

## Foreword

**Y**ears ago in Washington, I met Swami Prabhupāda, a spirited pious man as interesting for his perceptive discourse on the *Bhagavad-gītā* as he was on the subject of Vivekānanda and Ramakrishna. Swami Prabhupāda was fascinating to be with, for he had experienced life both as a householder and as an ascetic. To meet him was to be given instant access to everything he was thinking at the moment. He not only shared his meditations with you; he made you feel like a Kṛṣṇa devotee. He was so appealing that you couldn't help wondering why you hadn't had the fortune of meeting him before. His assessment of our madness, greed, and dash toward absurd aims was so clear that it made even a skeptic pause and contemplate. Many, overwhelmed by his selfless and compassionate intellect, became lifelong devotees, eager to shove back their own madness, greed, and aimlessness into some pit, and strive toward becoming virtuous men and women.

The writer of the present volume, Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa is one of those illustrious devotees. Bathing in the gracious luster of Swami Prabhupāda, he became his shadow and stayed with him till the very end. He has written thoughtful and earnest narratives of his earlier travels with Swami Prabhupāda. They have been published in two volumes, and applauded by readers and scholars everywhere. Written with graceful simplicity, the present volume is the continuation of the earlier ones. The narration casts light on the history

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of the worldwide expansion of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

On the pages of this volume one finds Swami Prabhupāda teaching, conversing, and arguing with gentle but forceful persuasions. Thanks to Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa, Swami Prabhupāda's magic never seems to wear off. Every encounter, every answer, and every gesture brings out the inner conviction of the great Swami. Like the earlier volumes, the present volume renders the essential events surrounding Prabhupāda's many encounters with people of various religious and cultural backgrounds, it also goes into topics more complex such as *mahā-mantra*, *māyā*, and *sadhana*. Here we find Swami Prabhupāda explaining these subtle concepts with admirable ease and patience.

This is not only an interesting book; it is also a full and rich one, and from the very opening it conveys a sense of spiritual quest, inspiring one's ethical imagination. The style of the narration is remarkably easy, natural and spirited, yet always reminding of the holy presence of his divine grace Swami Prabhupāda, as when he says that, "matter is utilized for the purpose of spirit . . . otherwise matter has no independent existence." It is this constant interplay between narration and spirited discourse that constitutes the book's appeal to us, that explains its hold on our attention.

The book is written with a style of personal force, a humble learning, a steady insight into the thought processes of the great Swami. The power behind Swami Prabhupāda's thoughts is infused with moral visions, in the sense that everything comes to us through a constant intervention of an unselfish, profoundly compassionate, and unusually ethical mind. On these pages Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa reminds us that the great Swami does not wish, as so many fake gurus and holy men do, one to transform the life of senses into some sensuous but in fact senseless enhanced living. For the Swami, "matter is inferior to the spirit soul. . . . The spirit soul is more complex and sophisticated." Thus the need for the spirited stream of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, where the

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life and the love for Kṛṣṇa become one with the desire for meaningful living, and where worldly success and joy become meaningless.

Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa often combines dialogues with descriptions, which turn his narration into an animated discourse, keeping the reader alert and attentive. Indeed on these pages Swami Prabhupāda appears not only as a master thinker, but also as a master talker, perhaps one of the great rhetors of religious literature. Those readers who have never had the opportunity of reading Prabhupāda's original works will be tempted to read them after they have read a few chapters of Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa's present work, since here a quotation or a critical remark attributed to this great Swami has the power to set one in that direction. Through his teachings, writings, and life as he lived, Swami Prabhupāda made us see that man ought not to be merely a blank slate passively open to events, but a mind that constantly seeks the spiritual meaning in everything it encounters. In Swami Prabhupāda the *bhakta's* tendency of transcending ordinary passion into a higher devotion for the divine was prominent. It brought an inner glow and significance to his personality. This book makes us see that personality in verbal action, it creates an atmosphere in which we see Swami Prabhupāda meditating, pulling things apart, drawing out many significant points with humor, wit, compassion, knowledge, and a spirituality almost divine. We owe a debt to Śrī Hari-Śauri dāsa for the enormous task of recording the time, life, and discourses of Swami Prabhupāda and making it all available to readers, both here and in the beloved country of Swami Prabhupāda.

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