

Foreword

Hari Śauri Dāsa’s choice of the term “Transcendental” to describe this account is very apt. The *Diary* is a remarkably candid and inspiring depiction of a spiritual master at work, interacting with his disciples and the public and trying to implant devotion to Krishna in the minds and hearts of often all too human followers. The journey so vividly portrayed in these pages is given a physical immediacy with careful attention to the sights and sounds of each country and setting, but it was primarily a spiritual journey for both Prabhupāda as master and Hari Śauri Dāsa as disciple/diarist, the whole played out in the context of a worldwide religious movement in the midst of an explosive expansion that had given newly gathered and mostly young followers enormous responsibilities to convey a message and live by standards that they themselves had not yet fully comprehended or internalized.

Holding all of this activity together is Prabhupāda, an 80-year-old Indian guru with declining physical strength but unbounded spiritual and intellectual energy, summoning his resources—or, as he would say, Krishna’s resources—to meet the daily needs of his disciples and, more broadly, the needs of a world in spiritual crisis. Prabhupāda is clearly the focus of this *Diary*, and he is brought wonderfully to life in Hari Śauri Dāsa’s careful transmission of his speech and his style of discourse. Those who knew Prabhupāda can hear his voice behind the printed words of the *Diary*, can

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remember with pleasure his keen arguments laced with Indian English idioms and Sanskrit quotations, and feel again the force of his brusque objections to arguments that missed the point of Krishna's message or actions that betrayed an undeveloped Krishna consciousness among his disciples. Those who did not know him can nonetheless sense the power of his personality as he taught, challenged, chastised, praised, and inspired his young followers, singing devotional songs, overseeing the installation of deities and procedures of worship, clarifying philosophical issues, and demonstrating by his example how a true devotee of Krishna should live and work.

This is an intimate portrait of the spiritual master, not a history of the Krishna consciousness movement. The greatest value of the *Diary* is precisely in the succession of details it presents of Prabhupāda himself, the guru at the center of the movement as the lineal representative of Krishna, Caitanya, and the saints and teachers who preceded him. The movement is always there in the background, of course, but it enters the narrative only as the topic of discussions between Prabhupāda and his disciples that reveal in a succession of sharply focused vignettes both his overall plans for expansion and his attention to the smallest details of financial management, book editing, architectural design, iconography, and ritual practice. Running through all of these discussions, moreover, no matter how practical or seemingly routine the topic may be, is always his central motif: the spiritual development of his disciples in Krishna consciousness. Without Krishna consciousness, he constantly repeats, nothing else matters. The success of ISKCON is not to be judged by the standards of worldly success in terms of numbers, buildings, or money; it is successful only if it conveys the pure message of Krishna through the medium of pure devotees whose motives and goals are those of Krishna and not of their own egos.

Some of the most interesting material in the *Diary* concerns Prabhupāda's attempts to get this latter point across

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to his disciples, whose cultural background had not prepared them for the discipline and obedience to a spiritual master that he demanded. What Prabhupāda was doing was really quite extraordinary and unprecedented. Previous Indian or other Asian religious teachers had either accommodated their teachings and practices to Western culture or had limited their effort to a small group of close-knit personal disciples who could be trained to a more rigorous standard. Prabhupāda, however, had tried from the beginning to involve as many people as possible in the chanting of the Hare Krishna *mantra* and then, as he gradually gathered a group of disciples around him, had begun to train them to follow the strict standards of his own Caitanya tradition: to become vegetarians, to maintain personal purity, to study the texts and teachings of the tradition, to practice systematic devotional chanting, to learn the proper ways of deity worship, and—for those who accepted initiation as formal disciples or *śiṣyas*—to shave their heads and wear the traditional clothing of Indian devotees.

These standards were not only maintained but were in fact continually upgraded as the movement expanded first in North America and then throughout the world. No matter what the cultural background of the disciples, all were expected to obey their new spiritual master and follow the strict religious lifestyle that he demanded; they were expected, in other words, to become traditional Caitanya devotees in every way possible even as they were engaged in establishing new centers and recruiting new followers in Europe, Africa, Central and South America, the Far East, and even in India itself. There were of course tensions and misunderstandings created by these demands, and at times serious splits within the organization; not everyone understood what was expected of them, and there were mistakes made as a result of over-enthusiasm, inexperience, misinterpretation, and sometimes willful resistance to Prabhupāda's requirements. What is astonishing is that there were not more problems than there were, at least during

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Prabhupāda's lifetime, given the overall youthfulness of his followers and the fact that they were being faced with requirements and given responsibilities that would have been unimaginable a few years earlier.

The credit for this must clearly go to Prabhupāda, whose role at the center of all of these developments was crucial to their initial success. We know this in general, of course, from the history of the Krishna consciousness movement, but few accounts give us the details that we find in the *Diary* of how this was brought about in the daily instruction and inspiration that Prabhupāda gave to his disciples. What we find in these pages is the serene energy source of the movement's whirlwind of activity, the pure devotee of Krishna who brings the transcendental wisdom and power of Krishna to the task at hand, certain that He will ensure success. No details escape his attention, and no disciple is left without his loving concern even when he or she has failed or fallen short of expectations. He is at times brutally frank in criticism, but never rejects the person criticized; he asks only that everyone remember whom they all serve, and do the job right.

The great strength of the *Diary* is that it lets us into the immediate presence of Prabhupāda as he deals with his disciples, with correspondence from abroad, with curious and mainly uninformed reporters, with visiting scholars, with fellow Indians, and with a succession of issues and problems that emerge from day to day. It is greatly to Hari Śauri Dāsa's credit that he does not idealize his account, but presents both Prabhupāda and his disciples as they were and as they revealed themselves in intimate discussions. This is not a hagiography from which all awkward personal traits are removed, but something much more valuable: the honest account of a remarkable—and remarkably human—leader trying to bring out the best in others on the basis of his own devotional commitment to his Lord.

The account would be far less persuasive if it gave us an idealized portrait of Prabhupāda instead of presenting him as he was; we need to see the whole man, operating

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within human limitations, to understand the measure of his achievements, and Hari Śauri Dāsa has given us this kind of honest report. It is this human devotee that we see so clearly in Hari Śauri Dāsa's account, succeeding, in the midst of Kali-yuga, to a degree that still inspires our awe.

It is easy to forget as we read the *Diary* that Prabhupāda was eighty years old at the time and in frail health. The number and variety of issues that he had to deal with even in the two months covered in this volume would challenge the stamina and skills of the most vigorous young executive, and executive decisions were not even his primary activity. His main task, as he saw it, was serving as spiritual mentor to his young disciples, a task made urgent because of his age and difficult because of the lack of continual contact with devotees spread literally around the world.

Prabhupāda started his first temple in New York City on his own at the age of seventy with a handful of informal disciples. Not quite ten years later, when this *Diary* begins, he was head of an international organization that was almost entirely his own creation, not just in practical terms but in conception. He was of course deeply informed about the Caitanya tradition and Krishna devotion from his Indian background, but no Indian tradition had ever expanded outside India in this way—not, at least, since Buddhism some 2,000 years earlier, and that process had taken centuries. An entire institutional structure had to be created from scratch to make the ISKCON expansion possible and sustain its orderly growth. In the midst of such rapid growth and development some of the disciples—including some of the designated leaders—failed to meet the exacting standards that Prabhupāda set for his followers. The wonder is that so few mistakes were made and that so many disciples were raised to a level of purity and performance that they could never have imagined for themselves before Prabhupāda inspired them by his example.

We have all too few detailed accounts of spiritual masters that have escaped the correcting hand of pious editors. Prabhupāda is fortunate indeed to have a devoted disciple

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who respects his master enough to respect his wholeness as a human being and lets us see that wholeness and humanness for ourselves. Prabhupāda does not need an apologist, but an accurate and honest reporter; his qualities speak for themselves. He was, as he appears afresh in this *Diary*, a truly remarkable man who understood that his role as a devotee of Krishna transcended his own human capabilities and limitations, and who was willing to let Krishna use him for His purposes until his own mortal frame was used up. We can be grateful to Hari Śauri Dāsa for giving us such an honest and intimate account of how Prabhupāda carried out this service.

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