

excerpts from Chapter Six of Hari Sauri's Transcendental Diary, Volume 2

Chapter Six

Detroit

June 11th, 1976

We had a momentary scare about an hour into the flight. The plane suddenly lost altitude, causing a dramatic change in cabin pressure. Passengers gasped in shock. My eyes whirled around in my head as I became dizzy and a little alarmed. I instinctively looked to Prabhupāda, but he simply smiled at me, somewhat amused by it all. Apart from this, the trip was uneventful and our plane touched down at 7:50 p.m. after a four-hour flight.

Fifty or sixty devotees led by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami, Mādhavānanda dāsa, the temple president, and Śrutakīrti dāsa, Prabhupāda's former personal servant, greeted Śrīla Prabhupāda at the airport. Although the reception was smaller than that in Los Angeles, it did not lack in enthusiasm. The devotees danced, jumped and chanted all around Prabhupāda as he made his way out to the waiting cars.

ISKCON Devasadhana Mandira

383 Lenox Avenue, Detroit

Prabhupāda went straight into the temple room to have *darśana* of the Deities. As we walked across the marble floor I marveled at the opulence of the place. One could hardly have custom-built a more beautiful residence for the Deities, so fitting are its appointments.

As the curtains opened Śrīla Prabhupāda lay prostrate before the exquisite spiritual forms of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kuñjavihārī and their lordships Jagannātha, Baladeva and Subhadrā. After accepting a few drops of *caranāmṛta* he walked to the back of the temple and mounted his *vyāsāsana*.

He gave a short arrival address, reminding the devotees that no matter what material opulence one has, unless used in the service of Kṛṣṇa, it cannot be enjoyed. He told us that by constitution we are parts of the Supreme Lord, and by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare we are praying to Him to please be engaged in His service. If we do not worship God, he said, then we worship dog; everyone has to serve someone, we cannot avoid the fact that we are servants. He explained that this is an educational movement, not a faith. Faith can be changed, but we cannot deny the fact that we are servants of Kṛṣṇa. So we should serve Kṛṣṇa if we want to be happy.

After fifteen minutes he finished his talk and went up to his quarters to take rest.

June 12th 1976

The temple complex consists of an extraordinary mansion built in the 1920s at an original cost of about three million dollars. It stands on several acres of land on the bank of a canal just off Lake St. Clair. It had been owned by Lawrence Fisher, a famous American car body manufacturer (“Body by Fisher”), and was intended as a rather inspired imitation of Louis XIV’s grandiose palace in Versailles, France. Originally many of his friends had also built similar mansions along the river bank, but that was in far better days. The Fisher mansion is one of the few remaining.

The neighborhood immediately surrounding our temple is very depressed, most of it a ghetto populated by poor black families. The houses are very run down, some unfit for human occupation, and the district has a reputation for a high crime rate. When the property was up for sale last year no one would buy it because of the neighborhood, but not caring for this Prabhupāda said that we can live anywhere. The asking price was \$350,000. Prabhupāda personally dealt with the realty agent, sealing the purchase himself. Typically Prabhupāda began by preaching about the value of his mission and asked the owner to give

us the place. The man declined, of course, but jumped at Prabhupāda's offer of \$300,000 in cash. Prabhupāda told us that at the time he had no money and no idea where it would come from, but nevertheless he made the offer because he saw the place as an ideal center for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa thus reciprocated and sent the necessary funds by way of two of his disciples from prominent Detroit families: Ambarīṣa dāsa, the great-grandson of Henry Ford, and Lekhāśravantī dasi, the daughter of Walter Reuther, a big Detroit union leader who died some time ago. Prabhupāda said that it had been specially kept for us by Kṛṣṇa.

In the morning Prabhupāda took a half-hour stroll around the grounds. There are about four acres of lawns and gardens divided by stone walkways and nicely trimmed privet hedges. Next to the main house is a swimming pool with changing rooms now converted into a garden shed. Many varieties of trees and flowers are all around. The entire property is enclosed on two sides by a very high wall, with a regal front entrance barred by huge wrought-iron gates. On a third side a fence separates it from some unused land, and the remaining side is open to the canal.

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Śrīla Prabhupāda decided to continue on with the story of Ajāmila, and so class took up with Canto Six, Chapter One, verse forty-six. The Yamadūtas described that the actions of the three modes of nature can be observed by the three distinct varieties of feelings, states of consciousness and actions of the living beings.

Prabhupāda again referred to the “overlapping” effect caused by contact with the modes of nature. “So the point is that although he [Ajāmila] was born in a *brahmāṇa* family, he was being trained up as a pure *brahmāṇa*, but he fell down to the modes of ignorance. Therefore one has to surpass the platform of goodness also. There are many cases, very good boy, all of a sudden, falls sudden. In our Society, you have seen very nice boy, doing nicely, all of a sudden, finished. So that is possible.”

He elaborated on this and told us the way to overcome it. “So if we understand this central point, that Kṛṣṇa is the root of everything, then we are successful in life. Otherwise, it is not. People are missing this point, that Kṛṣṇa is the center. If any way we act, making Kṛṣṇa in the center, you may draw many thousands of circles, it will not overlap. It will not overlap. To become Kṛṣṇa conscious means not to remain within this *guṇa-vaicitrya*, the varieties of material color, or material *guṇas*. Above that. Center Kṛṣṇa. Make center Kṛṣṇa. Then whatever you do, it will be perfect. Make Kṛṣṇa center. It doesn’t matter whether I’m a businessman or professional man, or engineer, doctor, there are so many varieties, or a mendicant or *brahmacārī*, *gṛhastha*, never mind. Make Kṛṣṇa the center.”

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Right after class Prabhupāda took a complete tour of the large and opulent mansion. He began on the ground floor at the far end near a side gate and small guard house. A large six-car garage, all tiled in blue, is being utilized as the *brahmacārī-āśrama*. Next to that he saw a boat well, big enough to dock three or four boats, enabling one to sail into the house from the canal. Its interior is covered throughout with small, one-inch tiles arranged in mosaic patterns.

Going into the main entrance in the center of the building he walked through an impressive, tiled vestibule into what was once a marble-floored ballroom. This is now the beautiful temple room. Two floors high, it has a slightly domed ceiling painted blue and white, resembling the sky with clouds. Hidden lights produce a soft glow to imitate the dawn. Decorative columns, mirrored archways and sculpted, artificially turreted windows run down each side to give an amazingly realistic impression of a Venetian street. On the inside of the entrance there is a small mezzanine floor, under which the devotees have placed Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *vyāsāsana*. At the far end a ready-built alcove behind three archways houses the Deities and another archway leads through the back of the Deity room to a small paraphernalia area. Above the

Deities there is another mezzanine floor with an area sectioned off for Tulasī-devī. Prabhupāda commented that the only draw backs were that the temple room is a little small and it was not good that people were walking above the Deities.

He went through some doors out through the side of the hallway, and into another smaller twin-boat well. A vacant room and a mini-bowling alley at basement level completed the ground floor facilities.

Grasping the wood and wrought-iron bannister, Prabhupāda ascended the grand staircase to the left of the main entry, carefully inspecting the highly decorative bas-reliefs covering the walls. At the top he came out onto a large open landing, and then he entered through a solid oak door into an astonishing library room. It has a two-story wooden book repository covering one entire wall and the remaining walls are covered with tooled leather rather than paper or paint.

This library connects into a huge main lounge decorated with ornamental stone fireplaces so large that one can almost walk into them. The high ceiling is crossed by thick, square, hand-painted wooden beams. Śrīla Prabhupāda looked around and suggested that this might be a suitable alternative to the present temple room because the Deities would not have anyone walking above Them. Off to the side, elaborate hand-carved, wood-filigree swing doors, led us into the music room. The main entry of this then took us back out onto the landing. Every fitting in the house was especially handcrafted from the finest materials in the world by the best artisans from all over Europe. The devotees have enhanced all this with paintings of Kṛṣṇa placed throughout.

On the opposite side of the landing Prabhupāda entered a lavish marble and carved-wood dining room. From there he walked down a wide passageway leading past the temple mezzanine to his own quarters.

Prabhupāda's quarters are elegant, consisting of a single large room with a slightly domed ceiling which has opulently decorated ridges running up from the corners to meet in its center. A portion of

the wooden floor is raised at one end, and screened off to serve as his bedroom. French doors, which, like every window in the mansion, are made of leaded glass, open onto a veranda overlooking the canal. Prabhupāda's room is directly above the large boat well.

Ensuite there is a roomy, marble-tiled bathroom. Apart from a full-size bath, there is a separate shower (which Prabhupāda does not use, preferring instead his own brass buckets). This has not one, but seven adjustable nozzles, one on top and three down each side. A spacious walk-in wardrobe completes the facility.

The devotees have set it up nicely for Prabhupāda's use, even to laying clean white sheets over the thick carpet, Indian style. However, just after moving in last night, Prabhupāda walked around a little, chanting *japa*, and stepped on a pin. It didn't pierce his foot but it was dangerously exposed. In their efforts to please him and create a homely situation the devotees had laid the sheets down but foolishly tacked the joins with pins. Prabhupāda shook his head at this lack of common sense and had me remove them all.

Almost every room in the house has been decorated with real gold paint. The room next to Prabhupāda's, which has been reserved for his servants' use, is typical. What to speak of the rest of the place, the bathroom ceiling is gold-leafed, as are the soap dishes, toilet roll-holders, and towel racks. All this is set against a background of black tiles.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was very pleased to see that the devotees are caring for the building and not allowing it to deteriorate. Even one room, he said, is worth the entire purchase price. He did note, however, that many fittings that were here last year when he purchased the place, such as crystal chandeliers, and even a large boat, are now missing. Mādhavānanda explained that due to the devotees' inexperience the agent sold them separately. In fact, our own lawyer had bought the boat for himself.

Despite this, Prabhupāda regards this as the best facility yet in the Movement and sees tremendous potential in it for attracting people to Lord Kṛṣṇa.