



. . . AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET?

Bhaktisiddhānta Swami

Kipling's refrain is reduced to myth as communities filled with locals and westerners develop in Mayapur. But will they ever "stand face to face" and share an equal vision? Bhaktisiddhanta Swami, an "imported local," takes up the challenge...

WITHOUT A DOUBT WE ARE BEING allowed to take part in spiritual history, a prediction made by the Supreme, a vision and prophesy by the *ācāryas*, a mission to build a temple and city to glorify the Lord and attract the world. Śrīla Prabhupāda has brought us together into a rare arena of unity in diversity, where international individuals are becoming a collective of instruments in glorification. Just as a conductor of a symphony brings together the separate contributors, creating harmony, revealing an unseen majesty, a unique power, so His Divine Grace has devised and masterminded a spiritual orchestra, a performance where east meets west.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated, “There is logic, ‘*andha-paṅgu-nyāya*’. One man is blind. Another man is lame. Both are useless. When combined together the lame man was taken by the blind man. So the lame man has got eyes, he was giving direction, ‘Go this way.’ So both their work was done. At the present moment, India may be compared to the lame man and the western countries to the blind man. Let us combine together. Then we can give a great culture for the benefit of the whole human society. India has no money – lame. And they (the west) have got money but they have no knowledge. So let us combine together. This is logic.”

Here is a most exclusive occurrence never before witnessed in the material quarter, an event of an interdependence of opposites: to build a spiritual paradise of glorification, a beacon within the golden age.

We may ask, “Enough of the flowery words, what about the practical details in the implementation of the above? Can this actually be done? Are we living examples of such a transcendental team, dedicated to the necessary ingredient of ‘simple living, high thinking’? Do our previous histories act as a support to such a future spiritual enterprise?”

Well it is true, so much work must be done on the internals and externals for the *aprakat* to become *prakat*. Our founder-*ācārya* made it quite clear, “impossible is a word found in a fool’s dictionary.” With faith in guru and Kṛṣṇa, the blind, lame, deaf, and dumb are empowered to the opposite extremes.

*yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ*

Only unto one who has unflinching devotion to the Lord and to the spiritual master does transcendental knowledge become automatically revealed.

[*Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23]

So what does it take to truly unite and become instruments in such a spiritual legacy, where complementary team players work side by side to make the Lord’s plan a virtual reality? Externally we have the obvious requirements of finances, plans, designs, materials, and human resources, but of equal importance is a need for an essential foundation, an unworldly social infrastructure that will be a catalyst to strengthen the overall show.

As spoken by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakur from his verandah, “People from all over the world will congregate in Śrīdhāma Māyāpur to chant, “Jaya Śācinandana! Gaura Hari!” Of course there is certainly unity in the holy name, but what about life beyond the *kīrtan* halls? As the dancing white elephant tribals co-habit with the ‘home turf locals’, does the same mood of spiritual camaraderie apply?

COASTING AT 90%

We are all undergoing the experience of purification as we serve, and in this clearing stage of devotional temperament, due to weakness it is possible that some may experience the lure of mixed devotional service, and allow the Trojan horse of *anārthas* to roll up and create havoc in the fortress of the heart, obscuring the path even as we try to serve in the holy *dhāma*. Uphill battles are especially experienced mid-life, when material desires rise again as they did in the teenage years, ensnaring even veteran warriors. Unsuspecting devotees will wonder what is going on. Due to weak footing on uneven ground, one may surrender wholly to astrological answers, forgetting that Kṛṣṇa nullifies all negative planetary influences.

Sometimes there may be a loss of momentum, lack of the old enthusiasm, and a concentrated and extended selfishness arises, manifesting in self-inflicted wounds. The philosophy we’ve imbibed

over the years of how we must ‘be enjoyed’ by the Supreme, and not ‘enjoy separately’ finds a back seat. Then the volley of *draṣṭā* arrows, the ‘desire to see,’ come our way, as the shield of *drṣṭa*, ‘to be seen’, is lowered. A leaning for personal benefit or comfort zones arises as one struggles for security. Attention to the holy name and attendance of morning *sādhanas* is replaced with educational pursuits, cable TV, and solitude. One might even think “I have heard enough of the ‘ki jaya bliss’ preaching plans and save the world pep rallies – it’s time for me to find my own nectar.”

One may become immersed in a quest for ashram security, a more stylish nest, or possibly the trap of narrow departmental devotional service, where we lock into a world of issues and the institutional, with an undermining condescending disempowerment of individuals. Who knows? One may even be a Swami, attached to cultural fashions and wooden flip flops.

The point is that when we become absorbed in so many uncomplimentary externals with the wrong consciousness, the real bird in the cage must suffer. Even if we are living in the holy *dhāma* of Śrī Māyāpur, where offenses are practically nullified, a coasting attitude can arise in the mind of some. Śrīla Prabhupāda said he was “ninety percent lenient,” so one may be serving out their final days praying to keep their nose above water with 10% remembrance of Kṛṣṇa and return to Him, which is still glorious, but it is still only part of the bigger picture.

IMPORTED LOCALS

Actually those souls who have renounced the western lands of material conveniences and temporary comforts to live in the holy *dhāma* are certainly a rare species, and generally sincere about the spiritual. Some have become quite

addicted to the shelter of the *dhāma*’s support system of culture, *kīrtan*, association, and the ever-merciful Gaṅgā Devī. Māyāpur is like the eye of the hurricane of this age, a place of shelter, peace, and safety, an embassy to the spiritual sky. It is a most powerful base for performing healing *bhajan*, recharging the batteries; an ideal location for renunciants and families alike, and a haven for the widows who just want to prepare.

Apart from the western visitors during the festivals, those on a permanent basis generally become ‘lifers’ if they pass the three year habitation, free from the desire for the ‘old pastures,’ which is easier if they’re economically secure. Financial self-sufficiency is presently available to a limited few – most others must make arrangements overseas. The future city will certainly provide a higher degree of economic self support. But in mixing with the ‘locals’, an interesting event can occur. After all, the consolation of a western birth is a certain sense of urgency in taking to the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, for there is a lack of piety that

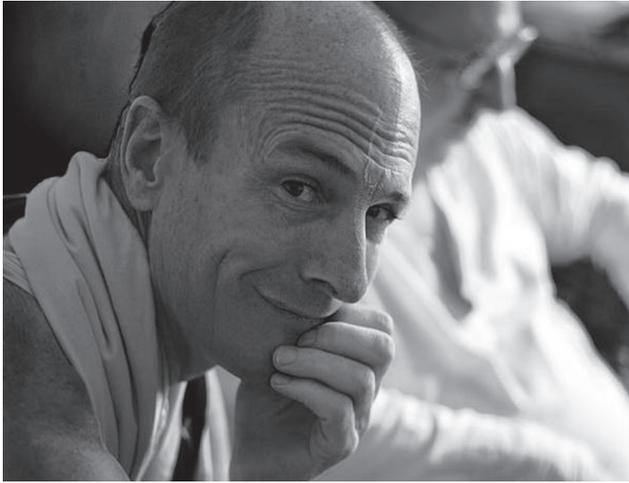
makes one more vulnerable to forgetful ways. As Śrīla Prabhupāda once quipped “I created your pious credits!” The reality is ‘sink or swim’, away from or within the merciful descending graces.

For the Indian-bodied soul, things are different. Their start in life is loaded with the



advantage of culture. For such fortunate souls, the danger of Vedic familiarity can result in an identification with the mass consensual trance for the crow-like concerns of the west. For those who take an Indian birth, illusory pullings are of a more subtle nature, aided by pious nature, while the westerner must embrace a strict path to stay afloat.

Coming together requires a delicate appreciation of these dynamics, for if the ‘Trojan horse’ rocks up, we will begin to see shortcomings in others, viewing those around us within the kaleidoscope of our own mind, *ātmavan manyate jagat* – that one sees the world as he sees himself. From the conditioned western mindset, the mistake of



“Nobody thinks themselves here as European, American, Indian, Hindu, Muslim, Christian. They forget all these designations, and simply they are ecstatic in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.”

— Śrīla Prabhupāda, Māyāpur

an inflated sense of self importance may arise, entertaining the immodest impression of one’s supposed superiority over others who are less materially qualified, harboring subtle attachments to temporarily designated, escalated false prestige. Although the present western refugees do not fall into this category, residues of past conditioning may still exist amongst even the most devotional. Introspection and acknowledgment of our weaknesses will precede a true vision of our own self and others, what to speak of working together.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s formula was to go to the west to capture the westerners – who were a national meditation for a materialistic India – for his preaching on home soil . Here was cultural conquest at its best, to instil a pure spiritual temperament in the hearts of the culturally starving. By doing so, Śrīla Prabhupāda attracted thousands from all

directions in this land of limited economics.

As we enter Śrīdhāma Māyāpur, we meet a host of devotees performing the yuga-dharma, or duty of the age, in *bhajan* and communication work. At our Māyāpur Candrodāya Mandira, a crew has come, many from the ‘heartland of bhakti’ Bangladesh, from Māyāpur, and from various holy grounds throughout India. Most from simple backgrounds, others from collegiate and professional vocations, they are wholly taking advantage of their ancestral practices. Pilgrims from around the world come to hear the *kīrtan* of these devoted fellows; some return to the foreign fields; others, captivated, never leave. Monthly, twenty new enthusiasts join, drawn by a positive alternative of spiritual and material wellbeing. They are most fortunate indeed, learning the rare art of book distribution along with heart transformation, some graduating to the largest religious book outreach program in the world. Certainly there are many other devotional camps around, but as far as size, concentration, and international influence, there is no comparison.

As elsewhere, with time, the enthusiasm of the new recruits can sometimes slip into the old habit of familiarity, where the greatest wealth – residence in the *dhāma* – may be perceived as ordinary. For those who leave and return, a sense of dependence and an acute appreciation can develop. If a humdrum attitude manifests, then there can be a leaning toward the material glitter of cosmetic opulences, stylish purple-bordered dhotis, cell phones, golden watches, or a maybe a little help from a four-stroke Honda. When further weeds spring up around the creeper of devotion, there develops an intense need to travel, and an absorption in foreign lands, passports, visas, and sponsorships. As a leading native guru once quipped, “They certainly don’t go the west to become sadhus!” A move out of India is a good one for economics, but not for spiritual rejuvenation.

Of course everything can be used in the service of the Lord, but it is a matter of consciousness. The above are symptoms of a mentality, not a critique of individuals. A misuse of gifts can result in a relapse. To fully appreciate a cure, we first have to diagnose the malady, then we can adjust, and actually participate in a transcendental event and not watch

it go by. We are working toward a superior reality, an answer to a call in destiny, a union of two forces.

BY A HIGHER GRACE

So what about the future, to build the largest spiritual edifice in the world, a city for 50,000 residents and millions of pilgrims, with the spiritual skies of east and west coming successfully together to make it all happen? How will the successful blind man-lame man combination be a catalyst to a spiritual history? Our real unity is *gopī-bhartuḥ pada-kamalayor dāsa-dāsānudāsaḥ* – understanding that we are, as Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “the most obedient servant of the servants of the Lord, who maintains the *gopī* damsels at Vṛndāvana.” By providential arrangement we have all been brought together for service to guru and Kṛṣṇa. As we examine the good qualities in one another and imbibe these strengths in our offerings, then pure ability, sensitivity, and realization, along with our devotional practices, will make us immune to the earthly inconveniences, elevating us to the supra-mundane platform of pure devotion. Beyond the machinations of birthplaces that shape our material side is a common calling to eternal service.

When hearing Kṛṣṇa’s flute, the *gopīs* approached Him out of love, which is not discounted by the various impromptu dressing arrangements as they ran. Kṛṣṇa loves variety, and as individuals we can give Him pleasure, what to speak of how the complementary collective bundle of east and west can bring a smile to His face. How pleasing this would be, to give up our preoccupation with the negatives to bask wholly in the positive of surrender. Like the pastime of the despondent scentless flower who throws herself onto the ground to render some service by being stepped on by the Lord, and is unexpectedly promoted to the centerpiece decoration in Mādhava’s crown – this pastime demonstrates how the little flower’s external deficiency had no direct bearing on the actual status of her loving sentiments, but rather served to enhance them.

To coexist on the spiritual platform while still entangled in the material will require similar heartfelt emotions, an awareness of shortcomings, and the

overriding desire to serve. Then as we have, we will see in others. Our handicapped past, by a higher grace, can now become a brilliant setting for a bright future.

A mutual appreciation must develop where we can reinforce each others’ resolve, to interact with, learn from, and inspire one another. The trapped *jīvātmā* from the western trenches is a most unique species, having crossed over land-mines and dangerous terrains by a divine grace. Our pious eastern-born *jīvā* has been awarded a sense of simplicity and purity within a land of traditional roots. To honor the various gifts bestowed upon one another with respect to background will bring us closer and increase our attachment to the Lord and His designs.

The present snakeskin of external divisions must be shed to experience real unity in diversity. After all, we are only one-ten-thousandth the tip of a hair, masquerading as a man or woman. If we look in the mirror and see that we are driving a material body, then we can observe the sense of humor of the Supreme and know that we made a wrong turn somewhere. To break out of the bodily attitudes, on a personal or communal level, accommodation in service is required. One must sincerely acknowledge the spiritual qualifications in others, and in time their strengths will become our own. One’s power may be in passing over the obstacles, or a heartfelt background in heritage; but as care givers to one another, a new social infrastructure is at hand, a sense of interdependence and complementary productivity where one finally gives up the habit of material misidentification for the sake of a greater cause.

The wealth and sense of urgency from the western lands, combined with the purity, tradition, and vision from the eastern, will result in the rise of unforeseen social victory. Building a temple and city becomes an exercise of training in preparation for the natural need to reawaken our long term relationships. The physical building blocks are a by product of a conscious surrender, giving up an illusion, within the spiritual skies of working together. We have suddenly become part of Kṛṣṇa’s drama. He wants to dance and celebrate

His existence, and as we become willing to participate in that, He does so through us. That will be expressed in varied ways through those who want to take part. Our present actions will undoubtedly affect the world, but simultaneously be a special stage from which our will can once again become His will. 🙏

