

The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim

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The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim

As Told By Himself

With Elaborate Purports
Dedication

To

My Wife Annie,

Who Deserves To Have A Book Written About Her

And To

The *Matajis* Of The Evanston Temple

1977-1979

The Best *Vartma Pradarshaka Gurus*

A Boy Could Ever Have

And To

My Parents

For Reasons Which
Will Become Apparent

Epigraph

"If you do what you did, you get what you got."

-- my father, concisely explaining the doctrine of Karma.

Writing My Own Hagiography

Anyone reading this probably has one question: "Who is Bhakta Jim and why should I care about him?" A good place to start answering that would be to explain what a "Bhakta" is. A Bhakta is one who practices Bhakti yoga, the path of devotion to god, in this case the god known as Krishna. Devotees in the Hare Krishna movement typically take a name meaning "servant of Krishna". So you might have the name "Krishna dasa", which means literally that. Of course Krishna has many names, so your name could be any of those names followed by "dasa", or for women "devi-dasi".

Now they don't give you that name when you walk in the door; you have to earn it. You express a desire to be initiated by a guru and become his disciple. After that there is a probationary period where you prove you can follow the rules: no meat eating, no sex outside of marriage and even that no more than once a month, no gambling (or questioning the meaning of the scriptures), and no intoxication, which includes tea, coffee, and cola. The probationary period is supposed to be six months but can be longer or shorter.

Now they can't just call you what your friends call you during this period, so they call you "Bhakta" followed by your first name. (For women the word used is "Bhaktin"). So "Bhakta Jim" is someone named "Jim" who never qualified for initiation.

Calling myself "Bhakta Jim" thirty years after the fact makes me feel a bit like the character in the novel *Kim* who signed his letters, "Written by Sobrao Satai, Failed Entrance Allahabad University".

I first became involved with the Hare Krishna movement back in 1977. I would be involved for about two years and I would get out when my parents hired deprogrammers. I spent another year after that getting a friend out of the movement, also through deprogramming. Actually, she was more than a friend. She was someone I very much wanted to marry, and she had become engaged to someone else after I left. Part of the motivation for the kidnapping was to prevent her marriage.

While I was with the movement I had some interesting experiences, which included falling in love for the first time, alienating my friends and family, trying to believe things no reasonable person could, doing fundraising for nonexistent charities, and getting arrested for singing on a street corner.

The late seventies were an interesting period in the Hare Krishna movement. The founding guru, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, died on November 14, 1977. Several years before his death the movement had gotten too large for him to supervise by himself, so he appointed some male disciples as the Governing Body Committee to run the movement on his behalf. After his death a few of these disciples became gurus themselves and things got interesting. Devotees still argue about what happened back then, what Srila Prabhupada really intended to happen after his death, etc.

I can't say from experience what the group was like in the very early days, but in the years I spent with it the Hare Krishna movement was a cult like the Moonies or the People's Temple of Jim Jones. I will give reasons why I feel that way in due course.

After I left the movement I started working on a memoir of my experiences which I gave the horrible title *Return to Maya*. Writing this manuscript was therapeutic for me, and I had a notion that I might become an author someday. Previous to this I had tried and failed to write science fiction stories.

I banged out a manuscript on erasable paper using a Royal Sabre portable manual typewriter. Nobody had word processors back then. I made a couple of copies of the manuscript and put the original in the box the paper came in, where it stayed for over thirty years. I was going to revise it, but it looked like an awful lot of work for a book that likely nobody would want to publish. If my original goal in writing it had been to expose the less savory parts of the movement, the book *Monkey on a Stick* would do that better than I ever could. My own experiences couldn't begin to compete with that book. I gradually gave up on the idea of becoming an author.

Three years ago I became involved in a computer project that led me to write a couple of manuals. One was about writing educational software, and the other was about finding, reading, creating and publishing free e-books. My writing style for these manuals was friendly and informal, because I was writing for teachers and students that were not technically minded. Several people praised my writing, and it seems that somehow or other I had achieved my dream of becoming an author. The fact that I would never get any money from the sales of either book did not change that.

One of the things I learned from writing my e-book book was how to scan the pages of a printed book or manuscript and to do optical character recognition on them. It was a natural idea to get my old *Return To Maya* manuscript scanned and put into a machine readable format so I could revise it for publication as an e-book. At first I planned to do a massive rewrite on it to try and make it a funny memoir. As I scanned it in, though, I found that what it was to begin with was not bad and actually, over thirty years after I had written it, it was an interesting read.

The manuscript was a mess, of course. I explained some things three or four times and other things not at all. Characters appeared out of nowhere and then vanished, Worst of all, every so often I would try to make my writing sound like what I thought a REAL AUTHOR sounded like with awful results.

In the original manuscript there are places where the sequence of events doesn't seem quite right, and other places where I remember *exactly* what someone said and I can't imagine how I did it. I

didn't keep a diary when I was in the movement. Everything in the manuscript was from memory and written months after it happened. The best I can claim is that what I wrote is pretty close to what happened.

When I wrote the original I very much wanted to destroy the Hare Krishna movement. Today, as threats to the world's happiness go the Hare Krishna movement is pretty small potatoes. The impression I get from looking at their many websites is that they are more in the mainstream these days. They still believe that the moon landings were faked, based on their reading of the Vedic scriptures, but I think (and hope) that some of the fanaticism of the old days has diminished.

The movement was involved in many scandals in the eighties. Gurus were selling and using drugs, movement schools were abusing and molesting children, temples were stockpiling weapons, and one whole farm community got excommunicated. (Their leader ended up going to jail). Maybe after all that they rethought what kind of a movement they wanted to be, or maybe they all just got old.

I would like to think that some of the devotees I knew might even find my account of the early days of their movement amusing. Until the day I left there was nobody at the temple in Evanston that I did not genuinely like, and I have no axe to grind about any of them.

I decided that I would not just revise this manuscript; I would also add new material to fill in the gaps and explain things better. This new material would be in italics so the reader can tell what was written thirty years ago and what was written recently. I would remove the parts of the old manuscript that didn't work, clean up the rest, and add the new stuff. The new stuff is the "elaborate purports" mentioned in the book title.

Several ex-devotees read a draft of this book and made comments that helped me to understand my own experience better.

I also made extensive use of the Internet to check what facts I could. I was able to look up information on long out of print books I had read in college on the Amazon website, learn the history of the building we used as the Evanston temple, find ex-devotees to review my early drafts, find out what happened to the devotees I knew after I left, and much more. I was able to listen to voices on streaming audio that I had not heard in over thirty years. I was even able to watch the episode of *Lou Grant* where Charlie Hume wants to deprogram his son who has joined the Hare Krishna movement and Lou talks him out of it. (It's on *Hulu*). I think we're creating a culture where no information ever has to go away. Whatever the merits of that may be, it *did* help me to write this book.

I hope you will find my experience as interesting to read about as it was to live through!
What To Expect From This Book

I would like you to read this book without expectations. Let's talk about some expectations you might have and why this book won't meet them.

First, you might want this book to be sort of a male version of *Eat, Pray, Love*.

I ate some good food in the movement, but I have no idea how to prepare it. I won't be describing much of it either. You'll learn for example that devotees sometimes make a desert called Simply Wonderfuls, but you won't learn how to make them.

Spiritually I didn't get very far. Sometimes devotees claim to be Krishna's most worthless servant out of humility, when in fact they are spiritually advanced. To make things clear, let me give you an example. You know Maria in *The Sound Of Music*? I was *worse than that*.

I did fall in love with one of the *matajis* but that didn't go anywhere either. (Well, it did lead to a kidnapping, but I didn't get to marry her). That woman is an important character in this story, but it is not a love story and no author in the world could turn it into one. Not even Nicholas Sparks. I wrote the original manuscript over thirty years ago, and finished it when it seemed likely that she and I would be together a long time. The words I used describe my feelings at the time. However, she did *not* turn out to be the great love of my life. That ship has sailed. In fact, that ship sank in sight of the dock.

If you seek advice on eating, praying, or loving you must seek elsewhere.

You might expect this book to be a story of how I lived a sinful life among the Hare Krishnas and was saved by Jesus. In fact, while I was in the movement I committed fewer sins than I do now, and when I left the movement it was not because of a religious conversion. Whatever you think of my tale, be assured that there will be no altar call at the end of it.

You might expect there to be revelations about what goes on in secret in the movement. You will not find them here. I was a "fringe" devotee for most of the two years I was involved, and while towards the end I got quite serious I never did receive initiation. If there were inner circles in the movement I was not aware of them and was certainly not let into them. The big scandals in the movement happened after I left.

I never saw Srila Prabhupada, the founder of the movement. He died shortly after I started coming to the temple, so I cannot tell you if the movement was any different when he was alive than it was afterwards, and similarly I can't tell you if the movement is any better now than it was when I was involved. I have not set foot in a temple in thirty years, and I have no interest in checking out the current state of the movement. They've put together some nice websites, many devotees are on *Facebook*, and that's all I know.

I was deprogrammed, and participated in deprogrammings, so you will learn a little about that.

While I condemn much that went on in the movement, truthfully 90% of the time I was involved I was happy and enjoying myself.

I learned a great deal about Indian philosophy and religion, and you'll learn *something* of that. You'll *need* to learn something of that to make sense of the story. Having said that, do not expect

this book to be an adequate substitute for the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Truthfully, there are memoirs of Hare Krishna life written by people who were in much longer and have better stories to tell. A fair number of ex-devotees have written about their experiences. I would guess it's a kind of therapy we all needed. In the process of revising the manuscript I looked up the devotee names of people I knew using Google and was able to find traces of many of them. The Hare Krishna movement has set up a surprising number of websites. Some of the people in this book are dead, and one uncommonly decent one took his own life. Some have gone on to become gurus and others have married or remarried. One started his own spin-off movement. Some seem to be much less active in the movement than they once were, but have not given it up entirely. A few I could find no trace of at all. While doing these Google searches I realized that even though the events in this book are thirty years old I'm still not completely over them.

I have made an effort to be honest in this memoir, but I have left out details that might embarrass people who don't deserve it. One of those details is my full name. The devotees called me "Bhakta Jim", so that's the name I'm going use for this story. In my family this will be that book we never talk about. If you had these experiences and wrote this book you'd do the same thing. Of course, if Oprah was to select this for her book club that could change. Then all bets would be off.

Thirty years ago I met some really interesting people and had some unusual experiences, some of them funny, some painful, others just sad. This book will be a complete record of my adventures, both spiritual and otherwise.

Mostly otherwise.

How I Got There

This is a new chapter not in the original draft. I felt that the book needed a bit more explanation of how things began.

The people in the Hare Krishna movement always have a story about how they joined up. Without exception they believe that everything in their life led up to that moment. If I had stayed in the movement longer I would have come up with a story like that myself, but it would not be much like the one I'm about to tell you.

This is what I looked like back then, and yes, I am wearing Earth shoes. (You can still buy Earth shoes. Like the Hare Krishna movement, they never really went away). The car is mine, a 1970 Cadillac Eldorado.

I went to Oakton Community College and while I went there I was an audiovisual aide, delivering projectors to classrooms and setting them up. Before there were personal computers being an AV aide was about as nerdy as you could get. It was and remains the most fun job I ever had. Most of the work was between classes, so while classes were going on you could goof off.

One of my fellow aides was named Bob. Bob used to bug the hell out of me. While I had difficulty

talking with women he had a natural way with them. He had long hair like a hippie (this was in 1976, so that was unusual) and I think that the women in the AV department found him to be harmless and charming.

One thing Bob talked about was his sister in the Detroit temple of the Hare Krishna movement. I think he brought in a copy of *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* to read at work too. This book was written by Srila Prabhupada, the guru of the movement, and was published by Macmillan. It was a really sensual and exotic looking book. The cover showed a blue man and a white man on a highly decorated chariot, and the interior had verses in the Sanskrit alphabet, a phonetic version of those verses, a translation, plus commentary.

I looked at the book only to mock it, and that would be the end of the story except that summer we both met a woman. I remember her name well enough but I'll leave it out because she has very little to do with the story, other than taking part in setting it in motion.

This girl was small and really cute, and a bit of a tease. She just showed up at the AV office one day and made friends with both of us. She talked about Hare Krishna with Bob and *might* have had sex with him. (She claimed she had seduced Bob and he didn't deny it). She did *not* have sex with me. I remember taking her out for breakfast once, but nothing happened.

I went off to Western Illinois University for my Junior year and forgot about her, until one day in the spring I received a letter from her and Bob with a photograph inside. The photo was large and was a black and white picture of her lying on top of a grave, barefoot. I thought it was really sexy. Compared to the amateur porn girls send to their admirers today it wasn't much but for 1977 it was pretty good. The letter said that she and Bob wanted to see me again.

I wanted to see her again, but I wanted to be prepared. Somehow I got the idea that reading up on the Hare Krishna philosophy would be good preparation. Why I thought that is hard to explain. I was quite horny most of the time back then and it influenced my thinking.

The Hare Krishna movement made a special effort to sell complete sets of its books to universities. The WIU library had a complete set of Prabhupada's books, plus many more on Indian religion by Max Mueller and other authors. I read quite a few of them and found them fascinating.

I did not limit myself to Prabhupada's books. The first book I read that mentioned Krishna at all was *Lord of Light* by Roger Zelazny, a kind of science fiction satire of the Indian gods, which made a passing reference to a "false Krishna". (In fact, that book may have started my interest in Krishna. The false Krishna acted in a way not befitting a god, as I remember, and I copied that one passage in a letter back to Bob. He responded by defending Krishna. So maybe it was the desire to irritate Bob that got the whole interest started). The movie *Steppenwolf* had another passing reference to Krishna, and I also read books by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, including *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*, *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*, and *Srimad Bhagavatam: The Wisdom Of God* which was a much shortened translation of the book Srila Prabhupada was translating in many volumes. I remember that in this book Krishna's cowherd girl companions were referred to as "shepherdesses." (You don't need to be a Sanskrit scholar to find that questionable. There are no sheep in the story of Krishna). The point I'm making is that I was not immediately drawn to Prabhupada's books. You could almost say I was avoiding them.

When I finally did look at Prabhupada's books I started with *Krishna Book*. (Actually that's what the

devotees call it. The real title is *Krsna, The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, with dots under the "r", the "s", and the "n" in Krsna. It's pronounced "Krishna" and it came in three volumes). It was a really beautiful book with lots of illustrations done by devotees and an introduction by George Harrison of the Beatles. There was something sensual about just holding it in your hands. The art especially was compelling, even if it was not quite professional quality. (The early books of the movement had art that was heartfelt but not polished. The same artists who did these illustrations would go on to be incredibly good in later books). The pictures gave you a window into a really exotic world.

Krishna was a different concept of God than anything I had ever come across. Previous to that I only knew of three concepts of God: The burning bush in *The Ten Commandments* Jesus George Burns in the movie *Oh, God*

Krishna was nothing like any of these. Krishna had power and He flaunted it. Even as a small child He had adventures, killed demons, played childish pranks, and loved women. Boy, did He love women. As an adult He lived in 16,108 palaces with one wife in each palace. As a young man, before He became a prince, He loved 16,108 *gopis*, girls who tended cows in the humble village where He grew up. The *gopis* had husbands, but their real love was Krishna. Krishna could expand himself into multiple bodies so each wife or *gopi* thought He was with her alone.

An interesting thing about Krishna is that sometimes the people in His life understood that He was God but most of the time they thought of Him as an ordinary person, in spite of the extraordinary things He was always doing. An interesting contrast to Christianity is that Christians expect Christ to return and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth some time in the future. Krishna's worshipers believe that Krishna set up His kingdom on Earth some 5,000 years ago and then took it away. Christ gives hints about what the kingdom of heaven is like in the parables, but the *Srimad Bhagavatam* gives a very detailed description of what God and the spiritual world are like.

Krishna is also an important character in the great Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. This is a terrific story about gods, goddesses, princes, princesses, gurus and their students, curses, terrible vows, love and lovemaking, gambling, and war. The book climaxes with a big battle between two factions of the same family. Both sides approach Krishna to ask for help. Krishna agrees to help both sides, but He has conditions. To one side He will give thousands of soldiers. To the other He will give Himself, as a noncombatant chariot driver, Prince Arjuna is given first choice, and chooses Krishna as his chariot driver.

As the battle is about to begin Arjuna sees the opposing army, full of his own relatives, and decides nothing good can come of fighting them. He drops his bow on the ground. Krishna gives Arjuna a lecture on the different methods of Yoga and the ultimate aim in life, which convinces him to take up his bow and fight. This lecture is like the Hindu Sermon On The Mount. Everyone on the battlefield stopped to hear it, and this chapter of the *Mahabharata* is often read on its own as the *Bhagavad Gita*, or Song of God. The Hare Krishnas have their own translation and commentary of the *Bhagavad Gita*, but not the rest of the *Mahabharata* which is something like three times as long as the Bible.

I really enjoyed these books. When I loaned them to a friend he described them as "pure sword and sorcery"! That was pretty close to my opinion too. I remember also that this friend and I went to the Bristol Renaissance Fair and I bought a bamboo flute from one of the vendors. Krishna is known as a flute player and is often shown playing the flute for the *gopis*. I never managed to

learn to play it.

Now while Krishna's life was full of sensual indulgence, the religion itself practices austerity. The idea is we are not supposed to imitate Krishna, but to love and serve Him. A desire to imitate Krishna is what got us into the material world. When we give up this desire we can go back to the spiritual world and enjoy being with and loving Krishna.

I wasn't having any of that, but I did enjoy the stories. That summer I met up with Bob and the girl and we talked about visiting the temple together. The girl soon lost interest in both of us and somehow or other I got the idea that I wanted to see this temple with Bob anyway.

This all happened a long time ago and I can't be quite sure of the sequence of events, but this is pretty close to what happened. Not exactly Saul on the road to Damascus, is it?

The Pleasure Of The Soul

That is how one day in the summer of 1977 I found myself standing across the street from the Evanston Illinois center for the Hare Krishna movement. It was an old building of yellow brick that once was a YMCA and was later used as a warehouse before the devotees came. The letters "YMCA" were still painted over one of the doors. There was a plywood board bearing a painted conch, mace, discus, and lotus and the words "Radha-Krishna Temple" over the other entrance. Short carved wooden posts flanked each set of stairs. The posts were imported from India and a bit beat up. The sidewalk was painted red with decorations in a white lotus pattern, and rickety iron fire escapes hung down the side and back.

This is what it looked like:

The YMCA on Emerson street had an interesting history. There had been a YMCA on Grove street in Evanston in the 1900's, but blacks could not use it. The Emerson street Y was created specifically for the black community in Evanston, and it served them from the 1920's until it closed in 1969, when the Grove Street Y started to admit blacks. The Hare Krishnas took it over in 1971 and were forced to vacate it in 1979 when the building was condemned for code violations. The city tore the building down the following year.

As a YMCA it had hosted concerts by Nat Cole, before he became Nat King Cole.

I have no photos of the actual building, so my crude draftsmanship above will have to suffice. The drawing is based on my memory and a photo of the YMCA from the 1960's.

Bob had given me the address of the temple in Evanston and told me about the Sunday feast. The next day I drove there to look at the place and perhaps go inside. When I got there, I couldn't work up the courage to go inside alone. I thought Bob would be there on Sunday and if I went to the feast I figured I would meet him there.

I went that Sunday by myself. The first thing about the temple that worried me was where I would put my shoes. I ended up hiding them behind a glass display case near the entrance so I could find them again in the pile of shoes that was forming.

Next somebody directed me downstairs to the temple room. This had been the gymnasium before and it had balconies with scalloped arches made of plywood and plaster on either side, with red curtains visible through the arches. The altar was contained in three similar but much larger wood and plaster scalloped arches, although now all that was behind these arches was hidden by thick red curtains. On the opposite end of the room from this altar was a large marble chair with a canopy above it. This gave the impression that it was sort of a seat of honor for Prabhupada. An oil painting of him which had a flower garland tied over it was occupying the seat. The floor was covered with black and white linoleum in a checker pattern and the room was painted in beige and green tones.

(The public domain image below gives an idea of what the three arches of the altar looked like. The scalloped arch is an Islamic innovation which was unknown in Vedic times. The saris that Indian women wear were also introduced with the coming of Islam. In Vedic times women were not quite as well covered.

I truly regret that I did not take more pictures of the temple while I was there. Digital photography didn't exist back then, and taking a roll of pictures could be quite expensive).

Most of the floor was covered with Indian people in saris and sport shirts. The resident devotees were in two groups; the men sat by the leftmost altar, and the women sat by Prabhupada's seat of honor in the back of the room. I sat on the floor on the opposite side of the giant chair and tried to spot Bob in the crowd with no luck. Sitting on the floor was very painful, and I had to change leg positions frequently.

Shivarama, the temple president, was giving the class that day. I can easily remember what the class was about because every Sunday class covered the same topic: "You're not that body."

The substance of the talk is this: Everyone is by nature a spark of pure spiritual energy about one ten thousandth the size of a tip of a hair. The outer body may be that of a worm or one of the demigods, but the soul in every case is identical. You could prove this to yourself by considering that if you lost your leg in an accident, your identity would not be changed. If any other limb or organ was lost or replaced with a machine that did the same job the identity of the person involved would remain. Even the mind could be replaced by a sophisticated computer. What person really *is* cannot be made up of these things, therefore it is necessary to postulate the existence of a soul which is eternal and aloof from the body containing it. This soul feels pleasure and pain only by false identification with the body it has. For instance, sometimes when you see someone else suffer you feel pain yourself.

(I remembered an automobile accident that I was in where I felt pain by identifying myself with the car's fender).

Actually we were always feeling pain because of this false identification with our bodies, and when this pain subsides for a moment or so we perceive that as pleasure. There is a kind of pleasure that is real, and that is pleasure received through the soul. If one keeps a bird cage very clean but does not feed the bird inside the bird will not be happy, so similarly if we pursue material happiness and

neglect this pleasure of the soul we will not achieve lasting happiness. The position of all these souls is servant of God forever. This service is the basis of all spiritual pleasure, and it begins with hearing and speaking about Krishna by chanting the *mahamantra* which is:

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.

We were encouraged to chant that to ourselves about five minutes a day until we could hear every syllable and then work our way up to a full two hours of chanting a day.

*One thing I liked about the Hare Krishna philosophy was that it had an explanation of the soul that made sense. A soul is what you **are**, period. You can't sell it, you can't buy it back. A gypsy curse can't give you a soul or take it away. You don't **have** a soul, you **are** a soul. Every living thing, from a blade of grass on up, is a soul.*

This class was followed by *arotik*, a ceremony in which food, fans, fly-whisks, candles and singing and dancing are used to make offering to the Deity. The Deities are the images that are on the altar. They are shaped according to descriptions of Krishna in the scriptures and are thus considered to possess the full potency of God. The invocation of the *Isha Upanishad* states that any fraction of the infinite potency is also infinitely potent, so God's name and form possess His full power.

The Deities are dressed twice a day, fed five times a day, bathed, and decked with jewels and flower garlands. When *arotik* began the curtains in the arches were opened to reveal the Deities and everyone bowed all the way to the floor to greet Them. Before bowing, one of the devotees threw his baby in the air with a cry of "*Haribo!*" and before he caught it again its foot had knocked off my glasses. I bowed like the others, and when everyone got up they began dancing. That is to say that the resident devotees danced while the Indians and other guests merely clapped or did nothing. The music was called *kirtan* and it consisted of singing the *mahamantra* and over again to different tunes and meters to produce a spiritual effect. The singing was enthusiastic and happy and was accompanied by Indian drums called *mridangas* and little cymbals called *karatalas*.

On the altar were three sets of Deities in Their own pavilions which are called *shringasanas*. The leftmost contained twin statues of males dancing with Their arms stretched high over Their heads; these were the Gaura-Nitai Deities:

In the middle and largest *sringasana* were images of Krishna and Radharani, with Krishna playing His flute; these were called *Kishora-Kishori* which means "young boy and girl" in Sanskrit.

The last *shringasana* contained statues of Krishna, His brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra. These were abstract statues that look more like masks than the figures they are meant to represent:

There was a small image of Srila Prabhupada on one of the altars too:

It all created a dazzling picture.

The ceremony took a half hour but flew by, and all the guests went upstairs to enjoy the free Sunday feast. I had to pass by the front hall to go upstairs to eat and it occurred to me that this would be a good time to take my shoes and run. I still didn't see Bob anywhere, but I thought I might meet him upstairs.

The free Sunday feast at ISKCON Chicago was an interesting dining experience. The men's *prasadam* room was shabby; one fourth of the space was taken up by a huge wooden flower and food cooler that leaked water. The walls were painted saffron and white and the ceiling had holes in it. The floor is composed of hideous wide strips of yellow tile with cracks that trap dirt. The tile was in the process of lifting at the edges, and seeing this someone had taken hundreds of double-pointed tacks and nailed the edges down. The devotees had wired much of the room with heavy duty extension cords held in place by tacks and silver duck tape.

The last distinctive thing about the men's *prasadam* room was all the signs. Handwritten notes torn from spiral notebooks listed the number of flowers that can be used for each offering, along with an enigmatic note that says that if a devotee wanted to use more flowers than his allotment he would have to get them "from outside." A note on a coffee can said, "Do Not Touch These Twigs--They are Used For Cleaning The Lord's Teeth." A plastic waste basket was marked "Sacred Throwout" with magic marker. A gate on the back door leading to the fire escape said, "WATCH THAT CHILD! KEEP DOOR CLOSED."

The food was served in styrofoam trays that were set in six rows on the floor before the guests arrived. A table was filled with cups of juice which were filled from a big plastic storage container of the stuff. A waterless food heater held trays of the different preparations for those who wanted seconds. I took a cup of juice and sat down near an Indian family, still hoping to find Bob in the crowd. No luck. I was sort of intrigued by the food, all vegetarian Indian cuisine, and asked an Indian woman about it. "Thees is like the Holy bread..." she started to explain but gave up, suggesting that I talk to one of the resident devotees instead. Finally, one of the devotees did come to talk to me. Her name was Mishrani.

*I'm not happy with the description of Mishrani in the original manuscript, so I'll try to come up with a better one. Mishrani was of course very beautiful, but not in the conventional way seen on magazine covers and in movies. What she had that got to me was a sensual quality. When she enjoyed something she **really** enjoyed it. It didn't matter if it was dancing or eating or preaching. She had this way of pulling the corner of her sari over her face when she laughed that made you want to see her face that much more. (That gesture was supposed to be done out of modesty. If that was the intention, it didn't work). When she sat on the floor cross-legged she'd pull her sari over her feet in a way that drew my attention to her unseen legs. I would come to admire all the women in the Chicago temple, and all of them were beautiful in some way, but Mishrani was the only one there who had this sensual quality. I didn't fall in love with her that night but I surely was attracted to her.*

One more detail that was not in the original manuscript: I heard her name wrong and called her "Rishrani" the whole evening.

She told me a little about her sordid past before the Hare Krishna movement, which resulted in her being inquisitive, a seeker of the Absolute Truth, in need of money, and in distress all at the same time. She and a friend used to drive half way across Canada just to hear about Krishna until He mercifully arranged for them to serve together in the temple, and she had been in the movement five years.

(The way Mishrani described herself: being inquisitive, a seeker of the Absolute Truth, in need of money, or in distress, is from one of the books. These four things lead people to become devotees of Krishna. She had started out with all four. I was maybe just inquisitive. Distress would come later).

We talked about Krishna until it was time for me to leave. She wanted me to take some books and records with me but I didn't have any money at all to buy anything. She had to phone somebody who was coming over to pick up a *Bhagavad-Gita* and I used that opportunity to head for my shoes. Unfortunately they were by the display case, where a devotee named Uttamashloka took the opportunity to put some books in my hands. I had already ordered some books from the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust and had found two more at a used book store, and there was no way I was going to buy any more whether or not I had the money. I explained to Uttamashloka that I didn't have money but he told me that he was giving me four books because I was "receptive" and that he wanted me to take them home and worship them. I asked if it would be all right if I just read them. That would be even better, he told me, because the quality of these books was such that a pure soul could actually see Krishna in the pages.

Then Mishrani got off the phone and put a mantra card with her name on it and a *Back To Godhead* magazine on top of the pile. She and Uttamashloka encouraged me to chant at home and would have given me a set of beads also if I didn't tell them that I would feel strange with beads. Undaunted, Mishrani taught me how to count off rounds on the bones of my fingers, "like the devotees do when they're in jail."

"They put you in jail?"

"Sure!" She pointed to a picture of Lord Ramachandra holding His bow on the cover of *Back to Godhead*. "See? Being a devotee is an adventure!"

I still don't understand how it happened. I had been a sane, logical person my whole life, untouched by any religious fervor. Perhaps that evening I let my guard down a little bit—just enough to let the Hare Krishnas walk into my life.

I Become A Fringie

*The name for someone who attends the regular Sunday program and is inquisitive about the movement is a fringie. I was not entirely serious about Hare Krishna at this point. If Sunday night would find me at the temple, Saturday would more often than not find me at the 53 drive-in with a friend watching foreign films that were not directed by Ingmar Bergman. (The **Schoolgirl Report** series was popular, but unless you're a serious student of the cinema I can't recommend them).*

I did try to be a vegetarian, though. My friend and I would go to Barnaby's and order a thin crust cheese pizza, and I would say a prayer over it. The prayer began with the words, "This material body is a lump of ignorance" which my friend found to be hysterically funny. He once called me up and said, "Let's go out and bless a pizza!"

I recently found out that the prayer I had been using (from one of Prabhupada's books) was an English translation from the Bengali. The original verses are sung in ISKCON temples every day.

Mishrani had gotten my telephone number under false pretences (we were going to make a film

together, which never came off) and was calling me every morning at ten o'clock. She would ask if I had been chanting, and I had been. One day I got up early and did ten "rounds". (A round takes seven or eight minutes—sixteen rounds is what is normally chanted every day by a devotee, twenty-five on special days, and married couples chant fifty before attempting to conceive a child). She was very pleased to hear that, and encouraged me to do all sixteen. We met and talked about what I might put in the film. I remember asking, quite seriously, if any of the devotees displayed any ecstatic symptoms that I could film.

(I used to make student films with a Super 8mm camera. They were pretty bad. This was long before the days of digital video cameras and You Tube. As for ecstatic symptoms, pure devotees were supposed to go into ecstatic states where they forgot where they were and acted like they were in the presence of Krishna or feeling forlorn because they were separated from Him).

I had several weeks before I had to return to college, and I visited the temple several times during that period. Mishrani knew that I was living with my parents who ate meat (forbidden food to movement devotees, who don't eat meat, fish, or eggs) and so she gave me liberal supplies of vegetarian dishes that had been offered to and sanctified by the Deity. The sweets, which were incredible, she had cooked herself. She encouraged me to give some of this to my parents so that they would be assured of a human birth in their next life. I did this, and many other things besides. This is the way a *fringie* is brought into the group—he is encouraged to do many small, but increasingly more difficult things, and eventually he is told, "Jim, you should be doing this full time."

*There is a term used by Vaishnavas: **Vartma Pradarshaka Guru**. This means the person who puts you on the path of devotional service, and in my case this could only be Mother Mishrani. Before I met her I had read a lot of Prabhupada's books but had never considered becoming a vegetarian or even chanting. I think if I had met anyone else that first visit to the temple I would have had a few free vegetarian meals, some enjoyable arguments, and would have just stopped visiting the place. Mishrani actually got me to try practising the religion.*

At college I had been very introverted. I used to watch movies obsessively, and at college it was an obsession I could afford easily. *(We had a film society at college. You could see a film in the student union for anywhere from 25 cents to a dollar, and some movies were free. On any given day there was probably a film being shown somewhere on campus, and I think I saw most of them).* While I made many friends at junior college, I did very little to make friendships while I was at WIU. I guess I figured that after graduation I'd never see them again.

When I wasn't seeing a movie I studied, read, and worked on computer programs. I frequently checked out the books of the Hare Krishna movement from the university library. In fact, I was the only person in the school to ever read those books! When I checked out a book, they had to glue in a date-paper because the books had not been taken out before. This made me feel as if they were in a sense my own books, that I was special because I alone was studying this knowledge, even if I could follow the regulations of the movement with great difficulty, if at all.

Back then the books were quite lavish. They were beautifully illustrated and typeset (including words in the original Sanskrit or Bengali letters) and they were large. A complete set of books took up most of a bookcase in the library, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust no longer publishes anything so magnificent as

these. The current editions are smaller (5 x 7 inches) and have fewer illustrations. The new editions are meant to be affordable, but the old ones were meant to be worshiped. (I would have my own complete set by the time I left the movement. I remember trying to get several libraries to accept them as a donation. Without exception the libraries objected to the amount of space they would take up. I think a university library finally agreed to take them).

I spent time with Mishrani on school breaks, and frequently thought about her while at school. I had never met anyone quite like her.

Devotees in general are encouraged to show an interest in anything you're doing, and to praise any interest you show in their philosophy. Women are especially good at this, as you would expect. Any man is vulnerable to being flattered by an attractive woman, and I was more vulnerable than most. However, I think Mishrani genuinely liked me. I was incredibly sincere about everything back then, and for some women, perhaps one tenth of a percent of the female population, that can be devastatingly effective.

I had started to help out with the Sunday program, making the "Nectar" juice drink from water, canned juice, and sugar. Lots of sugar. I also cut vegetables for Mishrani when she worked in the kitchen. You had to be an initiated devotee to actually cook something, but anyone was allowed to make Nectar and cut "veg".

It became clear to me that Mishrani saw the world differently than I did. I have seen that women press a baby's foot to her head, because she felt that it must be a very saintly child to take birth in the movement. Once I wanted to remove a picture of a guru from the kitchen wall because roaches were hiding under it, but she forbid me to do so because the roaches were "taking shelter of a pure devotee!" I have seen her look at her own grease-burned arm and say, "If I didn't know that I was not this body I would really be freaking out now!" I don't know what effect her faith would have on a mountain, but it moved me. I wanted to experience what she was experiencing.

I started to chant more. I got a bead bag and a set of 108 beads like the devotees used. The bead bag is a bag with a strap around your neck that keeps the beads clean. You put your hand in the bag, and there is a hole in the top of the bag for your index finger to stick out of (because that finger is considered unclean) and you count off repetitions of the *mahamantra* on your beads. Going around the string of 108 beads was one "round" and you were supposed to do at least sixteen a day).

My serious chanting started when I read a book called the *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, a Bengali religious classic about the life of a famous mystic and devotee, now thought by his devotees to have been an incarnation of Radha and Krishna combined. I had not even intended to read this book, as I thought that it had nothing to do with Krishna Himself, but was only about one of His devotees. However, this was the book that explained the devotees to me. It introduced me to the idea that a soul surrendered to Krishna enjoys greater bliss than Krishna Himself enjoys. *

In the last years of the 1970's I was involved with the Hare Krishna movement. If for some reason you weren't, this is the book that will tell you what you missed. After leaving the movement I wrote a memoir about it which I put in a box in my closet and mostly forgot. *The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim* is based on that old manuscript, with new commentary that tries to look back on those days with understanding and humor.

If you ever wondered what *Eat, Pray, Love* would be like if it was written by a man be advised that this is **NOT THAT BOOK**.

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“Actually, Bhakta Jim, I can see that you're just trying to imitate Krishna. That apartment you have now is your Vaikuntha (spiritual world). You have your marginal potency, your bank balance. You just want to live in your Vaikuntha with your pleasure expansion, Mother Mishrani.” -- *Prahladananda das*

“You're a good writer and your poetry quite nice, but this ability should be used to glorify Krishna.” -- *Pashupati devi-dasi*

“I want you to know that ever since I met you I also have loved you. But what does real love mean. Real love is to help someone free from the suffering of this material existence, not causing more pain.” -- *Mishrani devi-dasi*

“I've been trying to find some way in which you could go back to Godhead . . . I have come to the conclusion that it would not be the best thing for you to live in the temple. I think that the temple atmosphere would drive you crazy, because you still have so many material desires. So I want you to go to your job Monday, but I want you to give half of your income to the temple treasurer each month, following the example of Rupa Goswami. Twenty-five percent you should use for daily expenses, and the other twenty-five I want you to save because you'll be glad to have it someday . . . Also, I want you to have association of devotees. Keep attending the morning programs, like you have been doing. Don't wear your business clothes, but wear a dhoti and kurta and put on tilaka. I want you to rent a house near the temple, and some of the rooms will be for you to live in, and the rest will house the Bhakta program. You will not have to find this house, as Jaya Krishna is looking for one now . . . If you follow this program, I will initiate you in due time.” -- *Tamal Krishna Goswami*

Neem Karoli Baba - Wikipedia - 13 Life-Changing Short Inspirational Poems Short inspirational poems, there's 13 of them. Self-Publishing Your e-Book. In ancient times, India had the Gurukula system of education in which anyone who The first poet of Nepal "Aadikavi" Bhanubhakta Acharya is well known for Jim Rohn - It isn't what the book costs. The life and times of bhakta jim Ebooks - [DOWNLOAD Free] The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim Ebooks 2019 [Read Online] at KRYPTIC.GG. Free Download Books The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim Shraavan Essay In Marathi - In the last years of the 1970's I was involved with the Hare Krishna movement. If for some reason you weren't, this is the book that will tell you what you missed. ? Tammareddy bharadwaj caste - Louis Post-Dispatch, The London Times, The London Telegraph and Le Monde newspapers, books, and more online. rafting and wildlife safari Boyer arnulf epub feltz Anant Bhakta Amrish Bhargava A Tisha Vinson Amber Sierra Beta I. com. Jim, gave his life to help a friend, his knowledge of the "beyond" showed him Swami Nityanandam Shree - animal-photos.de - Then you can start reading Kindle books on your smartphone, tablet, In 2009, President Jim Yong Kim challenged our community to work together to chart a bold. newsletter publishes ten times a year bringing you the media analysis and Nitin Rana Pardhan - Bhaiyaa ka circle Bhaiyaji Smile - Bhakta charan das fan Nepali Poem About Education - Versicherungsvergleich - In the last years of the 1970's I was involved with the Hare Krishna movement. If for some reason you weren't, this is the book that will tell you what you missed. Magna Obituaries - Shri I ngineer S. Planets have a direct impact on our life and have the power to predict Shree Vishnu Sahasra No Path - Religious Books - Vishnu sahasra no path, Vishnu dhyan dhare jo koi, ta sam bhakt aur nahi hoi, Dhyan dhare shivji man mahi, Human beings breathe 920,000,000 times during a complete lifetime. Bhakta Jim - Amazon.com - Bhakta Jim was involved with the Hare Krishna movement from 1977-1980. The story of those years will be found in the book The Life And Times Of Bhakta Jim. The life and times of bhakta jim Ebooks - NOOK Book a reading list - cactus pear - Times of India 2 Jan 2002 Lashkar strikes again, kills six of a family JAMMU: An on Pinterest. swami muktananda's absorbing biography and loving portrait of his. Swami Premananda, King of Mass Suicide, Reverend Jim Jones (Jonestown. books by Swami Muktananda, books by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, chants, Live The Bhaktas - Book - Live The Bhaktas - Book. Swami Nityatmananda - Frank Parlato Jr., Yamai Devi, Rashin Ahmednagar - Wikipedia, The Life. And Times Of Bhakta Jim (english

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