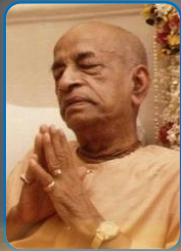


Freedom Newsletter



Dedicated to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

ISKCON Prison Ministry / June 2024

PO Box 2676
Alachua, FL 32616

A SOCIETY WITHOUT BRAIN

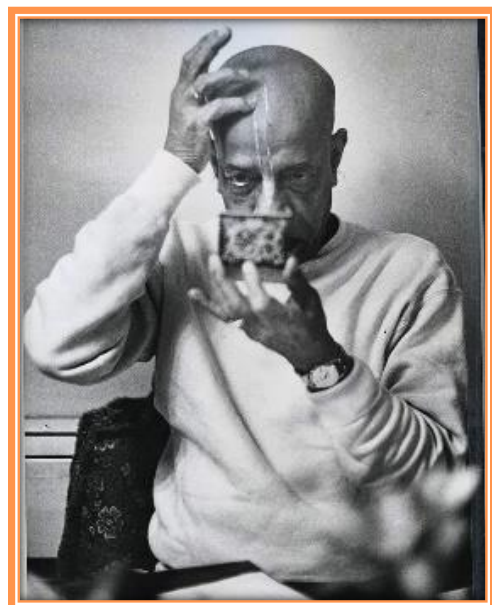
The following conversation between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Raymonde Van den Heuvel, of the International Labor Organization, took place in Geneva during the summer of 1974.

Van den Heuvel: I work for the International Labor Organization, which is a part of the United Nations family. We're concerned with the protection and welfare of all laborers in practically all nations in the world.

Srila Prabhupada: The Vedic literature describes four social classes—intelligent, administrative, mercantile, laborer. The laborers act as the legs of the social body, but legs must be guided by a head. That “head” of the social body is the intelligent class. The United Nations is taking care of the social body's legs, but what are they doing for the brain—the intelligent class?

Van den Heuvel: We want to see that the laborers have their proper share in society's economic rewards.

Srila Prabhupada: But my point was that if you neglect the head of society, then in spite of your attention to the legs, things will not go very nicely—because the brain will not be in order.



ABOVE: Śrīla Prabhupāda applying sacred clay (tilak) on his forehead.

Van den Heuvel: But this is also an important aspect of society, don't you think? We aim to improve the lot of the workers of the world.

Srila Prabhupada: In America the laborer class is very highly paid, but because they are not directed by a brain, by an intelligent class, they simply spend their money on drinking.

Van den Heuvel: The fact that a good thing is abused doesn't make it bad.

Srila Prabhupada: The point is that everyone should be guided by the brain. That is the only way to organize society. What is the value in working hard like an ass, without any intelligence?

Van den Heuvel; You can't force a man to use his brain.

Srila Prabhupada:

Therefore, the United Nations should support a class of ideal intelligent men who will act as the brain of society and guide the others so that everyone becomes happy.

Van den Heuvel: I think you'll find that in every society throughout the world there is a priestly class, a class of philosophical leaders.

Srila Prabhupada: Priestly class! The Bible says, "Thou shall not kill." But the priests have amended this to suit their own whims. They have sanctioned killing by allowing thousands of huge slaughterhouses for killing innocent animals. How can such so-called priests guide? I have asked so many Christian gentlemen and priests about this: "Your Bible teaches, 'Thou shall not kill.' Why are you violating this commandment?" They give me *vague* answers. They have not even taught the people what is sinful. That means a lack of brains in society.

Van den Heuvel: My organization is not directly concerned with people's brains.

Srila Prabhupada: Your organization may not be directly concerned, but if human society is brainless, then no matter what organizations you make, people will never become happy. If people are not taught by the intelligent class of society how to discriminate between pious and sinful activities, then they are no better than the animals.

Van den Heuvel: Of course, when you speak of the distinction between pious activities and sinful activities...

Srila Prabhupada: They see no such distinction anymore. But in our Krsna consciousness society, I instruct my students from the very beginning to avoid sinful activities. They must give up completely all meat-eating, gambling, illicit sex, and intoxication. And

now just compare their character and behavior with anyone else's. Even the Christian priests are surprised. They say, "These boys are our boys. How is it that before joining your movement, they never came to church, but now they are mad after God?" In the streets, people ask, "Are you Americans?" You see. Everything can be rectified by proper guidance. But if there is no brain in society, you can manufacture so many

organizations, but people will go on suffering. That is nature's law: if the people are sinful, they have to suffer.

Van den Heuvel: I don't think that you can expect an *international* organization to indoctrinate people ...

Srila Prabhupada: Why not? It *should* be international—everyone. The United Nations is meant for international

activity, so our proposal is that the United Nations maintain an international organization of first-class intelligent men to act as the brains of society. Then people can be happy. But if you want to keep the hands and legs working without direction, without a brain, then you will never be successful.

Van den Heuvel: You know, I think of myself as a servant of mankind, with a view toward helping people to understand one another and the world a little better, I'm trying now to organize workers' education programs ...

Srila Prabhupada: But please try to understand, I'm stressing on the point of society's brain. If there is no ideal class of men, if the brain is not in order, then any amount of education or organization you do will be unsuccessful. The United Nations is an organization for all human society, but they have no department which can actually be called the brain organization.

Van den Heuvel: That's true.

Srila Prabhupada: That is my point.

Van den Heuvel: We are only servants of the leaders of our member states. If Mr. Nixon and all the other heads of state don't have brains, then I'm afraid the United Nations can't do anything to give them brains.

Srila Prabhupada: Then your big organization is just decoration for a dead body. A body with no brain is a dead body. You may decorate a dead body to your full satisfaction, but what is the use? Without a brain-class of men in society to instruct the others what is right and what is wrong, then the social body is dead, or headless. And whatever work you do will simply be useless decoration for a dead body. 🌸



Excerpts from inmates' letters

Many blessing for all your faithful service you and your fellow staff provide for the prison community. It is no small task, I know, and I can say that all I have received is a true treasure in terms of my education in spiritual matters and journey back to Godhead. Yes, they're books to most, but to me they are truth and a message from Creator to creation.

Many blessings for continued successful outreach as you share the timeless message of KRSNA's grace with as many as will listen. My humble obeisances and heartfelt gratitude. Hare Krishna!

Our chaplain is still not on board with helping non-Christians acquire additional "items" with which to practice their faith. We used to have many catalogs for items such as medallions, pendants, altar items, even statuary. Now, some of those catalogs have been refused or contrabanded as an attempt to stifle the Pagans, the Heathen community, and some Eastern religions. That's not a gripe, it's the truth."

Victor R. —Kingman, Arizona

Dear ISKCON Prison Ministry,
Hare Krsna! I am writing to you today to let you know that I am being released and to let you know to cancel my newsletter and BTG subscriptions.

I want to thank you for everything you have done to help increase my awareness of Krsna. The books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and newsletter have always been a huge comfort to me, and I have always found something to help me in each of them. I am grateful to Krsna for being with me these past six years, and I plan to continue my realization once I am released.

I also want to thank your organization. In the seven years [when I was in prison] I have seen no one else that supports those of us in prison like you do. I know it can't be expressed fully what you have done to help us,

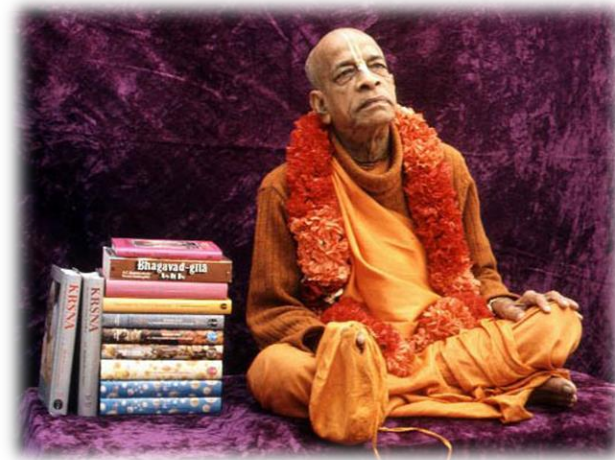
but I want to say Thank You! They are small words, but they come from the bottom of my heart. I hope that one day I may be able to lend you some assistance in your work as a small way to show my gratitude for all you have done.

Thank you again for everything you do! Hare Krsna!
Michael C. —Charleston, South Carolina

I am writing in thanks for the amazing amount of materials that you have provided for us here. When writing I had no idea the response that I could receive from your organization; once again, it was simply amazing. I have been involved with the humanist and secular community for decades now. If we had just one or two venues that provided half as much support as you did with that single letter, we would be the best-supplied groups within our DOC.

I would like you to know that I made sure your very generous donations got spread far here. I divided at least one copy of everything to both the Buddhist and Taoist groups here. We then made sure that our facilities chapel had a good amount of materials on their shelves, and still I was able to place some within our library, too. The Humanist group did decide to keep about six of the books that were provided for our own studies. I am very impressed by your organization, and while I am a secularist of a different kind, we do share many beliefs. If I can ever be of any assistance to you or your organization, please do not hesitate to reach out and let us know how we can help. Same goes if you can think of anything else that may be of benefit to us, feel free to point us in the correct direction. All my best, and much gratitude. Sincerely,

Benjamin O.D. and the FDCF Humanist —Fort Dodge, Iowa



Prabhupada: One mistake of judgment often made by the neophyte devotees is that any time there is some disturbance or some difficulty, they are considering that the conditions or the external circumstances under which the difficulty took place, are the cause of the difficulty itself. That is not the fact. In this material world there is always some difficulty, no matter in this situation or that situation. Therefore simply by changing my status of occupation or my status of life, that will not help anything. Because the real fact is that if there is any difficulty with others, that is my lack of Krsna consciousness, not theirs. Is this clear? Krsna says that His dearest devotee is one who does not put others into difficulty, in fact, who puts no one other into difficulty.

Letter to Madhukara -- Bombay January 4th, 1973

Inmate Artwork

RIGHT: Drawing of the Paramātmā (Krishna's form in the heart) by inmate Juan Martinez —Texas



LEFT: Drawing of Śrīla Prabhupāda, by inmate Brian Babinski —California

LIFE OF PURE DEVOTEES

Śrī Śrīdhara Pandit —(according to the lunar calendar, this year his disappearance day is on June 22)

Śrīdhara Pandit (pronounced Shree-dar) was a resident of Navadwip, India. He used to live at the northern extremity of Mayapur. During his lifetime, it was a banana orchard. Devotees still pay their obeisances at that spot to the memory of Śrīdhara Pandit. He appeared at the time of Lord Chaitanya's earthly pastimes and was given the nickname kholā-vechā, "bark-seller" because Śrīdhara played the role of a poor Brahmin (priest) who made his living selling the products of his banana garden.

SHRIDHARA'S POVERTY

Material wealth and prosperity are not the truest signs of the Lord's mercy on someone. Those who worship the gods and goddesses are generally seen to prosper materially, but one who is rich in the wealth of devotion to the Lord is the one who has truly benefited from his mercy. Lord Caitanya (pronounced Chay-tan-ya) Mahaprabhu gave this teaching to His associates through Śrīdhara Pandit: a devotee of Vishnu is free from attachments to material possessions and enjoyments.

One day, the Lord went to Śrīdhara's place and asked him why he was so poor; he was worshipping Krishna, the husband of the goddess of fortune, , and yet he never had enough money for food or clothing, and his house was dilapidated. On the other hand, those who worshiped the bloodthirsty Kali always seemed to have an abundance of material wealth. Śrīdhara answered that a bird who made its nest in the trees and wandered from place to place to find food was passing the time of day in the same way as a king in his palace who enjoyed the best

objects of gratification. There was no difference of degree or amount of pleasure experienced by the two. The Lord then said to Śrīdhara :

"Externally, though you appear to be poor, you are actually the true rich man. I will shortly reveal to the entire foolish world that the devotee is qualified to possess the greatest wealth, indeed they are the owners of all things."



Generally we call that person poor or unfortunate who is deprived of wealth, possessions and a home. One who has these things is called rich or fortunate. People try to accumulate wealth in order to find happiness, and not the opposite. This happiness is the real wealth, not the external possessions. Shri Krishna is the personification of happiness. Thus in actual fact, the difference between wealth and poverty is that one who has love for Krishna is rich; one who does not is poor. The Supreme Lord used Kholāvechā Śrīdhara to show the world who was truly wealthy and fortunate. The Lord is conquered by loving devotion alone, and by nothing else.

bhaktyaham ekaya grahyah shraddayatma priyah satam
bhaktih punati man-nishtha shvapakan api sambhavat

Being very dear to the saintly, I am only attained through devotion and unflinching faith. Devotion fixed on Me purifies even a dog-eater from all faults due to low birth and circumstances such as poverty. (SB 11.14.21)

patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya
prayacchati
tad aham bhakty-upahritam ashnamī prayatatmanah

"If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it. (BG 9.26)

THE LORD STEALS ŚRĪDHARA GOODS

The Supreme Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu showed the amazing pastime of hungrily taking Shridhara's foodstuffs without even being invited to do so. While the Lord was engaged in His student pastimes, Śrīdhara used to make his living by selling banana flowers and the core and bark of the banana plant. He would spend half of whatever little money he made in this way on worshipping the Ganges, the other half on his own necessities. Like Yudhisthira, he was very truthful and would always tell the real price of an item he would sell. Everyone in Navadwip knew this and so would not haggle with him. But Mahaprabhu would come to Śrīdhara and give him only half the amount

that he was asking for his bananas, banana flowers or bark. Every day, the two of them would pull back and forth on a bunch of bananas or something else, arguing for an hour or more over the price that was to be paid. Then Mahaprabhu would leave half the asked price and walk away with the goods. Śrīdhara would jump up and grab the item, trying to take it back, even pushing and shoving the Lord. (Chaitanya Bhagavat 2.9.163-5)

Even though He argued with Śrīdhara, when He saw that he did not become angry. Even though this is the way it looks from a superficial point of view, the fact of the matter is that when Śrīdhara saw the beautiful form of the Lord, he allowed

Him to get away with stealing his goods without getting angry. At the sight of the Lord's beauty, he would become enchanted and immersed in an ocean of joy. Such are the delightful pastimes of the Lord with His devotees. While arguing with him, Mahaprabhu would call him names in great satisfaction, sometimes subtly hinting at His own divine identity:

“Every day you buy things to offer to the Ganga (Ganges river). Why don't you just give something to Me without charging anything? Don't you know that I am the father of the Ganga that you worship. I am telling you the truth about this!” (Chaitanya Bhagavat 2.9.178-9)

They finally came to a settlement and Śrīdhara agreed to daily give Mahaprabhu some bananas or other items from the banana tree for free. From then on, the Lord would daily eat with great satisfaction from the little bowls made of banana bark, or on banana leaves given to him by Śrīdhara. The Lord thus eats anything that the devotee offers Him, but He rejects even rich items given Him by a non-devotee.

ŚRĪDHARA BLESSED AT THE HOUSE OF ŚRĪVASA PANDIT

On that eventful night when the Lord sat on the altar in Śrīvasa Pandit's home and revealed His Divine form to His devotees for 21 hours, showing them all the different incarnations of Vishnu, one after the other, He told them to bring Śrīdhara there also. Śrīdhara would regularly stay up the whole night chanting the Holy Names and calling out to the Lord. This was a source of

happiness to the devotees, but the non-devotees would complain that he was keeping them awake with his noise and they would regularly criticize and rebuke him. As the devotees were going to Śrīdhara's home on the Lord's order, they could hear him chanting loudly from a considerable distance prior to arriving.



When he came to Śrīvasa Pandit's home, Śrīdhara beheld the glorious divine form of the Lord and fell to the ground in a faint. He was brought back to consciousness by the Lord's voice and then, with the power that was given him through the Lord's mercy, began to recite hymns of glorification. Satisfied with Śrīdhara's hymns of praise, Mahaprabhu wished to give

him the eight mystic powers as a benediction, but Śrīdhara refused, saying that he only wanted service to the Lord's lotus feet.

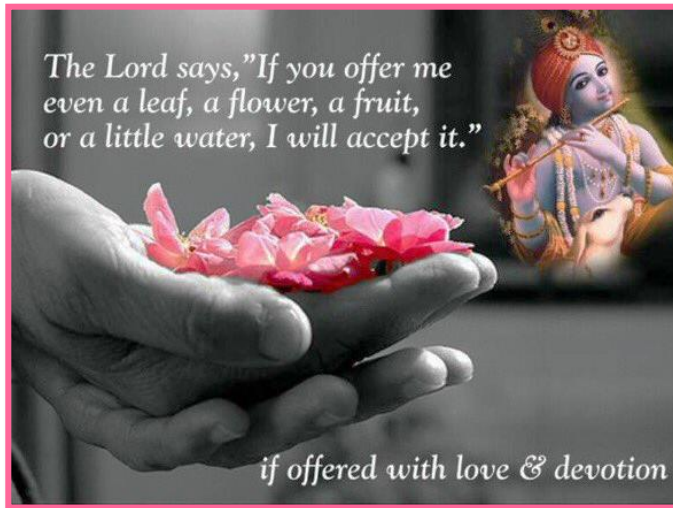
Lord Caitanya repeatedly urged Śrīdhara to ask for a boon. Finally Śrīdhara said, “Lord, if You must give me something, then I ask for this. May that brahmana who used to steal my banana leaves and bark be my Lord, lifetime after lifetime. May that brahmana who used to argue with me be my master, and may I serve His lotus feet.” (Chaitanya Bhagavat 2.9.223-5)

Who can recognize all these servants of the Lord who want neither wealth, nor followers, nor even scholarship. Of what use are learning, wealth, beauty, fame or high birth? All of these things simply increase one's pride and are ultimately valueless. A millionaire may try for millions of years to achieve what Śrīdhara did, simply by selling bananas and banana products, and still not be able to do so. (Chaitanya Bhagavat 2.9.233-5)

Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami Thakur comments on these verses as follows: “Through empirical knowledge or external analysis, no one can recognize the true character of a devotee. It should not be thought that the ability to collect great amounts of money is a function of devotion, nor that someone who is able to accumulate a great number of followers is a better Vaishnava than someone who cannot. Furthermore, if someone is a great religious scholar, this does not mean that he is a devotee of the Lord. A servant of Sri Caitanya might have very little money,

may show no signs of having a great number of followers, and may have no talent for argument or debate, and ordinary people are unable to understand why he is indifferent to these externals. These Devotees consider service to Sri Caitanya to be something more valuable than the accumulation of wealth, followers or learning. Thus, there is no possibility of the depth of their wisdom, their glories and their superiority being perceived by the general public.”

Who is capable of recognizing a devotee? He may possess all perfections, but we see only his poverty. The seller of banana products, Śrīdhara Pandit, is a living example of this. He disregarded the eight mystic perfections in order to simply accept devotion as a benediction. However much misery you see in a devotee’s life, you should know that in fact he is enjoying divine pleasure in devotional service. Those who are absorbed in sense gratification and intoxicated by learning or wealth can never recognize a Vaishnava (devotee). (Chaitanya Bhagavat 2.9.238-41)



MAHAPRABHU DRINKS FROM ŚRĪDHARA’S WATERPOT

When Mahaprabhu was leading the sankirtan party after having delivered Chand Kazi, He returned through the quarter of the conchshell merchants and that of the weavers to arrive finally at Śrīdhara’s home. When the Lord saw Śrīdhara’s tumbledown shack of a home from a distance, He laughed quietly from the inner joy He felt. He led the company of devotees along the path to Śrīdhara’s hut, where He spotted an iron water pot full of holes. There was still a little water in it, and the Lord drank it thirstily. The Lord is *bhakta-vatsala*, ever affectionate toward His devotees, and this act overwhelmed Him with feelings of love. Tears poured from His eyes like the currents of the Ganga, and a wonderful kirtan began in Śrīdhara’s courtyard in which all the devotees led by Nityananda and Advaita Prabhus were crying. Ah, when I think of the great joy they all experienced on that day here at Śrīdhara’s house, my heart is torn. (Bhakti-ratnakara 12.3136-41)

Mahaprabhu’s action was meant to teach us that by drinking a devotee’s water, we can attain devotion. He wanted to show that the water from a devotee’s water pot, even though it is old and rusty, is still like nectar to the Supreme Lord Himself. By way of contrast, He ignores the proud non-devotee’s water, even when offered in a jeweled goblet. 🌸



HOW I CAME TO KRṢṆA CONSCIOUSNESS

THE AMERICAN DREAM —By Prema Vilasa Dasa

A doctor in residency finds that the key to fulfilling the great American dream is not what he expected.

MY SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

My alarm goes off at six thirty. It’s Sunday morning. I take a shower, put on my dhoti, kurta, and tilaka, and after chanting the Gayatri mantra drive to the temple, just a few blocks away. The devotees are chanting the Brahma-samhita when I arrive. I join them until it’s time to cook Krishna’s breakfast, a service I have done



for nine years now. After preparing breakfast, leading Śrīla Prabhupāda's Guru-puja kirtan, attending the deity greeting (viewing the deities after Their daily dressing), and taking part in the group reading of Bhagavad-gita, I sit down with the devotees for honoring breakfast prasadam (food offered to Krishna). I then clean the kitchen, chant japa in front of the deities, and perform some weekly tasks for the temple, like sorting mail and organizing devotees' schedules.

In the evening I take part in the Sunday Feast program, sing and dance for the pleasure of the deities, and speak with guests. Then my wife and I go for a long drive to connect, catch up, and close the week. I feel blissful here, serving Sri Sri Radha-Natabara (a name for the Lord) in Columbus, Ohio, but this hasn't always been a typical Sunday for me. Sometimes I wonder, How did I get to this point?

A TEMPLE NEARBY

I came to the United States in September of 2000 to pursue the great American dream. I was twenty-three, had just finished medical school in India, and had secured a residency spot with the *Ohio State University Medical Center*, one of the top internal medicine residency programs in the country. My apartment was but a few blocks away from the medical center, which I soon discovered was just across the street from an ISKCON temple.

During my residency, I started visiting the temple regularly for pious association, prasadam, and some peace from a hectic life of training. The devotees were nice; they never "preached" to me but always gave me prasadam and encouraged me to join the kirtans. Over time, I made friends with lots of devotees and slowly started relishing going to the temple.

Then, in May 2003, something special happened. I overheard devotees talking about an upcoming festival at New Vrindavan, the ISKCON farm community in West Virginia. The festival had an alluring title: "The Festival of Inspiration." They invited me to join them, but the festival dates conflicted with my planned visit to a high school friend living in New York City. My friend, a twenty-five-year-old multimillionaire who had amassed his fortune dealing in Belgian and South African diamonds, lived in an apartment he owned on Park Avenue in Manhattan. We spent the first part of the week drinking at all the expensive bars and eating at gourmet restaurants. But Thursday morning he received a call and had to leave town on urgent business.

All alone, I began driving back to Columbus. On the road, I suddenly remembered the devotees talking about the festival in New Vrindavan, which was on the way back. I decided to check it out. The next three days were the happiest of my life. I attended the morning programs, feasted on prasadam, met many inspiring devotee exemplars like Peter Burwash, Yajna Purusha Dasa, His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami, and His Holiness Radhanath Swami, and danced in the kirtans with full abandon. I was amazed at the devotees' beauty and simplicity. The experience was a huge contrast to Manhattan, where I was spending hundreds of dollars to squeeze out some small semblance of happiness, and here, I was happy just eating simple kichari and fresh yogurt from the wonderfully protected New Vrindavan cows. The festival made such an impact on my mind that before leaving I decided I'd start chanting a couple of rounds of the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and following the regulative principles as far as possible.

Since I enjoyed the kirtans so much, I bought a CD called Vrindavan Mellows, by Aindra Dasa, from the temple's gift shop. Listening to it on my drive home gave me goose bumps. I began listening to it every day, and I became bewildered by what was happening to me – I couldn't enjoy any other music. I soon collected all my non-devotional CDs and donated them to a charity.

Developing a Higher Taste, I started visiting the temple more often. What began as sporadic chanting of two rounds on my beads became a daily practice, and every week or so I embraced more and more chanting. I began to dislike the food I was eating at restaurants and cafes, looking forward instead to the Sunday Feast prasadam. I also developed a distaste for the superficiality of modern society – the petty social and political concerns, partying, drinking, and just generally wasting time. I found myself thinking deeply about the meaning of life.

One day I was working a long shift at the hospital, and the local cafeteria had nothing vegetarian to eat. With lots of guilt I ordered a chicken sandwich and prayed to Lord Krishna to forgive me. After eating the sandwich I developed intense nausea and vomited during the night. That was the last time I ate meat.

Towards the end of my residency, one of my temple friends, Vrindavana-natha, told me he was getting married and invited me to his wedding at New Raman Reti, the ISKCON's rural community in Alachua, Florida. I drove to the wedding with my friend Carl, a student at Ohio State. We had started going to the temple at about the same time and had become good friends. We would discuss Śrīla Prabhupāda's books,

especially in terms of pragmatic philosophy and life in general.

While we were enjoying the wedding festivities in Alachua, Carl and I took a walk around New Raman Reti. From a distance we saw a saintly woman in a sari coming toward us. Something about her made us stop and talk to her. I said hello and asked her name. She was Ragatmika Devi Dasi, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, and she lived nearby. She agreed to my request to visit her house and ask her some questions about her life. I was already intrigued by the sacrifice and surrender of Srila Prabhupada's disciples. She especially looked radiant and genuinely spiritual as she invited us in to unpack her entire life story for us. We were stunned. She told us about her one and only meeting with Śrīla Prabhupāda and how she decided to dedicate her life to him completely by distributing his books and sharing Krishna consciousness with one and all. At the end of our discussion, she advised me to read Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlamrita, the life story of Srila Prabhupada written by one of his earliest disciples, Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami.

INSPIRATION FROM PRABHUPADA'S LIFE STORY

Some devotees had given me a copy of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, but it had sat on my desk for three years. I just couldn't understand its structure or content. I came back to Columbus and bought a copy of Srila Prabhupada-līlamrita. I could not put it down. I read it for seventy-two hours straight, hardly sleeping or eating. I even called in sick from work.

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I read about Śrīla Prabhupāda distributing his books and magazines alone in Delhi in ninety-degree heat, and about how while trying to print his Bhagavatam he had no money to buy breakfast.

I was amazed at Śrīla Prabhupāda's determination, his faith in the Lord, and his compassion for the drunks and drug addicts on the Bowery in lower Manhattan. Equally astounding were his success at the end of his life and his devotion and detachment in general. You could say I was sold.

After finishing the last page of the Līlamrita, I went to the temple, took whatever books the temple had, and went to set up a book table outside an Indian grocery store. Before I went I prayed to the murti (image) of Śrīla Prabhupāda, feeling that His Divine Grace was listening to me and blessing me to distribute his books.

That day, my first day on book distribution, I sold eighty hardbound books and fifty paperbacks. I was

thrilled beyond my wildest expectations. Never before had I felt so connected to the Lord. I felt that Lord Krishna was pleased by this service. The entire time I was out distributing books, the holy name simply rolled off my tongue without effort, giving me further impetus to approach people and ask them to buy the nectarean literature blessing my hands.

From then on I distributed Śrīla Prabhupāda's books every day – and read them too. Miraculously, I was now able to understand them and relish them in a way that had previously escaped me. I would listen to Śrīla Prabhupāda's lectures and read his letters as well, trying to follow the language, philosophy, and context. Now I was “tasting the nectar for which I was always anxious,” to paraphrase Lord Chaitanya. I was happy beyond compare and had the answers to all my questions in life. Everything made sense. Through the lens of Śrīla Prabhupāda's words I was able to weave all religions, philosophies, and scientific theories into one cogent reality. Every conscious experience now had new meaning. I was becoming Krishna conscious, awakening to ultimate reality.

I had always loved reading, but now I would spend my entire day in the library relishing the literature left by the Goswamis (Lord Chaitanya's direct followers), as well as the commentaries of Vaishnava acharyas and the works of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, and the current generation of Vaishnava writers. Sadaputa Dasa's seminal work *Mechanistic and Non-Mechanistic Science* gave me intense conviction, and his books in general deepened my understanding of Krishna consciousness. Another contemporary author who influenced me was Satyaraja Dasa (Steven Rosen). His works on Chaitanya Vaishnavism, comparative religion, vegetarianism, and yoga helped me bridge the gap between age-old wisdom and modernity. I was able to see Vaishnavism as a whole and in relationship to this world. He was deeply influential in the completion of my spiritual, intellectual, and emotional conversion to the world of devotion.

One day, in New Vrindavan, I heard a talk by Vaisheshika Dasa on how to distribute books. That presentation inspired me so much that I decided to dedicate my life to the cause of transcendental book distribution. Vaisheshika Dasa remains my hero and guide.

FINDING MY GURU

Shortly thereafter I met my spiritual master, His Holiness Radhanath Swami. His dedication to the

mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Chaitanya inspired me greatly. When I told him I wanted to take initiation from him, he instantly replied that initiation had already taken place in my heart and the remaining formalities could wait.

A PARTNER IN KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Gradually I felt that to practice Krishna consciousness properly I needed a partner to help me and to share my life. I prayed to Śrīla Prabhupāda to send a dedicated servant of theirs to help me serve them. Shortly thereafter I met my wife, Lalita Devi. I wanted to marry someone very serious about Krishna consciousness and serving Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. In Lalita Devi I found everything I wanted and much more. Through her I got to meet His Holiness Giriraja Swami, the most honest, courageous, and fully integrated person I have ever met. His association and my many brief encounters with his exemplary disciples and well-wishers have thoroughly enriched my devotional life.

THE REAL "GREAT AMERICAN DREAM"

Now, let's return to the present. Each day feels special. I serve in the temple, distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, facilitate their study, travel all over the world, and attend festivals such as Ratha-yatras and retreats organized by devotees I can spend time and make friends with. Wherever I go I receive Vaishnava association, service to the Lord, and delicious prasadam. I like to spend the month of Kartika (Oct.-Nov.) in Govardhan, India, in the shelter of Vaisheshika Dasa and His Holiness Keshava Bharati Maharaja. I am grateful to Śrīla Prabhupāda for giving us such an expansive society, which is continually growing worldwide. My great American dream is just beginning, as I explore this brave new world of devotional theism while continuing my practice as a doctor. 🌸

Calendar

JUNE 2024

- 03 June 2024 - **Apara Ekadashi**
- 03 June 2024 - Appearance Day of Srila Vrndavana Dasa Thakura
- 16 June 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Baladeva Vidyabhusana
- 16 June 2024 - Appearance Day of Srimati Gangamata Goswami
- 18 June 2024 - **Pandava Nirjala Ekadashi** (fasting from food and water for those who are able to)
- 22 June 2024 - Disappearance Day of Śrī Mukunda Datta
- 22 June 2024 - Disappearance Day of Śrī Śrīdhara Pandita
- 23 June 2024 - Disappearance Day of Śrī Syamananda Prabhu
- 26 June 2024 - Appearance Day of Śrī Vakresvara Pandita

JULY 2024

- 01 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Srivasa Pandita
- 02 July 2024 - **Yogini Ekadashi**
- 05 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Gadadhara Pandita
- 05 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura
- 07 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Svarupa Damodara Gosvami
- 07 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Sivananda Sena
- 12 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sri Vakresvara Pandita
- 17 July 2024 - **Sayana Ekadashi**
- 21 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Sanatana Goswami
- 22 July 2024 - **First Month of Caturmasya Begins**
- 25 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Srila Gopala Bhatta Goswami
- 28 July 2024 - Disappearance Day of Srila Lokanatha Goswami
- 29 July 2024 - The Incorporation of ISKCON in New York
- 31 July 2024 - **Kamika Ekadashi**

WHAT IS CATURMASYA?

The main goal of observing Caturmasya is to decrease attachment to material things while increasing devotion to Krishna. That means, as far as possible, decreasing sense gratification and increasing devotional activities such as chanting, reading, talking about Krishna.

Also, during the four months of Caturmasya one should eat what he needs but practice giving up food intended only for sense enjoyment.