

excerpts from Chapter One of Hari Sauri's Transcendental Diary, Volume 1

New Delhi and Kurukṣetra

November 26th, 1975 — Bengali Markets, New Delhi

At 11:30 a.m. I was sitting alone in the tiny temple room chanting in front of the Deities when Harikeśa walked in. Stopping at the open door he peered at me intensely through his thick glasses. “Do you know how to massage?” he asked.

“No, I’ve never done it in my life.”

“Well, go up on the roof of Prabhupāda’s apartment and watch how Upendra massages Śrīla Prabhupāda. Upendra is leaving tomorrow, so someone else will have to give Śrīla Prabhupāda his massage.”

Hardly daring to believe what I had just heard, I didn’t wait around. I immediately ran down the street to number nine, a small two story building, and quickly climbed the steep steps, past the ground-floor apartment of the building’s owner, Mr. B. N. Mukherjee, past the mezzanine, past Śrīla Prabhupāda’s flat, and up the final flight to the roof.

It seemed too good to be true; things like this just don’t happen! But sure enough, as I came out of the covered stairwell, I found His Divine Grace dressed in his *gamchā*, sitting on a straw mat in the sunshine. His eyes were closed, and Upendra was kneeling behind him, massaging his back with mustard oil. I offered my obeisances and sat down to watch.

After a minute Śrīla Prabhupāda opened his eyes and looked at me inquiringly. With a slight tip of his head, and raising his eyebrows, he asked, “Hm? What is that?”

I explained that Harikeśa had sent me to learn how to render the massage. “All right,” he said simply, and again closed his eyes until the end of the massage. When it was over, Prabhupāda returned to his rooms downstairs to bathe and eat his lunch.

Upendra took just two minutes to explain to me some of the finer techniques of massage—the amount of time to spend on each part of his body, the correct order to do it in, and the two types of oil to be used. Upendra confirmed that he would be leaving tomorrow for a preaching assignment in Fiji. And since Nitāi, Prabhupāda's other servant, had gone to Bombay to renew his visa, Śrīla Prabhupāda would need someone to give him his noon and evening massages, at least while he remained in Delhi. Harikeśa was fully engaged in transcribing Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes and cooking, so he was unable to do it. Under the circumstances, it seemed I was the only one available to execute this personal service.

Apparently, early this morning, Śrīla Prabhupāda and Harikeśa had discussed how to arrange for his morning massage. His Divine Grace had noticed me guarding the door, and remembering me from Australia, thought I might be able to do it. Harikeśa apparently had strong reservations about my suitability. He saw me in action as the temple commander in Vṛndāvana two months ago, when I had a somewhat violent exchange with a young Bengali man. It was only resolved through Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal intervention. Despite this, Prabhupāda has decided to give me a chance.

I returned to the temple quite unable to comprehend my good fortune. I am apprehensive but utterly ecstatic at the extraordinary turn of events. As requested, I went back to Śrīla Prabhupāda's quarters at 9:00 p.m. It was the first time that I had ever been in Prabhupāda's rooms at such a late hour. To see him smiling and relaxed, sitting back and chatting with his servants (to be part of it!), was a privilege I had never even dreamed of.

After a few minutes Śrīla Prabhupāda retired to his bedroom, and Upendra signaled for me to follow.

As Upendra stood at the side of the bed massaging Śrīla Prabhupāda, I looked on through the semi-darkness of the room. Upendra explained that if the bed was large enough Prabhupāda allowed his servant to sit cross-legged beside him. With this bed that was not possible.

Śrīla Prabhupāda dozed lightly as Upendra carefully kneaded and squeezed his calves, thighs, and feet. After a few minutes, he turned on his side, and Upendra worked on his left hip. This hip sometimes becomes numb due to poor blood circulation.

Upendra whispered to me that once, while he was massaging at night, Prabhupāda began to snore, so he stopped massaging and began to tiptoe out of the room. Just as he reached the door, Prabhupāda's voice came from out of the darkness, "Oh, you are finished already?" He had Upendra return to continue the massage.

There is no set duration. One simply keeps going until, on awakening, Prabhupāda tells the servant he may leave. Then he generally turns over and goes back to sleep again for a short while before getting up to begin his nighttime writing.

After only ten minutes Śrīla Prabhupāda gave a gentle "Hm," signaling that the session was over. We left the bedroom, and Harikeśa escorted us out of the apartment and locked up for the night.

I never expected that such an opportunity would actually ever come my way. In *śāstra* it says that even a moment's association with a pure devotee is enough to bestow upon one the perfection of life and that such association is rarely achieved. I never dreamt I would be the recipient of such good fortune, even after lifetimes of rendering devotional service. Everything has occurred simply by Śrī Kṛṣṇa's arrangement and Śrīla Prabhupāda's causeless mercy.

Excited and elated, I immediately rushed to the New Janata Book Depot, a small shop on the corner next to Nathu's Sweet Shop, and purchased a blank, lined notebook. Although my new engagement is to last only the next couple of days while Prabhupāda remains in New Delhi, I have decided to keep a diary of events so that in the future I will have something with which to remember this rare chance to personally serve His Divine Grace.

November 27th, 1975

While Prabhupāda took his morning walk, I cleaned his apartment. It is a small residence, with four rooms—very basic, but adequate quarters. The entry from the stairwell brings one into the main room, measuring about twenty feet by ten. I dusted off the sparse furnishings, including Prabhupāda's sitting place and the small, low desk at which he spends most of his time either receiving guests or translating during the night. I went through the back and straightened up the servants' room, where Harikeśa and Hansadūta are staying.

Prabhupāda's bedroom, about the same size as theirs, runs off from the side of it. It didn't take long to change the sheets on the small single bed and scrub out the tiny, cramped attached bathroom. Going back through the servants' room I came through a narrow passageway to the very small kitchen. I cleaned its unpolished stone benches and white ceramic tiled walls and swept off the narrow back veranda where Harikeśa seems to do most of the cooking on a coal fired bucket stove. Finally, I wiped the floors, all standard yellow mosaic stone and marble chip, mostly uncovered except for the thin, cotton rug, or *dhuri*, in the sitting room. I finished well before His Divine Grace returned from his daily walk.

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At 11:00 a.m. I reported to the flat for my first day's duty as masseur. I walked in just as Śrīla Prabhupāda was giving his blessings to Upendra for the success of his new preaching assignment in Fiji. After receiving Prabhupāda's garland, Upendra left for the airport. Looking at me, Prabhupāda casually tipped his head from side to side and signaled that it was time for his massage.

Prabhupāda went up to the roof and changed into his *gamchā*. I was already wearing mine. As he sat on the straw mat, all the instructions Upendra had given me began to whirl through my mind.

Now I was on my own. There was no trial, no practice session, no comment from Śrīla Prabhupāda—nothing. I was in at the deep end! I had to concentrate hard to overcome my nervousness and remember what to do. I had never massaged anyone before, what to speak of even touch His Divine Grace. So I mentally prayed to Kṛṣṇa to please give me sufficient intelligence to do it nicely for Śrīla Prabhupāda's pleasure.

In order to ensure a proper service attitude, I first offered Śrīla Prabhupāda my humble obeisances before touching him. Prabhupāda sat cross-legged as I fought my nervousness and knelt upright before him. I took hold of the bottle of sandalwood oil, poured a few drops into the palm of my hand, and began to massage Prabhupāda's head. Sandalwood has cooling properties and is therefore good for the brain.

After only a minute my thumbs and finger joints became suddenly, and severely, sore. Every knuckle ached so much I thought my hands were going to seize up. It was a sensation I hadn't foreseen. My mind flooded with signals of protest, which I fought to transcend. I prayed to Kṛṣṇa for the determination not to fail at my first attempt. By concentrating on trying to please Śrīla Prabhupāda I was able to keep the motion of my hands going without interruption. Thankfully, the pain soon disappeared, my hands loosened, and I pressed and rubbed Prabhupāda's smooth, shaved head without difficulty.

Not knowing any particular techniques, I simply tried to think what it would be like to receive the massage, how each stroke of thumb or finger would feel, and then I acted accordingly.

I took great care not to jerk, scratch, or poke him, yet at the same time give him a firm and smooth massage, working the oil into his skin thoroughly. It wasn't a question of merely rubbing in some oil. The trick, I realized, was to apply pressure, moving my fingers and thumbs backward and forward, while holding his head steady and balanced. I was extremely cautious when massaging his temples, forehead, and around his eyes, for the oil could easily make the thumbs slip.

After fifteen minutes I moved around to Śrīla Prabhupāda's back and switched to mustard oil, which is used on the rest of his body.

Mustard oil vitalizes and tones the skin, giving warmth to the body. I spent another fifteen minutes squeezing, pressing, and rippling the supple muscles of his neck, shoulders and back. With both circular and up-and-down motions of my thumbs, I gave his lower back and spine a firm work over.

Next, moving to his right side, I sat cross-legged and massaged his chest and stomach. These motions were all circular, made with the flat of my hand, all the time directing the massaging motion toward his heart.

Concentrating intensely on what my hands were doing, I failed to notice that I was sitting extremely close to His Divine Grace, breathing directly into the side of his face. I was embarrassed when Prabhupāda suddenly leaned away from me, half turning his head and giving me a sidelong look. He cautioned me, and I mentally made a note to remember to look away in future.

After ten minutes I moved to his right arm. With his arm outstretched and hand resting palm down on my right knee, I worked his biceps, forearm, wrist, and the joints of his hand. I noted that his hands were very refined, his palms especially soft and smooth. I was extremely apprehensive when it came to popping his joints by pulling each finger, as I had to tug quite hard. Horrible thoughts of dislocation

rushed through my mind, but Prabhupāda didn't seem to mind at all. After twenty minutes on his right side I moved to his left arm and repeated the procedure.

Then I moved to his front. He stuck his legs out, and I spent about fifteen minutes on each one, first his left leg, and finally his right. Prabhupāda warned me not to touch his knee that is still bruised from his recent car crash in Mauritius. He is treating this with a poultice of hot ghee and neem leaves.

I carefully massaged his thighs, calves, and ankles and finished with his feet, which I made a special effort to massage as nicely as possible. Rubbing my thumbs up and down his high arches and pressing the joints in the ball of each foot, I ended by pulling each individual toe, giving a slight squeeze to the soft, fleshy end portions. This made my thumb and forefinger snap together as they came up over the tips of his toes. Now I have some practical understanding of the meaning of "lotus feet," as Prabhupāda's feet are surprisingly soft and delicate, just like the petals of a flower.

After an hour and a half, I reluctantly concluded my service by again offering obeisances. Śrīla Prabhupāda stood up, took a little mustard oil in his palm, and applied it to the various gates of his body—ears, nostrils, genital, and anus. He then went downstairs to bathe and take his lunch.

Throughout the massage he had not said a word but sat silently with his eyes closed, his body relaxed, glistening and golden in the gentle winter sun. Later, I was relieved and elated to find out that Prabhupāda had commented I gave a good massage.