumpy start.

### **How It All Started**

At this time there is no big book distribution in Iskcon. Although temples occasionally sell big books at the Sunday Feast, no one thinks it's possible to sell big books on the street. We distribute Back to Godhead magazines for 25 cents, and although we have small books, we don't bring them because we think they are too expensive to sell (we have to get 50 cents for them).

I have never been one to be happy with the status quo (although sometimes that gets me into trouble) and I begin thinking that we should try to distribute the hardbound Krsna Books that have recently been published. This is such a big way of thinking that it's difficult for any of us to take it seriously - myself included - since Krsna Books sell for \$8 and we are scared to ask for 50 cents for a small book. Yet on Thanksgiving Day we decide to go door to door and bring Krsna Books along with our magazines. We figure it will be fun and exciting to show people the book and the pictures - and that alone will be our reward for our boldness. Of course, we know there might be a remote possibility of selling a Krsna Book, but we don't expect it. Yet we are excited about trying to "shoot the rhinoceros." So off we go.

As we go house to house we feel blissful and enlivened showing the Krsna Book to everyone. After an hour we return to the van as planned. As the last devotee approaches he yells from a distance, "I had a major unforeseen accident." We have no idea what he is talking about, but the huge smile on his face makes us suspect the impossible might have happened.

"I just sold a Krsna Book!" he screams wildly.

We're in total shock. Our whole world turns upside down. We go crazy. We bang the walls of the van; we yell; we laugh. The impossible has just happened.

We can't believe it. We go into major party mode celebrating this momentous victory and we pour our congratulations on the first devotee in Iskcon to ever sell a big book on sankirtana.

Here we are, a band of six very young devotees thousands of miles from the big temples in Iskcon, and we are making history pioneering big book distribution. As we sit in the van savoring the moment, we sense we are onto something big, something that could be the beginning of a big book distribution breakthrough in Iskcon.

From this time on, whenever we go out door to door we bring Krsna Books with us. And every once in a while someone takes a book and pays us \$8 (this is 32 times more money

than we get for selling a magazine, so that alone is pretty exciting. It's also exciting because \$8 is the normal total daily sankirtana collection for the entire temple.). Every time one of us sells a Krsna Book it is still as unbelievable and exciting as the day the first book was sold.

When I sell my first Krsna Book I get so excited – actually intoxicated – that I can't find my way back to the van to meet the other devotees. I am running wildly down the street in ecstasy because I can't wait to tell everyone what happened. But I get lost – and the van is only two blocks away! Later I read that Prabhupada said “This book distribution is the real intoxication.” I think those of us who were the first to distribute big books got a really potent brew of this intoxicating drug called big book distribution.

Although we sell a few books here and there, we don't have a technique to sell them. So our sales are just a matter of luck, a numbers game of running into someone interested enough to buy a Krsna Book. We sense it's possible to regularly sell big books, but we have no idea how to do it.

Krsna has a plan to help us. In steps Thakura Haridas Prabhu to save the day. Thakura Haridas, a tall, enthusiastic, boisterous, in your face kind of guy from the San Francisco temple shows up one day in Vancouver. Thakur Haridas is all enthusiasm and is always making huge plans to spread Krsna consciousness. In fact, before he came to Vancouver he was in Portland teaching a professional basketball team to chant japa in order to improve their game!

Thakura Haridas is looking for big challenges in Krsna's service, so when he hears about our big book distribution he immediately buys into the idea and becomes ten times more enthusiastic than we are. It's like his life's mission has just been revealed to him. He is ready to take on the world with Krsna Books!

Right at this time we receive an amazingly letter. It is a newsletter about Prabhupada's preaching and it quotes him saying, “If someone will go anywhere to spread Krsna consciousness, not considering how he will eat or where he will sleep, I will take the dust from his feet and put it on my head.” We practically faint when we hear this. This statement becomes the catalyst for a preaching revolution in our hearts. We are determined to do something to put ourselves on the line.

We come up with a bold plan. We decide to load all the books and magazines we have in the temple into our van and head east into the icy Canadian winter on traveling sankirtana. We decide not to take any money with us and not to make any arrangements for accommodations. This way we will have to totally depend on Krsna and live only by preaching and distributing books. So with only a van full of books and magazines and enough gas to get us to the next town, we head out on the first ever big book distribution traveling party.

We are ecstatic because we are totally depending on Krsna. We want the mercy and we know we'll get it if we are willing go out on a limb for Krsna. It's exciting. It's an

adventure. We are setting off to visit cities where no one has ever seen devotees or heard of Hare Krsna. (And, by the way, it is really cold for a kid like me who grew up in Southern California).

We hit the road in the late afternoon. The only food we are bringing - aside from the lunch digesting in our stomachs - is some uncooked rice and dhal. But we don't even have pots. We are living on the edge – and it's ecstatic.

We arrive in a small town about 8pm. We are used to going out on harinama wherever we go, so that's what we do. The problem is that it's in the middle of the winter and nobody is on the street. Well, actually there is one person on the street, the local town drunk. So here we are, three of us chanting and Haridas with his book bag full of Krsna Books, hoping that people might hear the kirtana and come over to see what's going on.

It's too late for anyone to be around so there is no one to come over. Well, nobody except the drunk. Since he is the only person Haridas can talk to, that's what he does. There he is showing the drunk a Krsna Book and we are looking at him thinking this is ridiculous. He's enthusiastically talking away, showing him every single picture in the book, and we are thinking Thakura Haridas is nuts, he is wasting his time. Haridas, the drunk isn't going to buy a book. Get real.

And then we watch in amazement as the drunk shuffles through all his pockets (it took him awhile to find the pocket with the money), pulls out \$8, and gives it to Haridas. No one had ever distributed big books on harinama and here Haridas sells a Krsna Book to the only person on the street - and a drunk to top it off! This event set the mood for the rest of the trip: you can distribute Krsna Books to anyone, anywhere. You just have to have a strong desire, believe you can do it, and depend on Krsna.

So we're on the street, it's 8:30 at night and the ecstasy is slowly being overtaken by the realization that, "It's dam cold out here, there's no one on the street, and we don't have a place to stay. Hmm. Maybe we should do something." Good idea. So we drive around town looking for a place to stay and by Krsna's grace we find a hostel. We knock on the door and we are immediately welcomed in and given our own quarters with a private bath. The place looked just like an ideal brahmacari asrama – and we had it all to ourselves.

Ok, this depending on Krsna stuff really works.

The next morning, upon our request, we are fed with all the fruit and nuts four hungry monks could ever want. The whole trip turns out to be a series of similar scenarios: we depend entirely on Krsna and He supplies our needs.

After breakfast we decide to go door to door and beg for cooking pots, since we'll need them to cook our dhal and rice. And we also beg for vegetables: "Here, take a magazine, it's only 25 cents. And can you also throw in a few carrots? How about a couple of tomatoes? I'll give you another magazine for your friends if you can throw in a pat of



butter. And there's just one more thing I'd like to ask: Do you have an extra pot lying around you can spare?"

By Krsna's arrangement we meet a devotee's aunt and she kindly donates all the pots and utensils we need. With the veggies we collected, we are now set. We get out our hot plate, cook and have lunch. Then we spend the little money we collected on gas and head off to Calgary, the next major town on our tour.

We arrive in Calgary and do harimana downtown. We ask every hippie we meet if they can put us up or know someone who can. We finally meet some hippies who offer us the storage room in the back of their head shop. A storage room sounds good to us since we have no where to stay that night. So right there on the street - without even knowing us for more than a few minutes - they give us the keys to their store. They don't even think: "We don't even know these people and they could steal everything and run out of town."

Are we surprised? Not really. We kind of expected something like this would happen. Our faith is high and it is causing amazing things to happen.

Everyday Thakura Haridas manages to distribute Krsna Books while the rest of us are still trying to figure out how to do it. Haridas is becoming so enlivened by distributing Krsna Books that he can't contain himself. It's common that after breakfast, while we are getting ready for sankirtana, he runs out for fifteen minutes to go door to door in the neighborhood. And while we are getting ready for bed, he often does the same thing. He is becoming addicted to distributing Krsna Books. And he is simply distributing books with one technique: his raw enthusiasm.

One evening after a long cold day on sankirtana, we sit down for some hot milk before preparing to take rest. Thakura Haridas, unable to contain himself, runs out to go door to door. In amazement we watch him step out into the cold night while we sit comfortably sipping our milk (and thawing out from the cold day on the street).

He returns about 20 minutes later.

"Thakura, where did you go?" I ask.

He is beaming. He tells us that he went door to door and just sold a Krsna Book to an atheist.

Amazed, I ask, "What did you tell them?"

Boiling over with enthusiasm he replies, "I told them, 'I am in ecstasy. You should take this book.' And they took the book!"

We couldn't believe it. Who is this Haridas Thakura Prabhu?

After a week in Calgary we head east to Edmonton. Again, we ask every hippie we meet for a place for us to stay. This time we meet some hippies that are acquainted with Krsna consciousness. They have a huge house and invite us to stay with them. They encourage us to make their house our temple. So we have morning programs almost everyday (we are not used to living outside a temple so we sleep in a couple days a week) and with their help organize three incredible Sunday feasts that are each attended by about sixty people. Everyone in the house is quickly becoming attached to the devotees, kirtana and prasadam (from our stay in their house, four people eventually became devotees).

Since this was the first time the movement came to Edmonton, we were getting a lot of publicity. We did a radio and TV show, and there were articles about us in the newspaper. Things were happening. And our daily preaching at the college was getting a great response.

We met several Indians in Edmonton who organized a huge program for us. This was the first time these Indians had ever heard of the Hare Krishna Movement. We spent the entire day preparing for the program. We shaved our heads three times, ironed our dhotis five times, cooked halvah on a slow flame for five hours, and prepared a play and practiced it a hundred times. And I carefully planned every word of my speech. We wanted to impress them for Prabhupada.

Since these Indians had never seen American vaisnavas, they were astonished to see us. I felt Prabhupada's presence very strongly at this program and the people remarked that they felt just as if they were in an Indian temple and that we were genuine sadhus. They were actually astonished by our presentation. We all had a strong feeling that Prabhupada was very pleased with the program. We were experiencing the special ecstasy of pioneering Krsna consciousness. Presenting Krsna to those who have never heard about Him or His movement rates as one of the highest pleasures I have ever tasted.

Haridas is becoming more enlivened every day. He is a persuasive person who likes to inspire others. We hear that the devotees in San Francisco fill their van with Back to Godhead magazines (BTG's) and go to a nearby city for a few days, staying until all the magazines are distributed. Thakura wants to get them into big book distribution, so one Sunday morning he calls the temple president of San Francisco, Keshava, to let him know that it's possible to distribute big books – and especially to tell him that he is doing it. Thakura gets Keshava on the phone, and while camouflaging his pride, asks in feigned innocence, "So what's going on down there with book distribution?"

Keshava proudly tells Haridas about their new traveling program of filling their van with BTG's and not returning until every last magazine is distributed. They are totally enlivened by this program and are distributing more magazines than ever.

Haridas is not impressed. He enjoys allowing Keshava to toot his horn because it will make it all the more dramatic when he breaks the news about big book distribution. So Thakura quietly listens as Keshava sings the glories of his traveling sankirtana party.

Finally he interrupts, “That’s nothing. You’re in maya!” Thakura’s intimidating voice almost screaming bloody murder. “We’re selling Krsna Books. This is the real sankirtana. Get out there and sell Krsna Books. Just bring them with you and show them to everyone. What’s wrong with you guys?”

Silence. Did Keshava faint? Did he commit suicide? No Keshava’s blood is boiling. He takes up the challenge. Thakura’s mission of inspiring Keshava is successful.

That one call ignited a big book distribution fire in Keshava’s heart, a fire so strong that it eventually caught on all over Iskcon. I must have sensed at the time that this call was going to change book distribution forever because that event has had a lasting impression on me. To this day I still remember exactly where in the house Thakura called, what the room looked like, what he said, his mood - everything.

The San Francisco temple takes Krsna Books out on their next traveling party. They end up surpassing our efforts. Keshava is now so enlivened that he calls his brother, Karandhara, in Los Angeles and tells him about the big book distribution breakthrough. Soon the fire catches on in LA with even more intensity than in San Francisco. Not only do the LA sankirtana devotees discover that they can sell Krsna Books, but temple devotees take Krsna Books to sell when shopping, doing laundry, getting gas, etc. (“I don’t have money to pay for the gas but I have this book I can give”). Devotees are becoming addicted to the intoxication of selling Krsna books. LA then spreads the news about big book distribution to the entire Iskcon world and the fire begins to slowly catch on.

Since so much unique and ecstatic preaching is going on, I write the devotees in Vancouver with a blow by blow account of our activities; the TV and radio shows, the Indian programs, how the house we are staying in is being transformed into a temple, and the incredible big book distribution results. The devotees are so enlivened by the letter that, unknown to us, they send it to Srila Prabhupada so he can also become enlivened by our preaching.

Prabhupada loves the letter. He replies and encourages me by saying that I get the credit for starting the first traveling sankirtana party (actually Gaura Hari Prabhu, the president of the Victoria, BC temple, had already taken out the very first traveling party in Iskcon, but Srila Prabhupada had not been informed about it. Our party was the second traveling party, but it was the first to sell big books). On that trip we distribute sixty big books, the all time record for big books distributed by one temple in one month. We report the score to Prabhupada, who is no doubt pleased. In his reply us he notes how we have taken advantage of every situation to spread Krsna consciousness, and especially to distribute Krsna Books. He tells us that seizing every opportunity to spread Krsna consciousness is the symptom of an advanced devotee.

My wife had sent the letter to Prabhupada. What I didn’t know was that in her letter to Prabhupada she mentioned that I had a wart on my foot and asked if Prabhupada had any cures. In those days it was not unusual for devotees to ask such things of Srila

Prabhupada since he was in the pharmaceutical business and would sometimes recommend remedies.

I had a wart on my foot from the age of thirteen. Despite having it cut out and burned off regularly for six years, it continually came back. So after joining the movement I stopped trying to remove it. However I noticed that when I returned from traveling sankirtana it was gone! I mentioned this to my wife and it was only then that I learned that she asked Prabhupada for a cure. And he never mentioned a cure for my wart in his reply to the letter she sent. Normally he would either say use this cream or else consult a doctor. But he didn't say anything.

One may wonder why it took so long for the movement to finally get big book distribution going. Prabhupada always encouraged us to distribute books, but he left it to us to figure out how to best do it. As he would sometimes say, "What's the use of being America if you can't do something wonderful." He depended on us to realize the importance of book distribution and take it up seriously. And it took time for this to sink in. As we developed book distribution, and particularly big book distribution, he encouraged us more than ever because now we were a more receptive audience – we were actually doing it. Now we really needed those letters to inspire us to distribute more and more books. Letters about book distribution became more numerous after 1972 because that's when book distribution really started taking off through the efforts of Ramesvara and Tripurari who took big book distribution to an entirely new level. Those letters, along with the newly published Caitanya Caritamrita, became the force that propelled book distribution to newer heights in the following years.

The above story about the first big books being distributed in Vancouver, Thakura Haridas taking up the challenge and then inspiring Keshava are important events in the history of book distribution in Iskcon because these events are not chronicled anywhere in Iskcon literature. The written history of Iskcon states that is all started with Keshava.

I feel so blessed to have taken part in that historic event and feel fortunate beyond expression that Krsna sent Haridas Thakura to Vancouver to run with my dream of distributing big books. I don't feel that I have any qualification to practice devotional service, but perhaps having something to do with the beginnings of book distribution has showered me with so much mercy that I am still able to practice Krsna consciousness today.

In Vancouver we did lots of door to door book distribution. The nectar was to find a few really interested people. We would go door to door individually, sometimes get invited into people's homes for long conversations. Sometimes we'd even do kirtans or cook some prasadam on the spot. This often resulted in people becoming members or joining the temple. Meeting people who would invite us into their homes was the highlight of the day and we would always ask our sankirtana partners if they got to go into anyone's home, and if so, what happened. These preaching opportunities were our life and thus we never tired of knocking on doors. We often went out from morning till late evening, not because we had to, but because we wanted to.

We also regularly preached in colleges. Our preaching was straight-forward, but presented in a way students could relate to. We didn't compromise, water down the philosophy, or hide behind it just to sell a book. As a result we were always enlivened because we were always speaking about Krsna. And we all became competent preachers.

Once there was a bus strike in Vancouver so we decided to drive the normal bus route to the university, pick up students along the way (everyone was hitchhiking) and give them prasadam and some Krsna katha while riding to school. I drove the van and Sridhara Prabhu would greet people, give them some cake or cookies, engage them in Krsna kantha, have kirtan and offer them books. They certainly appreciated our hospitality, so they were naturally willing to let us talk to them, have kirtan and give a donation. It was a wonderful program and totally in line with Prabhupada's encouragement that an advanced devotee takes advantage of every opportunity to spread Krsna consciousness.

After about two years in Vancouver, I was feeling a need to move on. Many new devotees had come and one of the devotees who joined in Victoria, Bahudak, was ready and willing to take over the temple. Also, it was common in those days for young devotees to be given lots of responsibility, and we were able to get some of Victoria devotees came to to help Bahudak manage the temple. So it was decided it was best that I go to Toronto to help develop a travelling sankirtana bus party to preach and do festivals in colleges. My heart was really into preaching and I welcomed the opportunity.

We traveled from Toronto speaking and doing musical performances in colleges. The program was nice but because it wasn't very successful we gave it up. After this I didn't have any important service, so I began thinking about leaving Canada and moving to a warmer climate, like Los Angeles. I never adjusted to the Canadian weather and was often sick. I even got pneumonia in Toronto. I told the temple president of my desire to move to LA, but he said that such concern about health was *maya*. In those days putting any energy into maintaining health - aside from eating ginger and chickpeas for breakfast or drinking brahmastra juice (ginger and red chili tea) when we had a cold - was frowned upon. So there was no sympathy for my health concerns. But I didn't buy into "you're not your body" the way the Toronto temple president did. The fact is that cold weather and I didn't go well together. So I moved to LA in the summer of 1972. As you could guess, the temple president didn't appreciate my leaving his temple. But there was another temple president that did: the president of the temple I moved to!

As a married couple with no children, my wife and I had always lived in temples and done full time service. But Los Angeles was different; grhasthas lived outside the temple and supported themselves. So we rented a small room in a devotee house two blocks from the temple. Since our overhead was minimal, I was easily able to support ourselves through book distribution. But since I was living outside the temple and was now on my own, no one cared if I went out on book distribution or not, or if I attended the morning temple program.

This new arrangement proved difficult for me. Sometimes I would rise early and sometimes I wouldn't. Sometimes I would go on book distribution and sometimes I wouldn't. I wasn't strong enough to be perfectly regulated on my own. Even when Prabhupada was staying in Los Angeles, I sometimes missed temple programs. My sadhana was suffering – and so was I. I was trained in many aspects of devotional service, but never specifically taught how to adapt to life outside the temple. This was unfortunate because I needed help making this transition.

At this time book distribution techniques were changing. Devotees were developing ways to distribute more books and get bigger donations. Up to this time book distribution was done primarily by direct preaching without using much salesmanship. Now devotees were starting to preach less and use specific lines, which we called mantras, that got more people to take books. And devotees were getting people to give bigger donations by asking for money for welfare programs such as helping kids off drugs and feeding the poor. The mood was much different than it had been, and although many devotees were enlivened, I really disliked this, was alienated by it, and had a difficult time adapting. It just didn't sit right with me. But because the techniques worked, more and more devotees began using them. And Prabhupada was pleased that more books were being distributed.

I noticed that the newer devotees tended to be enlivened by using the quick lines and new techniques, whereas the seasoned book distributors tended to be turned off by this. As a result, many older devotees gave up book distribution at this time. The cutting edge of book distribution now made most of the methods of the early days of book distribution a thing of the past.

My taste for book distribution waned to a great degree as I struggled to be more of a salesman and less of a preacher. Preaching came easily to me, salesmanship didn't. This kind of book distribution felt unnatural and robotic to me, so I preferred to preach in colleges and go door to door because these venues naturally lent themselves to a direct approach. At the same time, I was caught up in the wave of enthusiasm that distributing greater numbers of books was having on the sankirtana devotees. And Prabhupada continually encouraged us to distribute more books.

Book distribution was thus an agony and ecstasy for me. There was agony in spending little time with people and just focusing on saying whatever I had to say to get them to take a book and get as large a donation as possible. I felt less connected with people than I had when I preached more. Our success was no longer measured in how many nice people we met or how many people we got to the Sunday feast, but in how many books we distributed. And often the number of books became secondary to how much money we collected. This mood of book distribution was totally different from what I had grown up with in Krsna consciousness.

Yet there was definitely ecstasy as well. I was distributing more books than ever before and I could feel Prabhupada reciprocating with me. I had to give up my desire to spend a lot of time with people. I had to become more bold, more outgoing, more aggressive,

more focused – a different person. I had to get out of my box and depend completely on Krsna. In short, I had to surrender more. And more surrender meant more ecstasy.

Ultimately, the enthusiasm we had for book distribution didn't have to replace the preaching spirit. But at that time we had not evolved book distribution to the point in which we could both distribute lots of books and preach as directly as we used to. Prabhupada said it could be done, but it was an art we had to master. He also said that if you sell a book by preaching you are a brahmana, and if you sale it without preaching you are a sudra. Still, Prabhuapda encouraged our less brahminical efforts.

Gradually I was finding household life to be a drain on my Krsna consciousness. I couldn't figure out how to be a good husband and a fully engaged enthusiastic devotee at the same time. In those days brahmacaris and sannyasis looked down upon marriage, and this greatly influenced my thinking about married life. I would often go on traveling sankirtana for a few weeks, leaving my wife alone. When I was on the road I was enlivened and ecstatic. When I was at home, it was a different story. I wasn't mature enough to make my marriage work and be Krsna conscious, so I wrote Prabhupada asking for sannyasa. He told me he would not give sannyasa to any grahastha who had not first shown himself to be responsible in his marriage.

He then said I could take vanaprastha, which meant that we would not be having any more children (we had a baby boy at this time) and focus our lives on preaching. But I took this as my reservation for sannyasa, and thus got even more into traveling sankirtana. My wife was so upset that she wrote Prabhupada who basically chastised me in his reply to her. My neglect of her and my interest in preaching took it's toll. Without any discussion, she decided to move from San Diego to Los Angeles and told me she didn't want anything to do with me any longer. At this point it was too late for me to rectify the situation, even though I begged for a second chance.

Gradually she fell away from Krsna consciousness and this weighed heavy on me since I felt it was my fault. She also didn't want me to have any relation with our son. Eventually she had turned him over to her parents because she was not emotionally stable enough to raise him and support herself at the same time. He was fed meat and raised without any devotional influence. I was devastated. She was suffering from mental and emotional problems and had a fear that I would kidnap our son if I saw him. So she would not let me be with him. As a result I only saw him several times before he moved out on his own at the age of 21.