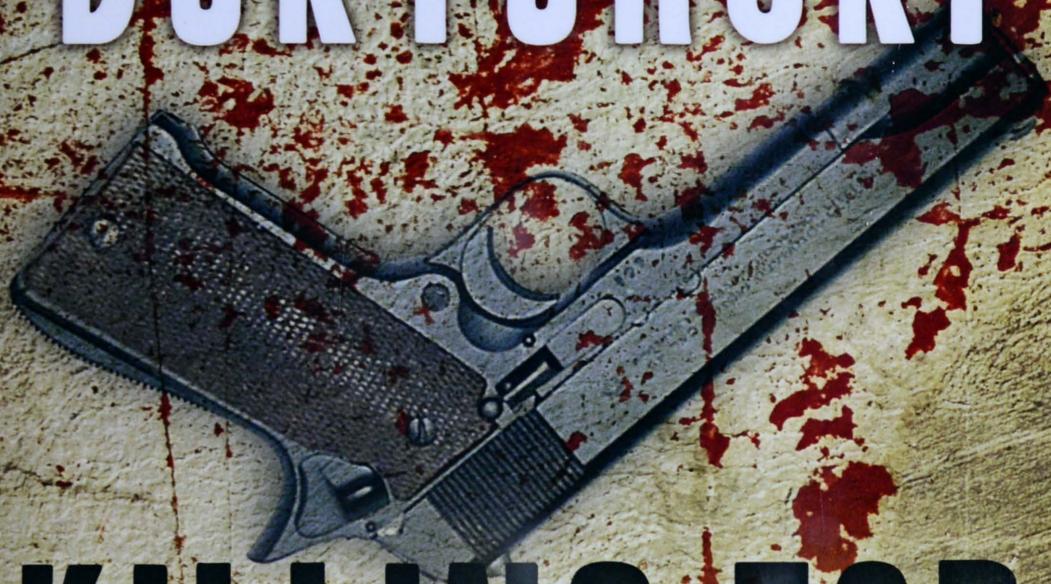


**HENRY
DOKTORSKI**



**KILLING FOR
KRISHNA**

THE DANGER OF DERANGED DEVOTION

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THE DANGER OF
DERANGED DEVOTION

Henry Doktorski

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*This book is dedicated to all who have been traumatized by
deranged devotion, especially my godbrothers and godsisters,
in the hope that, with a much fuller understanding and
perspective, we may all better heal.*

“Do you think Arjuna was simply meditating on Krishna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra? . . . No, he was fighting. He was killing for Krishna. He was thinking of all the soldiers he had to kill for Krishna.” —His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder/Acharya ISKCON, cited by Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), *Srila Prabhupada-Lilamrita*, Vol. 5, “Let There Be A Temple.”

Cover photo: a Star Model P .4 5caliber hand gun; the gun which killed Sulochan dasa (Steven Bryant).

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Dedication

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHY for so long I have continued my efforts to discover and share the hidden story about Kirtanananda Swami and New Vrindaban. It was, after all, some sixteen years ago (2002) when I first began researching the history of New Vrindaban and writing about my findings.

One important reason why I have maintained my enthusiasm for studying New Vrindaban history is because Krishna (as I see it) so kindly gifted me the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive—tens of thousands of pages of New Vrindaban and ISKCON publications, trial transcripts, letters, confidential documents, and more—for safekeeping (see the “Acknowledgments” section in this book).

I believe there is a reason why the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive came under my protection. Should I be a miser and keep the inside story about New Vrindaban all to myself? Not at all; I consider it my sacred duty to share the classified information in this priceless treasure-trove of ISKCON history with others. During a private darshan, Bhaktipada once quoted to me Luke 12:48, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

But perhaps the most important reason, as I see it, why I have developed a passion for uncovering the unadulterated history of New Vrindaban, is because of the intensity of the love I once-upon-a-time had for my “spiritual master,” and the devastation I experienced when I finally

realized he was a cheater. When one loves someone very much and discovers that one's beloved is a cheater, the emotional trauma can be intense, deep-rooted, and long-lingering.

In my case, discovering what actually happened at New Vrindaban has been therapeutic for me; it has helped to heal my heart. Some godbrothers and sisters have told me that they have found my periodic articles about New Vrindaban history to be beneficial for them. As their long-unanswered questions become answered, their understanding about what happened during a very important and formative time in their lives becomes more complete, and with more complete understanding, they more easily and effectively can heal and move on with their lives.

In essence, this book, and other books which may follow, is about healing, not hurting; about mending, not breaking; about rejuvenating, not injuring. Not all may see it this way, but that is how I see it, and that is how some of my godbrothers and sisters see it. Darkness cannot exist where there is light, and nescience cannot exist where there is knowledge. "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house" (Matthew 5:15). It doesn't hurt anyone to uncover dark, hidden secrets—except perhaps for those who want to keep the dark secrets hidden.

The author

Preface

SOME READERS MAY BE AWARE that, during my spare time, I've been working on a book: a biography of my former ISKCON spiritual master and a history of the New Vrindaban community—*Gold, Guns, and God: Swami Bhaktipada and the West Virginia Hare Krishnas*. It's been quite a few years in the making, but I believe it will be finished and published soon. However, before that monumental work—containing about 108 chapters—is completed, I thought to write a shorter book about the murder of the New Vrindaban resident, the radical dissident Sulochan dasa (Steven Bryant).

Writing about the murder of Sulochan was particularly difficult, because so many eyewitnesses contradicted each other. “Bhaktipada” had one story, Tapahpunja and Radhanath Swamis had another conflicting story, and Dharmatma and Janmastami had yet another story. Who was speaking the truth and who was concealing the truth? About a decade ago, when I first was confronted by these apparently irreconcilable differences, I became discouraged, and wrote:

I cannot in most cases ascertain whether my interviewees are (1) speaking honestly, truthfully and factually, or (2) . . . attempting to cover up their own sins and crimes with sanitized versions of actual events. I am not a detective; I really don't have the time or inclination to spend the rest of my life trying to find out what really happened at New Vrindaban. . . .

I am tired of this never-ending process. Each new lead unearths a plethora of unbelievable atrocities, which in most cases I cannot positively confirm, as when I attempt to interview persons who were implicated in alleged activities they either refuse to speak about it to me, or deny such events ever occurred. And then some others become angry at me for repeating what I have heard which defames the “great souls” who built the [New Vrindaban] community, and then they utter threats to me. Do I really need this?

While some godbrothers encouraged me to continue my research, others attempted to discourage me. In a 2008 letter to the author, one godbrother (a man serving life in prison for the brutal murder of two devotees) admonished me: “Persons in your state of consciousness, lack of Krishna consciousness, would not be capable of understanding. . . . This is simply a frank assessment of fact. . . . For your sake, I just hope you don’t continue with your attempt to publish your book. You can’t see it, but you are riding toward oblivion on Vaishnava *aparadhas* [offenses to Vaishnavas]. You have no standing in these matters, since you are no longer within the family of Vaishnavas. You will gain nothing but pain and suffering in your life.”¹

Although I was discouraged for a time, I did not give up my quest, and I thought, “If I am patient, perhaps Krishna, the dispeller of darkness, will illuminate the truth.” My patience has been rewarded, for recently, in November 2016, I had a breakthrough in this regard: the pieces of the puzzle fell together and the picture became clear and focused. With the arrival of these insights, the cloud of illusion had finally lifted, just as the damp New Vrindaban morning fog is burned away by the arrival of the sun. Years ago, Bhaktipada was fond of quoting Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.

After more than three decades, it seems we have finally uncovered most of the facts and dispelled the persistent fictions regarding the conspiracy

to murder Sulochan. I believe my recent analysis is sound, and now I offer these insights to the Vaishnava community at large, and to any others who are interested to learn about the history of ISKCON and the New Vrindaban community and the danger of deranged devotion.

One of my friends, after reading my manuscript, thought I wanted to see Radhanath in prison. That is not true at all. I have no personal animosity towards Radhanath, nor to anyone else who was involved in the plot to murder Sulochan. I have only fond memories of the times I spent with Radhanath, Janmastami, Kuladri, Dharmatma, Hayagriva, Tirtha and Tapahpunja during (and after) my fifteen years as a resident of New Vrindaban.

For example, when I first went to live at the brahmacari ashram at the Old Vrindaban Farm in the summer of 1978, I used to take off work early to play harmonium and sing bhajans at the 6 p.m. *aroti*. There was no Bhakta Program during those days; no “gradual submersion” into the daily life of a surrendered soul. The philosophy at New Vrindaban was “Sink or Swim.” At the Old Vrindaban Farm, Radhanath dasa Brahmacari was the full-time pujari, and he was always friendly to me. I found him to be a renounced, simple, gentle and soft-spoken devotee. He was also a bit sickly, and was afflicted with painful boils from time to time, as I recall. I heard he took a vow, at Kirtanananda Swami’s instigation, to never leave that place; to worship Radha-Vrindaban Nath on that isolated hilltop in the Allegheny Plateau surrounded by fields, forests, and grazing cows (and an occasional angry bull)—where Srila Prabhupada first visited New Vrindaban in 1969—for the rest of his life.

When Kirtanananda ordered him to become a sannyasi in 1982, Radhanath was beside himself. I remember the expression on his face; such suffering, such pain. He did not want to take sannyasa, he did not think himself worthy, and he did everything in his power to get out of it, but finally he accepted his fate. There is no doubt in my mind, that of all the dozens and dozens of devotees Bhaktipada awarded with sannyasa, Radhanath turned out to be the best of them all.

Radhanath was always gentle and mild, and averse to violence. One year there was a big infestation of gluttonous groundhogs who were devouring everything in the garden. Kirtanananda couldn't spare a "useful" devotee to do groundhog guard duty, so he ordered Radhanath—Bhaktipada sometimes called him "useless"—to take a shotgun and sit in the garden, and if he saw a groundhog, to kill it. I heard that Radhanath sat in the garden all day like a scarecrow and saw many groundhogs, but he did not want to hurt them, so he fired the gun over their heads to scare them.

Janmastami has also been friendly toward me since the summer of 1979, when I taught music at the Nandagram School. When I first met him, he was carrying firewood into the school basement, and he went out of his way to point out the poison ivy so I wouldn't get a rash. In the early 1980s, I used to visit Kuladri in his Bahulaban office sometimes when I was back from the "pick." He was always on the phone, but he was also always friendly to me.

Dharmatma was my traveling sankirtan leader for six or seven years (about 1980-1986). During that time he never gave me any reason to doubt his integrity. During those days before the invention of cell phones, I counted on him to answer his landline phone at any hour of the day or night, in case I got separated from my partner, arrested, and needed to get bailed out of jail. Dharmatma was always dependable. I trusted him.

I didn't get to know Hayagriva until 1989, when he was bedridden due to bone cancer. (I was taught early on to avoid devotees who did not follow the principles strictly.) But at that time, he lived at Bhaktipada's house, and whenever I visited Bhaktipada (several times a week), I would always spend time chatting with Hayagriva, who used to make me laugh with his humor, despite his painful condition.

I became friendly with Tirtha Swami not until December 2002, when I first wrote to him in prison asking to hear his side of the story of Sulochan's murder for my New Vrindaban history book manuscript. He replied, and we exchanged more than two hundred letters from

2002 to 2017. I became his editor, and helped him edit and publish five books which he wrote in prison, which were published by the New Vrindaban Prison Ministry. I created a website for him and served as his webmaster. ²

I used to collect money from donors (mostly from Lokavarnattama dasa: Lawrence Burstein) and purchase \$400 to \$700 worth of food for Tirtha, which I used to pack and ship to him every Christmas. Once a year he was allowed to receive a food package in prison, and he greatly appreciated the dried soups, dried fruits, granola bars, rolled oats, herbal teas, ghee, honey, nuts, spices and maha-prasadam from New Vrindaban that I sent to him.

I also have fond memories of Tapahpunja dasa Brahmachari taking me out in the parking lots of Ohio and teaching me how to distribute Prabhupada's books. I was never any good at it, but Tapahpunja was always kind to me. Once in the autumn of 1979, after I had been arrested at a concert at the Richfield Coliseum, he bailed me out and asked me what happened. I said a security guard stopped me and asked me if I was going to the concert. I said, "No. I'm just here to distribute books." Then the security guard arrested me for trespassing.

Tapahpunja chastised me, "You fool! You should have said that you were going to the concert! Then he would have simply told you to stop distributing books, and you wouldn't have been arrested!" I felt so bad, but the pained look on my face must have touched Tapahpunja's heart, for then he encouraged me, "That's all right. You are a brahmin, and a brahmin is always truthful."

Tapahpunja was correct in one regard; I like to speak the truth. I like to hear the truth. I do not like to be deceived. I do not like duplicity. I want to find out the truth when the truth is obscured. Perhaps that is why Radhanath Swami appears so prominently in certain sections of this book: the evidence implicates him without question in Sulochan's murder, and yet he consistently denies it.

But witnessing denial is not new to me; it is quite familiar. I saw exactly this same behavior 25 years ago when I confronted my “spiritual master” in October 1993 during a private darshan in his home and point-blank asked him if he had been having illicit sex with teenage boys. Bhaktipada told me that he had never broken any regulative principles since he met Prabhupada. I didn’t believe him, and so I rejected him as my spiritual master.

I knew he was lying because I had done my homework; I had conducted my own investigation. I had talked to some of the New Vrindaban boys and read their testimony. The evidence was overwhelming. As far as I was concerned, Bhaktipada was no guru—he was a show-bottle pretender. Although he did not admit his fault, it was nonetheless important for me to confront him, so I could more easily sever my sentimental attachment to him and become free from his influence.

I suppose, in one sense, I feel a kinship with Sulochan. He could not stand hypocrisy, and he fought against it. I feel the same way. When I detect hypocrisy in a so-called “spiritual” leader, my natural response is to investigate the evidence, and if needed, challenge the hypocrisy. I did it 25 years ago, and I will do it again, if I think it is important.

Similarly, I don’t expect Radhanath Swami to change his story and admit participating in the murder plot, regardless of the evidence against him, any more than I expected Bhaktipada to admit his vices when I confronted him. In this regard, at least, Radhanath and Bhaktipada are birds of the same feather. However, if others want to follow Radhanath, to worship and adore and serve and give their lives to him, that is fine with me. I truly wish him and his followers well. All glories! But I sometimes wonder: Prabhupada said, “a qualified brahmin is always truthful.” (*Krishna Book*, Chapter 52). Can a person who distorts the truth be considered a brahmin?

And why does a person not speak the truth? Could it be because of fear? Could such a person be fearful of others discovering the truth? Could

such a person be afraid of inflicting yet another scandal to Prabhupada's movement, of disappointing thousands of sincere disciples and losing prestige and position as a great, humble, and saintly ISKCON spiritual master? If dishonesty is due to fear, I wonder: can such a person even be considered a sannyasi? Prabhupada says, "A sannyasi . . . must be fearless." (*Srimad-bhagavatam* 2.2.5, purport)

About fifteen years ago, on September 14, 2003, I spoke with a godbrother (Bhaktipada's former chauffeur and director of New Vrindaban purchasing, Priyavrata—Frankie Lyons) in a Chinese restaurant in Wheeling, West Virginia. Although he was not personally involved in the plot to murder Sulochan, he was a witness to important conversations among senior New Vrindaban leaders regarding the murder plot. He told me, "Every time I visit New Vrindaban and Radhanath is there, he avoids me. He doesn't even look me in the eye. I think it's because he knows that I know he was involved in the murder plot, and when he sees me he becomes fearful that I might say something. It seems to me he becomes afflicted with great anxiety."

Interestingly enough, after I discovered—by reading the trial transcripts and speaking with other devotees who had witnessed important conversations—that Radhanath had indeed been involved in the murder of Sulochan, it seemed that he also began avoiding me whenever I visited New Vrindaban and tried to speak with him. I remembered my godbrother's remarks some years earlier about fear and the anxiety it produces.

In my opinion, if a person, even a saintly person, has deep-rooted fears which interfere with his mental composure, peace and happiness, and results in anxiety, that person's well-wishers and friends should attempt to expose the root cause of that fear and help their friend acknowledge the root cause, honestly deal with it, and thereby conquer his fear. That is what a true friend would do; not let a friend continue to deny the root cause of the fear and live the rest of his life in anxiety. Blowing on a boil cannot remove the pus inside; it must be lanced with a sharp knife.

In this regard, I consider myself to be Radhanath Swami's friend; perhaps his best friend. Who among his close associates or disciples would dare to bring up in conversation or by letter such a disturbing and *verboten* topic? Maybe Radhanath will thank me someday, for researching, writing, and publishing this book, if it helps him to acknowledge and conquer his fear, admit the truth, and become an honest disciple of Srila Prabhupada.

One of my Vaishnava friends, a Prabhupada disciple, who remembers those times thirty years ago when fanaticism and violence ruled ISKCON, reminded me, "It's good you are discovering all this information and sharing it with others, but be forewarned: you may need to watch your head. Have you been a little worried about the possible repercussions? Perhaps you should be."

I responded, "I believe those days of fanaticism and violence are long gone." I hope I'm right.

The author

Introduction

HIS DIVINE GRACE SRILA KIRTANANANDA SWAMI BHAKTIPADA (Keith Gordon Ham), the son of a Baptist Minister and one of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's first disciples (and his first sannyasi), ruled the New Vrindaban community with an iron fist; residents had to willingly submit to his authority or get out. It had been that way since 1972 ³ (if not earlier) when Kirtanananda had become the sole authority in the community. This cultish attitude increased when Bhaktipada became the initiating guru for New Vrindaban after Prabhupada passed away in 1977.

Rebellious blasphemers who had doubted or challenged his authority had been threatened (Subal dasa—the editor of the *Brijabasi Spirit*: 1981), ⁴ beaten bloody (Jadurani devi dasi/Judy Koslovsky: 1980), or murdered (Chakradhari dasa/Charles Saint-Denis: 1983). Bhaktipada was not afraid to use violence against undesirable influences. During a New Vrindaban counselor's meeting on June 13, 1984, Bhaktipada said that if community enforcers could “cut off a few hands, a few balls, and shoot a few people,” petty crime would be eliminated at New Vrindaban. ⁵

After the demise of Chakradhari, who was known as a “fringie”—a devotee who doesn't strictly follow the regulative principles—some Brijabasis (New Vrindaban residents) began fearing for their lives. Would they be next? Bhaktipada had grown so powerful and ruthless that most thought only a madman would oppose the undisputed “king” of New

Vrindaban, who boasted, “Not a blade of grass moves in New Vrindaban without my knowledge.”

Yet one such “madman,” a former New Vrindaban resident, had the guts to challenge the biggest and baddest guru in ISKCON. Sulochan dasa (Steven Bryant: 1952-1986) began a crusade against Bhaktipada and the other zonal acharyas (the eleven senior ISKCON leaders who had, in 1978, appointed themselves as successors to Srila Prabhupada) which eventually ended in his murder. However, his death instigated a formidable federal government investigation which eventually ended Bhaktipada’s 26-year reign at New Vrindaban.

After losing the affections of his wife who, he believed, had become captivated by Bhaktipada’s charisma, Sulochan began a campaign to evict the “guru” from his post by publicizing among the worldwide ISKCON community recently-discovered sordid details from Bhaktipada’s past and secret criminal and immoral activities from New Vrindaban’s present. He declared “open season” on Bhaktipada, Ramesvara, and the other ISKCON zonal acharyas, and recommended violent means to dethrone the pretenders. The leading brahmins and ksatriyas at ISKCON temples in West Virginia, Ohio, and Southern California took his threats seriously and, after six months of plotting, succeeded in hunting down the “demon” and killing him.

BHAKTIPADA AND SULOCHAN

Bhaktipada was a star in ISKCON. When he traveled to Hare Krishna temples in the United States and abroad, he was idolized as a celebrity. Brahmacharis (celibate male students) especially fawned over him, eager to render some personal service. They attentively listened to his classes and darshans as if each word from Bhaktipada’s mouth was a drop of nectar falling directly from the spiritual sky. Bhaktipada was respected and admired throughout most of the ISKCON world for at least ten reasons:

- (1) He was regarded as Prabhupada's first and senior-most disciple. He bragged, "Srila Prabhupada said I was first in everything." ^{6 7}
- (2) He was noted for his preaching and debating skills; he was considered a scholar of both the *Bhagavad-gita* and the Bible, and was acknowledged as undefeatable in argument.
- (3) His austerities—such as rising early before sunrise, taking a cold shower even in winter, attending all the temple services, avoiding contact with women, strictly following the four regulative principles (allegedly) and eating only the barest minimum to keep body and soul together—were legendary.
- (4) He was adored for his great love and affection for his spiritual master, which was poignantly exhibited when he shed profuse tears of separation on a number of occasions, such as when Prabhupada was ill or when he passed away.
- (5) He was extremely charismatic. One contemporary remembered, "Not all the [ISKCON] gurus had that kind of strong personal charisma, but he did. In life sometimes you'll meet a person that just is electric. Kirtanananda had that unnamable immensity of personal character whereby people felt kind of cowed by his presence, or very impressed, or blown away." ^{8 9}
- (6) He established the New Vrindaban Community in Marshall County, West Virginia, and built it from next to nothing into the largest ISKCON farm community in North America.
- (7) He masterminded the design and construction of Prabhupada's Palace of Gold—billed as "The Taj Mahal of the West"—the marble and gold memorial shrine for the founder and acharya of ISKCON, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, which catapulted New Vrindaban to the attention of national and international media.
- (8) More Prabhupada disciples reportedly served under Bhaktipada than under any other guru in ISKCON. By the end of 1986, only about 500 Prabhupada disciples remained active in ISKCON (3,500 had left for one reason or another), ¹⁰ but, thirty percent

(almost 150) of all Prabhupada disciples active at that time lived at New Vrindaban or its satellite centers. ¹¹

- (9) By 1986, he had initiated a thousand devoted disciples throughout the world, and had an army of dedicated fundraisers out on the “pick” who collected sometimes \$150,000 per week, and more than \$3,000,000 per year. Bhaktipada had deep pockets and he could spend his money, for the most part, however he pleased.
- (10) He had a small but loyal group of ksatriya enforcers who helped maintain discipline in the community. Usually they threatened or beat up disobedient devotees; more rarely they used stronger methods to silence especially dangerous dissidents. One California devotee who had been threatened by some of New Vrindaban’s ksatriya enforcers noted, “On the ‘Goon Squad’ were a group of guys . . . that would beat the hell out of you or whatever it takes to convince people to cooperate.” ¹²

Although Bhaktipada could be ruthless to those who incurred his wrath, he was also extremely affectionate to his faithful servants. He had a cult following of over five hundred devotees who lived and worked at the community and its satellite centers in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida and New York City, and thousands more in Canada, India, Africa, Malaysia and elsewhere. Most of them did as they were told. He had power, and he was not afraid to use it. Other ISKCON gurus may not have liked Bhaktipada or his tactics, but they nonetheless admired him and coveted his wealth, power, fame and renunciation. Most wished they could be like him in many respects.

Sulochan, on the other hand, was not highly regarded by most of the Brijabasis. He was a householder, unsteady in his service and prone to fault-finding and argument. He was not a model husband and sometimes humiliated his wife. After a time, he did not strictly follow the four regulative principles, and he couldn’t stay in one place for very long. He had few friends at New Vrindaban, and some thought he would never amount to much.

Despite Sulochan's talk of inciting violence, in my opinion, the greatest danger he posed to Bhaktipada was not through any threatened bodily harm, but through his sharp-edged words which cut deep into his adversary's reputation. Sulochan might have been foolish for advocating violence in his letters and publications, but he was after all, by nature, a fighter. He was named after a ksatriya warrior—one of the one-hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra and Queen Gandhari, who died fighting during the Battle of Kuruksetre in India some 5,000 years ago—and he possessed many of the qualities of a ksatriya.

One of his associates recalled his ksatriya nature, "Sulochan was, by nature, a warrior. I can't say he was a very good one, obviously, but he was no brahmin, he was not good at business, and he was nobody's servant (sudra) either. The man lifted weights, was well-built, regularly practiced firing his handgun at shooting ranges, and definitely had the warrior (or, to be liberal, ksatriya) mentality. I know this from first-hand experience. He was not a bluffer. He was willing to fight to the death, as long as he had a chance to prevail. He was actually engaged as a warrior in his writings, i.e., he was fighting with words. That was his spirit." ¹³

Although Sulochan lived intermittently at New Vrindaban for only a few years, he turned out in retrospect to be an extremely important figure in the history of the community. He—by his life and death—affected the community more profoundly than nearly everyone else. After a year and a half (October 1984 to May 1986) of mostly frustrated attempts to educate the devotee community about the vices of Bhaktipada and the other zonal acharyas, Sulochan gave up his "impossible dream" to dethrone his arch nemesis. He was no longer a threat to Bhaktipada and the other ISKCON gurus; he had, more or less, given up his quest and found another woman with whom he wanted to marry and settle down. It was then he was tragically, and ironically, murdered.

But in death Sulochan was able to do what he could not do in life: bring down the mighty Bhaktipada. The subsequent prolonged legal battles drained the seemingly all-powerful guru of men and money,

the criminal allegations facilitated his speedy expulsion from ISKCON, and then, seven years later, his house of cards was smashed completely when the last straw was added to the already-heaping haystack of alleged sexual molestations of boys and young men: the Winnebago Incident of September 1993, which divided the community, and soon after, effectively ended Bhaktipada's 26-year reign as the sole uncontested authority and "king" of New Vrindaban. A few years later, at his 1996 trial, he pleaded guilty to charges of mail fraud after his once-devoted disciple Tirtha Swami turned against him and threatened to implicate him in the murders of Sulochan and Chakradhari.

Anuttama dasa (Geoffrey Walker), ISKCON's International Director of Communications and co-GBC representative for New Vrindaban, appropriately noted, "I think both Steve Bryant and Kirtanananda Swami were kind of like two trains on a track headed for a collision."¹⁴

CHAPTER 1

A Thorn in Bhaktipada's Side

STEVEN LESLIE BRYANT (July 4, 1952-May 22, 1986) was the son of a United States Air Force officer and a German-born high school teacher (Jack W. and Helga L. Bryant). Although Steven was born in Laramie, a small town in southeastern Wyoming, he grew up in Royal Oak, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit about fifteen miles northwest from downtown. His hair was blond, his eyes were blue, he stood six feet tall and weighed about 170 lbs.

A newspaper reporter explained, "He [Steven Bryant] grew up in Royal Oak and graduated from Kimball High School. During his junior year of high school he attended a private military school in the South because there were 'too many distractions in the way of cars here,' said his mother, a retired high school teacher. He returned to Kimball for his senior year. Soon after leaving for college, Stephen became 'infatuated' with the Krishnas and quit school to join the community in Detroit, Jack Bryant said." ¹⁵ Sulochan's father remembered, "He tried to convert us, but we would have none of that." ¹⁶

At Detroit ISKCON, Steve met another novice: Bhakta Terry Ray Sheldon. The two often worked together, as Steve was a good carpenter and Terry a good mechanic. They became friends and shared a special camaraderie, as they both surrendered to Prabhupada around the same time. However after a few months, Terry left the city of Detroit for the rural ISKCON farm community in West Virginia; Steve remained at Detroit ISKCON. ¹⁷

During July 1974, Steve accepted initiation from his spiritual master, the founder/acharya of ISKCON: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. At his initiation ceremony, Steve prophetically received the Sanskrit name: “Sulochan dasa” (in English: “Servant of Sulochan, the son of Dhritarashtra”). In the *Mahabharata*, Sulochan is mentioned as one of the one hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra and Queen Gandhari. The historical Sulochan was killed by Bhima during the battle of Kuruksetra some 5,000 years ago.¹⁸

Three months after Steven became Sulochan, Bhakta Terry became Tapahpunja at an October 1974 fire sacrifice at New Vrindaban. In Sanskrit, *tapah* refers to “austerities and penances,” and *punja* means “heaps” or “volumes of pious activities.”¹⁹ The name “Tapahpunja,” therefore, means “One who serves the Lord, Who performs heaps, or volumes of austerities and pious activities.”

Sulochan was an excellent masseur and liked to offer this intimate personal service for the pleasure of his godbrothers. Naranarayan dasa Visvakarma (Nathan Baruch Zakheim)—an ISKCON artist who served as the Art Director for the BBT—remembered the time he met Sulochan in Detroit, “During a visit to Detroit ISKCON in 1974 or 1975, I once again met Sulochan. He was very friendly, and he really appreciated all the devotees. He was a very good masseur, and he gave me a massage. He told me that his personal objective was to give full body massages to all of Prabhupada’s male disciples; as a means of giving them some personal *seva* [service]. He felt it an honor to do this.” Naranarayan also remembered a curious conversation he had with Sulochan during his massage:

While Sulochan was massaging me, he told me a very creepy story. Some time earlier, he had given Bhavananda [Charles Bacis, a senior devotee who was initiated in Los Angeles in 1969] a full body massage. He said that Bhavananda requested Sulochan to “go down on him” [perform fellatio], that it was a spiritual act of advanced understanding that Sulochan, as a relative neophyte, could not possibly yet understand.

Sulochan objected, and declared that this was totally against the regulative principles to which he had vowed his life. Bhavananda insisted and said that doing this would “transcend” the four regulative principles, which (after all) pertained only to the material body on the material plane, and that this act with Bhavananda was far more advanced on the “actual” spiritual platform than Sulochan could even begin to understand. Sulochan did not want to contradict a highly charismatic person whom he considered to be almost on the level of guru, or at least much more spiritually advanced than himself. He complied.

He confided in me, as he had known me from Los Angeles, and considered that I could give him some possible alternative understanding than the one given by Bhavananda. I gave him a clear understanding of Bhavananda’s life-long homosexuality, his cavorting with other homosexuals in New York with Andy Warhol and his appearance in Warhol’s 1966 art house classic film: *Chelsea Girls*. Sulochan was deeply shocked, but took it philosophically. After all, he had acted in good faith.²⁰

Naranarayan’s story about Sulochan and Bhavananda, although perhaps unusual, is not unheard of. Novice devotees, as a rule, can easily become bewildered or confused or taken advantage of, as they typically do not yet fully understand the philosophy of Krishna consciousness and the importance of the four regulative principles (which prohibits illicit sex). In 1970, Kirtanananda Swami attempted to play this same trick on a 20-year-old godbrother in Calcutta, India. Hanuman dasa (Henri Jolicoeur) recalled, “Kirtanananda made sexual advances toward me. . . . In Calcutta, Kirtanananda took me apart in the ISKCON house and told me that Tibetan monks in the monasteries were permitted to have sex between monks. (He told me this in a low quiet voice near my face.) . . . After a few times, I made it clear to him that . . . I was not interested in learning about it. I was serving directly Prabhupada now.”²¹

I remember one of my godsisters at New Vrindaban, a beautiful, young woman with a slender waist from New Zealand, whose first

experience in Krishna consciousness was having intercourse with a sexually-gregarious male Prabhupada disciple at the 1980 Rainbow Gathering in West Virginia's Monongahela National Forest. An experienced devotee would never fall for such a trick as Bhavananda played on Sulochan, as Kirtanananda tried on Hanuman dasa, and the New Vrindaban Prabhupada disciple played on my godsister.

Sulochan left Detroit in 1975, around the same time when ISKCON purchased the 1927 Lawrence Fisher mansion on Lenox Avenue; a four acre estate of formal gardens, pools and fountains overlooking the Detroit River. Sulochan came to New Vrindaban, where his mechanically-inclined friend, Tapahpunja, had settled. Perhaps, he thought, this rural village in the Allegheny Plateau might be a good place for him to serve his spiritual master and ISKCON.

However, the daily austerities at New Vrindaban (cold showers, no hot water, smoky wood-burning stoves, ankle-deep mud, simple prasadam cooked without ghee, etc.) were more than Sulochan could handle, so he relocated to the warm and sunny Los Angeles ISKCON temple on Watseka Avenue in Culver City, where he served at the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT). There he helped index Prabhupada's monumental opus: his translation with commentary on the Sanskrit scripture *Srimad-bhagavatam* (also known as the *Bhagavat-purana*).

Sulochan was by nature friendly, and was liked by many of his associates. One devotee at ISKCON Los Angeles remembered, "Steve was just a real nice guy. We had fun. I thought he was a nice man."²² Sulochan's lawyer, David Gold, noted, "He was tall, blonde, and fairly good looking. What kept him from being truly handsome was a touch of goofiness in his face and smile."²³

In Los Angeles, Sulochan met Puranjana dasa (Tim Lee), who served as the manager of the Spanish Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, and the two became best friends. Puranjana said, "We just became friends. Everybody liked him. He was just a very affable kind of guy."²⁴ Another friend at

New Dwaraka (Los Angeles ISKCON), remembered Sulochan, "I knew him in Los Angeles, as we both did pujari service. He was a great person, a very sincere follower of Srila Prabhupada, and a good friend of mine." ²⁵

THE GOPI-BHAVA CLUB

In the spring of 1976, a select group of about fifty devotees in Los Angeles began secretly meeting together to read and discuss the intimate conjugal pastimes of Radha and Krishna as revealed in Prabhupada's books. Puranjana was the leader of the men's group and Sulochan attended the meetings. When Prabhupada heard about this in June he became furious and met with Puranjana and Sulochan, whom he feared had been contaminated by sahajiya tendencies. (Sahajiya refers to a devotee who takes things cheaply, and doesn't strictly follow the regulative principles.) Prabhupada's servant, Hari-Sauri (Denis Harrison), remembered the Gopi-Bhava Club and Prabhupada's condemnation of same:

June 5, 1976. . . . Prabhupada had just sat down in the middle room [of his residential suite at Los Angeles ISKCON] for breakfast when Pradyumna [Paul H. Sherbow: a senior ISKCON scholar initiated in New York in April 1967, "brilliant in Sanskrit learning," ²⁶ who edited the Sanskrit and Bengali passages in Prabhupada's books and at one time served as Prabhupada's personal secretary] came in, obviously quite disturbed. Prabhupada allowed him to come up to his small table, already set out with his silver thali [plate] of cut fruits, puffed rice and fried cashews. Pradyumna began to complain about the study group . . . mentioned yesterday. He told Prabhupada one devotee was reported to have said that the *Gita* was too bodily conscious and "external" and that he became inspired only by reading about Krishna's confidential, internal dealings, especially those of the gopis in the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*.

Srila Prabhupada was so disturbed by this news that the piece of fruit he held in his hand never made it into his mouth. Abandoning breakfast, he went back into his darshan room and called for all GBC

men and sannyasis, as well as for several members of the study group. He demanded to know who was involved. Hrdayananda Maharaja [Howard J. Resnick, the GBC representative for much of South America] told him that the head of the men's group was Puranjana dasa, the manager of the Spanish BBT operations. He was immediately sent for, as was Sulochan dasa, a brahmacari I had gotten to know in Mayapura [India] during the festival [three months earlier]. As we awaited their arrival Hrdayananda Maharaja tried to assure Srila Prabhupada about Puranjana. He said he was actually a sincere and level-headed person and he didn't think he had sahajija tendencies; he thought he was simply misled.

I told Srila Prabhupada that Sulochan had approached me yesterday in an excited and conspirational mood to tell me about the surreptitious meetings. He was quoting parts of *Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta* without, it seemed to me, understanding them, and had many misinterpretations of the text. He had cited some verses which he interpreted to say that in each relationship with the Lord there is something lacking which is found only in the next rasa. He indicated that they actually considered paternal affection inferior to the gopi-bhava platform because Lord Chaitanya said that there is no higher way to serve Krishna than in the mood of the gopis. They were therefore concentrating on the gopis' lives very closely, for they exhibited the highest and most pleasing way to satisfy Sri Krishna.

As I related the incident Srila Prabhupada's anger flared. "Just see," he declared disgustedly. "Mother Yasoda is less than the gopis! This is their thinking. And they want *siddha-deha!*" [*Siddha-deha* is the form of the soul's eternal spiritual body.] Prabhupada was furious that such things could develop within ISKCON. By this time the men were in his room and for almost three quarters of an hour he strongly rebuked the group, angrily refuting its reasoning. He compared their exclusive focus on the gopis to "jumping like monkeys."

Puranjana said their intention was to simply scrutinize the activities of the gopis and develop the same aspirations because this was recommended by Lord Chaitanya. Prabhupada got even

angrier. He was in no mood for being mollified. “You want to scrutinizingly study Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s instructions, but why just the parts about the gopis? Why don’t you scrutinizingly study where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says *guru more murkha dekhi, karila sasana*, that His guru found Him to be a fool and told Him he was not fit for anything but chanting Hare Krishna? Why don’t you scrutinize that part? First become a fool like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu before jumping over like monkey!”

Puranjana tried to reassure him that they were not attempting to imitate the gopis’ love of Krishna; they were simply studying the descriptions so that they could develop such desires. Prabhupada flushed, his top lip quivering. “First deserve, then desire! There is no question of desire unless one is actually liberated. Until that point you simply do whatever service you are given. So long as there is any pinch of material desire there is no question of desiring on the spiritual platform!” He said the intimate gopi-lilas were discussed by Lord Chaitanya only among His three most confidential associates—Svarupa Damodar, Ramananda Raya, and Sikhi Mahiti. *Siddha-deha* is for liberated souls—no one else.

Sulochan said that they had thought it was all right because it was in Prabhupada’s books, and they were only reading his books. Prabhupada told them that just because a drug store has every type of drug it does not mean that one can get them without prescription. The doctor prescribes according to the disease. He said that from the beginning stages of devotional service up to the highest rasas, everything is there in his books, but they are not all to be immediately studied.

He ordered them not to hold any more meetings and to disband the “club.” . . . After sending them out duly chastened, Prabhupada explained to us that this sahajiya philosophy means the preaching will be finished. “So try to save them,” he advised the GBC men. “In Vrindaban many sahajiyas would ask, ‘Oh Swamiji, why are you bothering to preach? Why not just be content to stay in Vrindaban and do your bhajan?’” . . .

June 8, 1976: . . . The leading members of the sahajiya group wrote a letter to Prabhupada apologizing for “jumping like monkeys.” Hridayananda Maharaja delivered it and reported that they had obeyed Prabhupada’s order and stopped having any further meetings. Unfortunately, a short while later he came back and informed Prabhupada that Puranjana dasa had abandoned his service at the Spanish BBT and blooped [defected from ISKCON]. “And you said he was sincere!” Prabhupada remarked to Hridayananda.²⁷

The formation and dissolution of the Gopi-Bhava Club was not a minor footnote in ISKCON history; it was so important that twenty-one years later Tamal-Krishna Goswami (Thomas G. Herzig) discussed it in detail in an article for the *ISKCON Communications Journal* about heresies in ISKCON.²⁸

SULOCHAN MARRIES

After the June 5, 1976 meeting with Prabhupada and the letter of apology three days later, the Gopi-Bhava Club disbanded and Puranjana and Sulochan secretly left Los Angeles in great embarrassment. Although Los Angeles temple authorities thought they had “blooped” (as the two left no forwarding address), both remained in ISKCON. It is not exactly clear where Sulochan went after leaving New Dwaraka. Puranjana claimed, “We both went to the United Kingdom after we had a big blow out with Ramesvara and company.”²⁹ Sulochan’s father, Jack Bryant, on the other hand, indicated that Sulochan went to India after leaving Los Angeles.³⁰

One godbrother at ISKCON Vrindaban claimed that Sulochan served as temple commander for the Krishna-Balarama Mandir (c. 1978). He remembered, “I lived in Vrindaban, India, from 1976 to 1984. Sulochan came in 1978 or 1979, and he became temple commander. At some point, the temple president (I don’t remember who it was at that time), decided to clean Prabhupada’s house, and decided to remove quite a few items that he thought didn’t need to be there anymore. Some of those items

were maha [remnants, or relics] from Srila Prabhupada. Things like a sweater, a towel, a long-sleeve polo-like shirt, framed pictures, personal books of Srila Prabhupada and many other things. The temple president instructed Sulochan to put these things in the godown [storage room] of the guest house. However, that godown was a dark place with a lot of dust and humidity, and Sulochan thought that all those things were going to get damaged or eaten by rats, so he came to my house and asked me if I would give him a donation for some of those things that had belonged to Prabhupada. I immediately said ‘Yes,’ and so I gave him a donation for some of those transcendental items.”³¹

Eventually, perhaps late in 1978 or early in 1979, Sulochan traveled to England and served at Bhaktivedanta Manor, the ISKCON temple/manor with seventy acres of lawns and gardens in the Hertfordshire countryside about twenty miles northwest from London. The manor had been donated to ISKCON in 1973 by the former Beatle, George Harrison. When Sulochan first came to England he lived for a short time with Puranjana, then found other lodging. Puranjana recalled, “He was in U. K. and he lived at my place for a short time.”³² Sulochan served as a pujari (priest) at Bhaktivedanta Manor.

Puranjana remembered Sulochan’s artistic skills as a pujari, “In England, Sulochan was a pujari, and he made fabulous ornaments, water fountains, and so on. Everyone waited in the temple room when he was scheduled to offer aroti because everyone knew the aroti would be fantastic. He got a little electric pump, and set up bowls on the altar, and made a water fountain. He was quite an artistic person. The fountain was not a permanent fixture, so it took a long time for him to set it up before aroti. Whenever he made that fountain, the curtains always opened late. He got into a big blow out with the women pujaris; they said he was always late, and he was. Eventually he got booted off the altar for taking too long to set up for aroti.”³³

When Prabhupada came to visit Bhaktivedanta Manor in September 1977, two months before his death, Puranjana presented his infant son to

Prabhupada. Puranjana recalled, “When Srila Prabhupada came to U. K. in 1977, I personally offered my baby son at his feet. Yes really, my son has a U. K. birth certificate.”³⁴

At Bhaktivedanta Manor, around 1979, Sulochan met a young and attractive hippie who liked to hang out with the devotees, Jane Rangeley, who had a two-year-old son from a previous relationship. Jane said, “I was living outside the temple and just visiting. I would have liked to become a full-time participant, but there really wasn’t any place for me to stay.”³⁵

Tapahpunja Swami, Sulochan’s friend from Detroit who later became a senior New Vrindaban resident and temple president for Cleveland ISKCON, recalled, “Bryant went to England. That’s where he met Jane, his wife. She was not a devotee. She was spaced out and wandering around. He came along and they got married.”³⁶ One godbrother at Bhaktivedanta Manor remembered Sulochan, “He was well-known to us because he’d been a pujari at the Manor, and had taken away, as his wife-to-be, one of our congregation members from Stoke-on-Trent.”³⁷ Puranjana recalled, “Sulochan married a girl who lived down the street from my place.”³⁸

Sulochan, with the help of a friend, persuaded Jane that she should marry him. Marriage to him, he insisted, would help her advance in Krishna consciousness, and then she could live with him in the temple. Jane agreed, and they were married within two weeks. Unfortunately, the two had very different reasons for getting married. Sulochan was romantically attracted to Jane; it appeared that he wanted a loving and physical relationship with a woman who would be devoted to him and respect him as a teacher of Krishna Consciousness. But Jane was not romantically nor physically attracted to Sulochan; she saw her marriage as a convenient way for her to get more involved in Krishna Consciousness. She said, “It [our marriage] was really based on philosophy. My motive was wanting to get more involved [with the temple] and he was looking to get married.”³⁹

WHEN A WIFE PLEASURES HER HUSBAND HER LIFE IS SUCCESSFUL

Sulochan's attitude toward marriage was patriarchal; he believed a wife had to be completely subordinate to her husband. The wife's entire goal of life should be simply to please her husband; she should worship her "lord" as a god. His view was supported by his spiritual master and the *Manu-sambhita*. Prabhupada explained how a chaste wife should relate to her husband:

A woman should think of her husband as the Supreme Lord. ⁴⁰

A husband is the supreme demigod for a woman. . . . A husband represents the Lord as the object of worship for a woman. ⁴¹

A chaste woman must dress nicely and decorate herself with golden ornaments for the pleasure of her husband. Always wearing clean and attractive garments, she should sweep and clean the household with water and other liquids so that the entire house is always pure and clean. She should collect the household paraphernalia and keep the house always aromatic with incense and flowers and must be ready to execute the desires of her husband. Being modest and truthful, controlling her senses, and speaking in sweet words, a chaste woman should engage in the service of her husband with love, according to time and circumstances. ⁴²

Even if a husband had an irritable temperament and liked to insult his wife, Prabhupada insisted that a model wife "must try to understand her husband's temperament and please him." In a *Srimad-bhagavatam* purport, Prabhupada described the relationship between the sage Cyavana Muni and his wife Sukanya:

This is an indication of the relationship between husband and wife. A great personality like Cyavana Muni has the temperament of always wanting to be in a superior position. Such a person cannot submit to anyone. Therefore, Cyavana Muni had an irritable temperament. His wife, Sukanya, could understand his attitude, and under the circumstances she treated him accordingly. If any wife wants to be happy with her husband,

she must try to understand her husband's temperament and please him. This is victory for a woman. Even in the dealings of Lord Krishna with His different queens, it has been seen that although the queens were the daughters of great kings, they placed themselves before Lord Krishna as His maidservants. However great a woman may be, she must place herself before her husband in this way; that is to say, she must be ready to carry out her husband's orders and please him in all circumstances. Then her life will be successful. When the wife becomes as irritable as the husband, their life at home is sure to be disturbed or ultimately completely broken. In the modern day, the wife is never submissive, and therefore home life is broken even by slight incidents. . . .

A woman must be trained to be submissive to the will of her husband. Westerners contend that this is a slave mentality for the wife, but factually it is not; it is the tactic by which a woman can conquer the heart of her husband, however irritable or cruel he may be. ⁴³

THE HUSBAND MUST PROTECT HIS WIFE

Although the wife must submissively serve her husband, their relationship should not be one-sided. The husband also has duties to his wife: primarily he must protect her. In a personal letter and in two lectures on *Srimad-bhagavatam*, Prabhupada explained:

It is the duty of husband to protect wife in every way from the onslaught of material nature, and he must act always as her spiritual guide by being perfect example of devotee. ⁴⁴

Husband means who takes charge of the girl for life, and wife means the girl who has the resolution to serve the husband throughout life. That is husband and wife. And when the wife is in danger, the husband's duty is to give protection, at any cost. That is husband-wife relationship. ⁴⁵

The husband gives the topmost protection to the wife. This is the example. Just like Lord Ramachandra [the seventh avatar of Vishnu

and the protagonist of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*). Lord Ramachandra is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but Ravana [the Rakshasa king of Lanka and the antagonist in *Ramayana*] took Sita [a daughter of King Janak of Janakpur, an avatar of Laksmi—the goddess of wealth and wife of Vishnu—and the consort of Rama] from His protection. Ramachandra could marry many millions of Sitas, or He could create many millions of Sita, but He's showing the example that it is the husband's duty to give protection to the wife at any cost. And He did it. For one woman He killed the whole Ravana's dynasty. This is husband's duty. So protection, not slave. It is protection. The husband should give to the wife the topmost protection, and the wife should be so faithful to the husband. ⁴⁶

In *Krishna Book*, Prabhupada indicated that if a husband is able to protect his wife, but does not do so, “he is considered already dead, although he is supposedly breathing.”

If, after growing up, a son does not try to satisfy his parents by his actions or by an endowment of riches, he is surely punished after death by the superintendent of death and made to eat his own flesh. If a person is able to care for or give protection to old parents, a chaste wife, children, the spiritual master, brahmins and other dependents but does not do so, he is considered already dead, although he is supposedly breathing. ⁴⁷

Unfortunately, Sulochan was not a model husband for Jane; she claimed he did not protect her, but insulted and slapped her for reasons only known to him. In an e-mail to the author, she wrote: “He would often slap me in the face. He either thought it was fun or it was his way of being affectionate. It caused me a lot of embarrassment, especially if he did it in public. It definitely was humiliating, and that was probably the intention on his part, supposedly to keep me submissive.” ⁴⁸

However, Sulochan's condescending attitude only succeeded in alienating his newly-wedded wife. She later indicated that impulsively marrying a

man she didn't know was a great mistake. She wrote: "We were ill matched. Definitely no attraction on my side of the equation. It is quite possible that with someone else Sulochan could have been happily married."⁴⁹

JANE MOVES TO NEW VRINDABAN

Sulochan manufactured and sold glass pendants to support himself; he purchased several 1/8-page advertisements in *The ISKCON World Review*.⁵⁰ One of Sulochan's friends in London recalled, "Circa 1981 we would discuss bronze casting/sculpting/jewelry making in the London [ISKCON] restaurant—then called 'Healthy, Wealthy & Wise.' Sulochan had recently produced a fine Narasimha medallion and was selling copies of it."⁵¹

While living in London during the latter half of 1980, Sulochan decided that New Vrindaban—a rural ISKCON farm community in Marshall County, West Virginia, a pioneer village allegedly based on land and cows, the home of Prabhupada's Palace of Gold, known for its motto: "Simple Living, High Thinking"—would be the best place to raise his family. Puranjana remembered, "Sulochan told me he was going to New Vrindaban, which I told him would be a disaster."⁵²

But before he went to New Vrindaban, Sulochan traveled to India on business and he asked Jane to go to New Vrindaban with her son; he promised to join her at New Vrindaban after his India trip. However, he told her she would have to earn the passage money for herself and her young son. One source, which may or may not be reliable, explained:

In the fall of 1980, as Sulochan prepared to go to India for a second time that year, it was agreed upon that she should go to New Vrindaban to live. Leaving her with £20 and a bag full of pendants to sell, he left for India. Before leaving, he also gave her a letter of introduction which said, in effect, "Here is my wife, she is coming here to live and possibly to take initiation. I shall be coming there in about four or five months."

Jane was pregnant at the time, and was caring for her three-year-old son Krishna dasa. Still, unassisted, she traveled to France where she managed to sell enough pendants to purchase passage to America for herself and her small boy. Finally, in late 1980, Jane arrived in New Vrindaban.

[She said] “My first impression of New Vrindaban was that I immediately fell in love with everything. I thought, ‘This is just like Vrindaban, [India].’ I thought that living here was the closest thing to living in Vrindaban.”⁵³

Jane arrived at New Vrindaban a few weeks before Christmas 1980. She was at once caught up in the intense engagement of the Christmas marathon, an annual December event in which New Vrindaban residents reduced their time sleeping and increased their work load. She enjoyed living there, she made many friends and performed various services. She said, “The first day I arrived it was absolutely beautiful. The sun was shining. It was like a full package: living close to the earth, learning how to serve God and developing a simple lifestyle.”⁵⁴

TEMPLE AUTHORITIES PRESSURE JANE TO TAKE INITIATION

An initiation ceremony was planned for Christmas day and the New Vrindaban temple president, Kuladri (Arthur Villa), suggested to Jane that she accept Harer Nama initiation—a ritual in which the disciple accepts the spiritual master as good as God—from Bhaktipada.⁵⁵ When Kuladri invited Jane to accept initiation from Bhaktipada, Jane was “very surprised.” This invitation was extremely unusual, as normally a prospective disciple had to wait six months before making such a big commitment. Spiritual masters in ISKCON, as a rule, only accepted disciples after they had passed a rigorous probationary period during which the candidate proved his or her sincerity and determination. Jane, however, had been at New Vrindaban only a few weeks.

Jane recalled: “I was very surprised when Kuladri suggested that I should take initiation. I was not opposed to the idea, and was quite impressed with Kirtanananda Swami. However I was not expecting to be approached regarding initiation so soon. I had only been at New Vrindaban for three weeks, and I was unsure how Sulochan would respond to the idea. The temple authorities were pressing for the initiation.”⁵⁶

At the Christmas day fire sacrifice, she accepted Bhaktipada formally as her spiritual master and was awarded the name “Jamuna dasi.” Jamuna (sometimes spelled “Yamuna”) is the name of the sacred Indian river (the largest tributary of the Ganges) which begins high in the Himalayan Mountains, flows through Vrindaban (the village of Krishna’s childhood pastimes) and after an 855-mile journey, merges with the Ganges at Allahabad.

In England, Sulochan had told his wife that of all the ISKCON gurus, he liked Bhaktipada best, but he never explicitly gave her permission to take initiation. Jamuna explained: “Sulochan had very traditional views regarding women and really did not believe in women taking initiation, which is the reason that he had always avoided the topic. Now that the issue had come to a head and there was some social pressure he conceded that my being initiated by Kirtanananda would probably be okay as long as Kirtanananda was serving Prabhupada and Sulochan was happy in the service of Kirtanananda. This made sense and worked up until the point that the two had a disagreement.”⁵⁷

Although he tried to accept Jamuna’s initiation, Sulochan considered it a personal insult that Kirtanananda had initiated his wife without his knowledge or permission. Kirtanananda was not Sulochan’s spiritual master; he was his godbrother. It is a breach of etiquette for a guru to initiate a godbrother’s wife without even consulting the godbrother husband. But since the deed was already done, he tried to accept it.

Sulochan came to live with his wife at New Vrindaban early in 1981, and appeared to be serious in his attempt to become a faithful Brijabasi.

However by early winter, he was drinking beer and watching television nightly. He rarely chanted sixteen rounds anymore, and his *sadhana* (spiritual practices, such as chanting on beads) consisted of going to the temple once a week. ⁵⁸ Jamuna explained: “When we were living in London he was chanting his rounds. It was not until we were in New Vrindaban that he became slack.” ⁵⁹

One Brijabasi, Gopish dasa (Gabriel Fried), a professional welder who ran the New Vrindaban brick factory which manufactured pavers for community roads and parking lots, claimed that Sulochan brought recreational drugs from India into the community for his personal use. A private investigator interviewed Gopish and reported, “Fried volunteered that Bryant was in the jewelry business and made several trips to India. He said that when in India he would buy various types of drugs such as cocaine, Quaaludes, and bring them back into this country. He said that Bryant did not bring in large quantities but enough for his own use.” ⁶⁰

Jamuna, on the other hand, was more serious about following the rules and regulations—at initiation devotees promise to chant the Hare Krishna mahamantra 1,728 times daily on beads (16 rounds), and to abstain from four pillars of sinful life: (1) meat eating (including fish and eggs), (2) intoxication (including alcohol, coffee and tea), (3) illicit sex (sex is only permitted between husband and wife solely for the procreation of children), and (4) gambling; and she was disturbed by her husband’s backsliding. She regularly attended the morning program, studied Prabhupada’s books and chanted her rounds. Sulochan worked in the mold shop; a physically demanding service which was especially difficult for him. When his best friend, Puranjana, suggested he move to California, he decided to accept the invitation.

Jamuna remembered, “Sulochan had been working in the mold shop for a year. It was physically grueling work and he was not very well suited to physical labor. Therefore when his best friend suggested a life of ease in California it was not a hard choice.” ⁶¹

SULOCHAN AND JAMUNA MOVE WEST

Although Jamuna loved living at New Vrindaban, her husband told her to pack her bags and move with him to California. As she was, at the time, sincerely trying to be a good “Vedic” wife who was always obedient to her husband, as Sukanya was submissive and obedient to Cyavana Muni, she unwillingly complied. It appears that Sulochan did not drive directly to California; he first stayed for a few months in Detroit. One of his friends recalled, “After Sulochan left Vrindaban, India [around 1978 or 1979], I saw him again in Detroit (I think in 1982); he had an apartment near the temple. My wife and I were visiting from India and stayed for about two months at the Detroit temple. I needed to use a car, and the temple let me borrow an old car they had, but there were a couple of times that the temple car was not available, so Sulochan let me borrow his car. One time I told him I was going to come back in a couple of hours, but it actually took me about four hours to come back. By then he was pretty freaked out, and told me he had already called the cops and the fire department, thinking that something had happened to me.”⁶²

Eventually Sulochan and his family arrived at the Hare Krishna community in Three Rivers, California, near Sequoia National Park. His buddy Puranjana lived nearby. Jamuna’s life was there was stressful. One source claimed:

They arrived in . . . California, in December 1982. . . . Jamuna was extremely upset and cried for days. “I was totally flipped out for two months after we left,” Jamuna recalls. . . .

His [Sulochan’s] association in this locale was with persons who were very much opposed to ISKCON and the new gurus. Also, at this time, he forbade Jamuna from having a picture of Srila Bhaktipada in the house. Jamuna was forced to put her son in a karmi school, and Sulochan’s warped obsessions became even more ingrained. At one point he told her that he would divorce her if she did not adjust her mentality to his. . . .

In spring of 1983 he began growing a small crop of marijuana in the back of the house. “At first he claimed that he was growing

it strictly to sell, but he ended up smoking the whole crop himself," she recalls. . . .

For the most part, Sulochan would sit around the house watching television, while he made Jamuna work, making pendants for his business, and in whatever balance of time she had left, she had to do all the housework, cooking, and caring for the three children. "I was so miserable that I would plan how to leave without his knowing," she remembers, "but we were in the middle of nowhere, miles from the nearest bus station, I had three kids, and I couldn't drive, so what could I do?" . . .

Sulochan's maltreatment of Jamuna was so atrocious that it sparked a major dissention with a neighboring devotee, Puranjana. Although they were good friends, Puranjana could not tolerate the way Sulochan treated her. . . .⁶³

Puranjana, Sulochan's California buddy, confirmed, "He was not a particularly kind husband, and I warned him this might cause her to dissent, that's true. He did, however, provide everything she needed and he was not violent with her, but he was a bit harsh in his tone and dealings, and he told me 'Everyone at New Vrindaban treats their wives like this.'" ⁶⁴

"In June 1983, Sulochan . . . decided to build a motorhome and travel around the country. He bought an old van, and built a wooden frame to increase the size. In October 1983, the motorhome completed, he packed everything into it and headed east." ⁶⁵ One of Sulochan's friends remembered his live-in van, "I was surprised at the van's spacious interior, which was like a small motorhome with bookshelves, a couch, chairs, and a kitchenette." ⁶⁶

Sulochan promised Jamuna that they would return to New Vrindaban, although his California friend, Puranjana, protested. Puranjana explained, "Sulochan had some attachments to the macho-male he-man women-repressing club at New Vrindaban, and that is what prompted him to leave California and return there. He was not yet convinced that every one of the gurus were corrupt. In 1983 he still thought Kirtanananda Swami, and some other gurus, might have been great souls. I begged him

not to go back to New Vrindaban, but he went anyway. He and his wife were both influenced by the culture there, which was not favorable to householders.”⁶⁷

The family returned to New Vrindaban in December, 1983. Although Sulochan intended only to visit for a short time, Jamuna was fully determined not to leave again. Sulochan left almost at once on another trip to India, and Jamuna again took up residence in New Vrindaban, doing service at the nursery. Sulochan returned in April 1984, and established a workshop in the Bahulaban utility building for creating pendants for his jewelry business.

Tapahpunja Swami recalled, “Bryant’s scheme for making money was to buy little religious pendants in India for resale. There were little pendants of flat brass, small, something devotional to wear around your neck. There were pictures of different deities. He called his business ‘Jagannath Jewelry.’ In one building in New Vrindaban, the building that served as a utility building for construction of the temple, there was a casting and molding shop. Upstairs there were various workshops. They made jewelry, clothing, and things for decorating the Palace. On the very, very top was a storage room and in there Bryant built a small room where he could run his jewelry business.”⁶⁸

By 1984, Jamuna had three young children: two boys with her husband (Sarva and Nimai) and another boy (Krishna dasa) from a previous relationship. Apparently their marital relationship was becoming stressed. One time Sulochan hit his wife a little too hard and she complained about it to her spiritual master. When Bhaktipada pulled his vehicle into the temple parking lot, Jamuna walked up to speak to him.

A seventeen-year-old former gurukula student (gurukula—literally “the place of the guru”—is the boarding school where most ISKCON children are raised and educated) happened to be sitting in Bhaktipada’s vehicle at the time. Hari-Venu (Geraldo Altamirano) recalled, “I was sitting with Bhaktipada in the passenger seat of his Blazer, and Jamuna came

up to the driver's side window. She looked awful. She had a black eye; her eye was bleeding. And she had a nasty bruise on her face in the shape of a hand. Someone had slapped her very, very hard. She told Bhaktipada that her husband was being abusive. Could he please talk to him and get him to stop beating her? Bhaktipada said something like, 'Try to be more submissive and humble. Don't provoke your husband.' Later that same day, Bhaktipada saw Sulochan and called him over to his vehicle. Bhaktipada chastised him, 'Why did you have to hit her so hard?'⁶⁹

SULOCHAN ATTEMPTS TO ADOPT THE BRIJABASI SPIRIT

It appears that for a time Sulochan had tried to adopt the Brijabasi spirit like his wife: unconditional surrender to Kirtanananda Swami. He had even submitted an offering to Bhaktipada which was published in *Sri Vyasa-Puja: The Most Blessed Event* (September 3, 1984), in which he honestly admitted that he was unsteady and a "veteran fault finder." He also expressed what appeared to be genuine appreciation for the Brijabasis, whom he considered "advanced devotees." He implied that he was having problems and wanted to leave. He admitted that he hadn't "sufficient intelligence" to stay at New Vrindaban; but he begged the devotees to preach to him and even tie him up with ropes or put sugar in his gas tank if necessary—anything to make him remain at New Vrindaban and adopt the Brijabasi spirit. Sulochan wrote:

Dear Srila Bhaktipada,

Please accept my most humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Ever since I came and left New Vrindaban back in 1975, I haven't been too steady in my service to Srila Prabhupada. So much has happened within ISKCON over those years that it's been very easy to rationalize moving from one place to another, even leaving ISKCON. It's easy to find fault here and there, and use that as an excuse to avoid serving ISKCON, which is, after all, Prabhupada's body. Even now I find myself complaining about all the mud and holes in the road. . . .

Look at me now. My heart is devoid of life, and I'm simply the servant of my tongue, belly and genitals—literally a dead body flapping.

Then, look at the many wonderful devotees here, who have stuck it out with you all these years. They are actually advanced devotees, not just by dint of their hard work, but by their good qualities, especially humility, which I've witnessed. Further proof of your potency is that New Vrindaban has blossomed so beautifully, even a veteran fault-finder as myself can no longer find any fault. Therefore, I'm humbly begging you and all the Brijabasis to let me stay here. I haven't sufficient intelligence on my own to stay, so I need your help. I know I try to look independent, but actually I need to be preached to. Not only preached to, but if you catch me trying to leave, please tie me with ropes. Put sugar in my gas tank—anything, but please just make me stay so I can also see Krishna in this life, and join the rest of you in Goloka Vrindaban, at my death.

Thank you, sincerely,
Your fallen servant,
Sulochan dasa⁷⁰

Sulochan sincerely attempted to become a devout Brijabasi; early in 1984, under the tutelage of the Palace Manager, Mahabuddhi dasa (Randy Stein), he became one of the top tour guides at the Palace.⁷¹ But, despite his efforts, he did not fit in; he had an independent streak—he liked to do things his way. This was completely opposite to the mood at New Vrindaban: complete submission and surrender to the guru. He became convinced he had better ideas about running the community, and when management ignored his ideas, he became angry and was not afraid to express his anger to the authorities. He began writing critical letters to Bhaktipada, presenting his own ideas about how New Vrindaban should be run. There was talk about allowing Sulochan to be in charge of running the guest lodge, but when the position was given to someone else, he became furious. Sulochan's mother recalled, "The dispute [between Steven and Bhaktipada] began after my son was denied a job as manager of the guest house at the commune."⁷²

Bhaktipada explained, “Steven Bryant used to come and go. He was also one of these people that couldn’t stay in one place. Sometimes he was in England, sometimes he was in Los Angeles, Texas, Florida, New Vrindaban. . . . He wanted to be the manager of the guest house, but I recommended against it because he wasn’t steady. . . . [I] couldn’t depend on his being there. He became very irate and said, ‘I am leaving.’ Told his wife to ‘Pack up, and let’s go.’”⁷³

Bhaktipada recognized his independence and told him on occasion: “Sulochan, you’re just not my man.”⁷⁴

SULOCHAN LEAVES NEW VRINDABAN FOR GOOD

Sulochan finally decided that he had had enough; he must leave New Vrindaban for good. Shortly before he departed, he happened to meet an old friend from the Detroit temple, Tapahpunja Swami, on the third floor of the Bahulaban utility building. Both had joined ISKCON about the same time and, because of this, they felt a kind of camaraderie.

One interviewer explained, “Tapahpunja knew Bryant. . . . They joined the Detroit temple at approximately the same time. When people join a temple they are called ‘Bhakta’ by older devotees. The older devotees will refer to someone as Bhakta Terry or Bhakta Steve. It means ‘trainee.’ You are like privates in boot camp. In the Detroit temple for a month Tapahpunja worked hand and hand with Bryant. They were both mechanically inclined. Bryant was good in carpentry and Tapahpunja was a good mechanic. They worked on the temple together.”⁷⁵

During an interview with a private investigator, Tapahpunja described his meeting and confrontation with Sulochan on the third floor of the Bahulaban utility building in June 1984. The interviewer explained:

Sheldon and Steve Bryant joined the Detroit ISKCON Temple at approximately the same time in 1974. They always shared a special kind of camaraderie because of those early days as new devotees,

even though Sheldon soon left for New Vrindaban and Bryant stayed in Detroit. . . .

Quite coincidentally [in June 1984], Sheldon and Bryant bumped into each other on the third floor of New Vrindaban's utility building which houses most of the community's workshops. Before his falling out with the community, Bryant had maintained a small jewelry workshop there on the third floor. Sheldon happened to be there looking for statuettes to take back to Cleveland for an upcoming festival.

Bryant invited Sheldon into his former workshop and told him he was gathering up the remainder of his jewelry supplies and was leaving New Vrindaban for good. Bryant talked about his dissatisfaction. Sheldon said that at first he tried to maintain a calm mood but Bryant's blasphemy of Bhaktipada was so vehement that he angrily told Bryant to shut up and that a fallen devotee was in no position to judge Bhaktipada.

Sheldon said that his outburst stopped Bryant momentarily, but that he ended the episode by shouting out, "Mark my words! I'm going to ruin his reputation. And if that doesn't work, I'll use a high-powered rifle!" Sheldon said that was the last meeting with Bryant.

Sheldon said that as he drove back to Cleveland, he reflected that . . . Bryant posed a serious threat to Bhaktipada's life, especially considering the fact that he was a known user of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine.⁷⁶

After his encounter with Tapahpunja Swami, Sulochan ordered his wife to join him in exile, but she refused. Jamuna said: "I was really trying to be the ideal 'Vedic' wife for a very long time. At a certain point I just snapped and couldn't take it anymore. It was too far removed from who I was."⁷⁷

She continued: "When I first caught wind that Sulochan was thinking of leaving New Vrindaban I went to Bhaktipada and asked him if I could stay. He gave his permission and actively encouraged me to stay every step along the way. I really appreciated him supporting me in this way. Of course I had no idea what a fiasco it would turn into."⁷⁸

However not all her friends thought she should abandon her husband and remain at New Vrindaban. Some advised her to be a chaste wife and follow her husband. She wrote, “There were mixed opinions on this from the devotees. I was being advised both ways.”⁷⁹

Sulochan’s mother recalled, “He [my son] talked a blue-streak trying to get [his wife] to go with him, but she was very loyal to [Bhaktipada], who initiated her. Her heart and soul belonged to him [Bhaktipada]. [My son] accused him of wife-stealing—spiritually not bodily—and he was devastated because she would not come with him.”⁸⁰

SULOCHAN’S SONS RETRIEVED BY MOTHER AND THREE ENFORCERS

Sulochan took with him all of his belongings and his two young sons. He left his stepson with Jamuna. Leaving on June 24, 1984, he drove to Wheeling, crossed the Ohio River into Ohio and headed north on Route 7, headed for his parents’ home in Michigan. He stopped briefly at a supermarket in Martins Ferry, Ohio, to purchase diapers. When he returned to his van, he discovered that a posse of three armed New Vrindaban enforcers had already taken his children and returned them to their mother, who sat in the community vehicle. He was outnumbered and out-gunned, and he had to accept defeat. Sulochan continued on to his parents’ home in Royal Oak, then later headed to Los Angeles.

Jamuna explained: “I was standing in the [temple] hallway holding [my son] Nimai, and Sulochan just took him from my arms and walked to the motor home along with Sarva who was three years old at the time. He sat in the motor home with the children for some time, probably hoping that I would follow him. Then he slowly circled the temple building several times, again, probably hoping that I would run to join him. Finally he drove off. Obviously I did not want to be separated from my children, but I had to make a stand for what I wanted, and I definitely did not want to live in a van traveling around the country with three kids for the rest of my life. I was quite surprised when Bhaktipada arranged for a

group of men to 'retrieve' the children. I went along in the van and my children were delivered back into my arms. I was very relieved and grateful, although somewhat alarmed at the methodology, not really wanting to fan the spark of an already growing conflict." ⁸¹

Gopinath dasa (Ronald Nay; known as RVC Swami after 1986), the notorious former headmaster of the Nandagram School who served as the librarian and head pujari at the new RVC temple, noted in his diary, "June 23, 1984: Sulochan left and took his kids. We rescued them in Wheeling and brought them back to his wife at the temple." ⁸²

A WIFE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTER IS ETERNAL

Sulochan called Bhaktipada on the phone and tried to get him to send his wife and children to him. Bhaktipada said that he couldn't do that; Jamuna wanted to stay and he wouldn't force her to leave New Vrindaban. Sulochan said: "Ham directly told me that if I wanted my wife back, I would have to surrender to him." ⁸³ In a conversation with his attorney, Sulochan exclaimed, "Bullshit! There's no way I'll surrender to that faggot! Maybe he can con a soft-headed woman, but he's not going to make a punk out of me." ⁸⁴

Bhaktipada preached, "The relationship between husband and wife is on the material platform, but the relationship between spiritual master and disciple is on the spiritual platform. My relationship with a disciple is eternal, but the husband's relationship with his wife is temporary." Sulochan confirmed: "Ham stated to me on several occasions that he has an eternal relationship with my wife and that my relationship with her is temporary. My wife accepted his statement. That statement is absolutely unfounded in sastra [scripture]. Prabhupada has stated in numerous places that the wife shares everything with her devotee husband and together they go back to Godhead. Prabhupada never said that the wife should worship any man other than her husband and Krishna, at least I have not found any statement to that effect and I have been carefully going through all the books and letters now for several months." ⁸⁵

I had also heard this philosophy at New Vrindaban: the relationship between husband and wife (and children)—based on the material body—was temporary, but the relationship between spiritual master and disciple—based on the spirit—was eternal. Therefore the wife's guru must take precedence over the wife's husband if there is a conflict or disagreement.

Sulochan called his wife a few days later, and threatened to do everything in his power to destroy New Vrindaban and Kirtanananda Swami. In a 1985 pamphlet titled, "The Story of a Cheater," Jamuna allegedly explained, "This man is insane, selfish and violent. He is unbalanced. Srila Bhaktipada, on the other hand, has always been a kind and loving father to me and is worthy of all respect. Steve's groundless criticism of such a wonderful person is simply another indication of Steve's insanity. I am sorry that I ever had anything to do with this crazy person." ⁸⁶

In one sense, Sulochan was blind: he could not see that he was such a difficult husband to Jamuna. Rather than accept responsibility for the consequences of mistreating his wife and creating an emotionally distant spouse, he blamed Bhaktipada for ruining his marriage. He thought Bhaktipada had captured her heart and now she had abandoned serving her lawful husband to serve her guru. He wrote: "I had been living a rather disheartened married life. My wife had been devoting her heart to another man, and so, naturally, this killed any chance of our having a meaningful relationship." ⁸⁷

Sulochan's mother remembered, "He [my son] thought that [Kirtanananda] was his main rival. She [his wife] liked the guru more than she liked him." ⁸⁸

If Sulochan was blind, so was Jamuna, who was infatuated with Bhaktipada. If she had known about his sexual molestation of boys and teenagers or his authorization of the murder of Chakradhari, she may have left New Vrindaban with her husband. But Bhaktipada's transgressions were kept secret. Very few people were aware of these anomalies: only a select few of trusted confidants, such as Hayagriva dasa (Howard

M. Wheeler)—Kirtanananda’s homosexual lover (they met at a gay bar near North Carolina State University in Chapel Hill in October 1960), and the co-founder of New Vrindaban—knew the full inside story.

JAMUNA DIVORCES

Jamuna was divorced on November 30, 1984 on grounds of irreconcilable differences, and was remarried to one of Bhaktipada’s loyal followers: Raghunath dasa (Ralph Seward), who served at New Vrindaban in various capacities, such as a computer consultant. She soon became pregnant with his child.⁸⁹

Jamuna explained: “Because he [Sulochan] was continually threatening to kidnap the children, I decided to get legal custody of them by applying for a legal divorce. That divorce was granted in November of 1984, giving me full legal custody of the children.”⁹⁰ Jamuna continued: “As far as my marriage to Raghu, Bhaktipada tried to discourage Raghu from seeing me, he basically told him to wait. When we did eventually get married Bhaktipada did not actively approve or disapprove.”⁹¹

Some testimonies suggest that Jamuna reportedly began her relationship with Raghunath while her husband was still living at the community. Sulochan claimed to have discovered his wife’s affair and reported it to Bhaktipada, who dismissed his complaints. Sulochan wrote: “Jane had been secretly associating with this person [Raghunath] for some time.”⁹²

One former gurukula boy explained: “One of the gurukulis accidentally observed Raghu and Jamuna together while Sulochan was still at New Vrindaban, and told it to me. Later while I was sitting in Bhaktipada’s [Chevrolet] Blazer, Sulochan walked up to the driver’s window and I heard him complain to Bhaktipada about this, but Bhaktipada was not interested in doing anything about it, in disciplining Jamuna and Raghu. Bhaktipada said something like: ‘Sulochan, you’re just not my man.’”⁹³

Jamuna, on the other hand, denied having an affair: “You mentioned that Raghu and I were already having an amorous affair while Sulochan was still living in the community. That is not true. My son, Krishna dasa, was in Raghu’s ashram and on one occasion I traveled to the dentist with Raghu and all the boys, and that was when I first got to know Raghu. After that we probably spoke on a couple of occasions but there was no relationship or physical contact until months after Sulochan left the community. If the ashram boy saw anything it would have been at a much later time. While I was married to Sulochan I never in my mind ever considered divorce. I just simply liked New Vrindaban and wanted to stay here.”⁹⁴

SULOCHAN ACQUIRES PIRATE COPY OF PRABHUPADA’S LETTERS

Sulochan decided to learn more about Kirtanananda by searching through the BBT Archive. If he found anything suspicious, he would inform his wife and perhaps she would join him in Los Angeles. If he found nothing unusual, he thought he might return to New Vrindaban and try to fit in. He wrote:

Finally, in June of 1984, with plenty of encouragement from the “guru” she had been devoting herself to, namely one Kirtanananda “Swami,” my wife decided to leave me to devote her life to him, even though I have two baby boys by her. At the time, I knew very little about Kirtanananda, so I was a little cautious about openly criticizing him for his interference in my marriage. The fact that his “disciples” have more weapons than brains also discouraged me from openly challenging him.

My wife also knew very little about him, except for the hype that’s drilled into all the gullible guru-pies [guru groupies] at his camp, such as, “He’s the oldest and first sannyasa disciple of Prabhupada” or, “He built Prabhupada’s Palace, so he must be a pure saint.” That kind of stuff. In effect, neither of us really knew anything about him at all, so she agreed that I would go to Los

Angeles and do some research, and if I found out anything suspicious, I would let her know. She said she would then join me if that was the case. I agreed to rejoin her at Kirtanananda's camp if his slate was clean. ⁹⁵

After returning to Los Angeles, Sulochan acquired a pirated microfiche set of copies of the complete letters of Prabhupada (the original letters were carefully guarded at the Los Angeles-based Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) from a sympathetic devotee: Bhakta dasa. These letters gave him insight into the inside story of the history of ISKCON, a revealing perspective which had been hidden from nearly all the rank-and-file devotees by the leaders of ISKCON. When Sulochan acquired these precious secret letters, he left Los Angeles and drove his van north to Berkeley, California, where he met Puranjana.

At first Sulochan was simply interested in saving his marriage; he searched for Prabhupada's statements about marriage in his letters. Later, during his research he discovered that the zonal acharyas were not authorized by Prabhupada; they were pretenders. Sulochan explained: "As I started to read through Srila Prabhupada's personal letters to his disciples, I was primarily looking for quotes on marriage. At the time, I was desperate to try and save my own marriage. Although that was my main motive, I also knew it was my moral duty to try and save my wife and children from possible danger. In this way, I began my research with the blessings of the Lord of Morality, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu [(1486-1534), the founder of Gaudiya-Vaishnavism and Krishna Himself]. Since I was approaching His top-most representative, Srila Prabhupada, for guidance and inspiration, I knew the outcome would be auspicious, whatever it was. I had no idea where my research would lead me. I only knew that something was going to burst, and I didn't want it to be me. I was not especially concerned with the broader 'guru-issue' facing ISKCON's 'leaders' today. Mainly, I wanted to save my own family, hoping that was part of the Lord's plan." ⁹⁶

Sulochan's best friend, Puranjana in Berkeley, remembered:

Sulochan was also very excited because just before he had left Los Angeles he had purchased a "pirated microfiche copy" of all of Srila Prabhupada's letters. He said, "We are going to bring the GBC [Governing Body Commission]'s gurus down with these letters." That is because the letters offer a stark view of how Srila Prabhupada had wanted the GBC to manage; how he distrusted some key GBC members who were now allegedly gurus; how he did not want the GBC to consult with the Gaudiya Math . . . and so on and so forth. When we read some of the letters it was very much evident why the GBC had wanted them to be suppressed and hidden.

A few days later Sulochan informed me, "Ramesvara [Robert Grant, the ISKCON zonal acharya for Southern California and the head of the North American Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT)] found out where I am staying and he called me to threaten me. He wants me to return the letter's microfiche and not publish any of these letters—or else." "Or else what?" I asked. "Or else I will be dead meat on the hook," Sulochan replied. We looked at each other and started to laugh hysterically for five minutes. We knew immediately that these letters must therefore be very, very important and they must contain information that the GBC is trying to hide.

And we also knew that we were going to publish the letters anyway. We just could not stop laughing for quite awhile either. We both agreed, the GBCs must have lost their minds if they thought that they "owned" Srila Prabhupada, and that they could hide his light under their dark cloud. In short, the GBC was making it a law, "It is forbidden to quote from Srila Prabhupada—or else you will be dead meat." Of course, if you want to quote from the GBC's homosexual pedophile gurus, that is fine! And the GBC says further that these homosexuals are gurus who are as pure as God. And they have some violent ex-convicts who will beat your head in with an aluminum baseball bat if you disagree with their homosexual worship project. That is what we were going up against and we joked about it.⁹⁷

Sulochan began meticulously studying the voluminous archive of Prabhupada's letters to see if he could find anything about Kirtanananda Swami which might convince his wife to lose her faith in him, leave New Vrindaban and return to him. He wrote:

Knowing that Kirtanananda had attacked Srila Prabhupada in the late sixties in his first attempt to take over the movement, I figured that if I could get all the letters dealing with that incident, then I would have something tangible to show my wife about the real character of her new "protector." . . . The letters contained all the secrets I had been hoping for—and more. I knew then that it would be my assigned duty to make the truth in these letters known to all. . . .

As I began my search through the letters, I discovered something higher than my personal marital problems that I knew I should share that with everyone. I discovered that Srila Prabhupada is no ordinary man. . . . I could see in Prabhupada's letters how a real saint deals with people on a personal day-to-day level. . . . Reading the letters became like an intriguing mystery to me. I took careful notice of little comments Prabhupada would make about the leaders, specifically the Governing Body Commissioners (GBC). For instance, Prabhupada's whole strategy changed dramatically in July of 1970. He freely started giving sannyasa (celibate renounced order) to his male followers instead of encouraging them to marry. He stopped encouraging devotees to open temples and instead encouraged them to distribute books. And he began writing very heavy letters indicating that the character of many of his leading disciples was way below the mark. They clearly show why Prabhupada became disgusted with these "top men" of the Society and ultimately why he decided to leave the planet early. . . .

So, on October 11, 1984, I mailed a letter to all ISKCON centers openly declaring war against Kirtanananda and the entire Society if my family was not returned to me intact. The Society ignored me. Hardly did I get one response. Since silence automatically means acceptance, I knew that my accusations were correct, and that it was just a matter of time before the truth would triumph. From that point onwards I

was doomed to live in constant hiding from Kirtanananda's worshippers, who would have killed me in an instant if they knew where I was parked in my motor home, typing away. . . .⁹⁸

SULOCHAN HEARS REPORTS OF ANOMALIES AT NEW VRINDABAN

When Sulochan began showing Prabhupada's letters to his friends and acquaintances, he discovered that some former New Vrindaban residents had their own horror stories to tell—about abuse, child molestation, drug dealing and even murder—but they were afraid to accuse Kirtanananda. Sulochan later explained to his attorney, “You've got to understand, Kirtanananda is considered to be like a god. Infallible. Above reproach. Nobody questions him. People are in awe of his power. But when I started showing this stuff to other devotees I found out everybody had their own story to tell. Everybody had some dirt on Kirtanananda. It's just that they were either too scared or worshiped him too much to talk about it before. Drugs, people getting killed, kids getting molested.”⁹⁹

Sulochan's attorney, David Gold, recalled that his client, unlike the other devotees he had met, was “without fear” for Kirtanananda. “There was definitely something different about him,” Gold remembered. “I had talked with a lot of disgruntled Krishna devotees over the years, all of whom had tossed out various insults and accusations about the Swami. But regardless of how angry or disillusioned they were, they still referred to Kirtanananda in tones of respect, even awe. In contrast, Bryant spoke without fear or reservation.”¹⁰⁰

David Gold examined the letters from former New Vrindaban devotees which Sulochan had collected. He remembered: “I picked up the first letter and began reading. It testified to Bryant's good character, then it went on to say that the writer was aware of numerous women who had been beaten at the commune. The next letter contained similar testaments to Steve's sound mind and strong moral character, then the author, a woman, told how Kirtanananda had intentionally destroyed a number

of families so that he could use the women for the street begging operation. The next letter was from a man whose daughter was molested at the ashram school. Another man said Kirtanananda had encouraged him to beat his wife. Another writer, who remained anonymous, said he was ordered to smuggle heroin from Thailand and turn over the proceeds to Kirtanananda. Someone else reported that they knew who the killer was in an unsolved murder at New Vrindaban.”¹⁰¹

SULOCHAN’S EDITOR

Sulochan heard, from Puranjana, of a brahmin godbrother who was not only highly regarded as a scholar of the Vedic scriptures but also as a reformer who had battled against the zonal acharyas in Vrindaban, India, in 1978 and 1979: Kailasa-Chandra dasa (Mark Jay Goodwin). Although Sulochan had determination and a fighting spirit, he was neither scholarly nor expert in the scriptures, nor was he an accomplished editor. Kailasa-Chandra, on the other hand, was all these. Sulochan knew he needed someone like Kailasa-Chandra to help him put his ideas into words which could be understood and appreciated by all.

In May 1985 Sulochan contacted Kailasa-Chandra, who happened to be in Houston, Texas. Kailasa-Chandra liked Sulochan’s fighting spirit and agreed to help him. The two traveled together in Sulochan’s van and eventually found their way to Santa Cruz, California. They lived together for about three months and during that time Kailasa-Chandra edited Sulochan’s writings. Kailasa-Chandra recalled:

I was influential in almost everything Sulochan published. I was in Houston in May of 1985 and, somehow or other, Sulochan managed to contact me. I traveled with him in his (very difficult to drive) van for almost three months that summer (1985). We got together in the Southern United States, and then traveled to California. We parked on Gopa-Vrindapal’s place near Santa Cruz (in the mountains), as both he and his wife, Mula-Prakrti, were favorable to us. From there,

I got him [Sulochan], for the first time in years, to chant rounds on his beads (eight), and I also got him to see the light about [Satsvarupa dasa Goswami's six-volume biography of Srila Prabhupada, titled: *Srila Prabhupada-Lilamrita*, which he had become very sentimentally influenced by, previously. . . .

These, however, were not my major contributions to his cause. My major contribution to his efforts was editing his publications—and, let me tell you, they really did need it—big-time! Without that editing, it is possible that, due to their careless, overly-emotional, gossipy, and scandalous tendencies, he would not have been taken seriously by those who eventually did so in the mid-1980s.¹⁰²

As Kailasa-Chandra indicated above, neither Sulochan nor his best friend Puranjana were considered strict devotees. Eric Johanson (formerly Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Maharaja), a disciple of Hamsadutta who sometimes served at the Berkeley temple, recalled, “It was a well known fact around Berkeley temple that Puranjana dasa was a staunch critic of the zonal acharyas. Puranjana dasa and Sulochan dasa were [also] well known around the Berkeley temple for watching TV and not being all that serious about *sadhana*, spiritual practice.”¹⁰³ However, due to Kailasa-Chandra's association, Sulochan became stricter about following the Vaishnava *sadhana* and again began chanting on beads, eight rounds daily.

SULOCHAN ADVOCATES VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ISKCON GURUS

While still living at New Vrindaban in 1984, Sulochan purchased at least two firearms—a .38 revolver and a .45 automatic—and sometimes wore the guns around his neck. One former gurukula boy recalled: “At Bahulaban I saw Sulochan wearing a pistol around his neck and I asked him why he was wearing it. He replied: ‘To kill faggots.’”¹⁰⁴

One of the New Vrindaban “fringies,” the would-be-ksatriya Kalpavrksa dasa (Keith Weber), sold Sulochan two guns. During an interview with a private investigator, it was explained, “Weber . . . stated . . .

‘I had sold one [Star PD .45 automatic pistol] to Steve Bryant while he was a member of the community here in West Virginia.’ . . . Weber went on to explain that he had sold a couple of guns to Bryant including a .38 revolver and the .45 automatic. He said that like himself, Bryant liked guns and liked to collect them.”¹⁰⁵

In California, Sulochan sharpened his marksmanship skills on a target range by shooting a pistol at a picture of his arch nemesis. Puskar dasa (Matthew Goldman), a talented artist who produced hundreds of paintings for the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, ISKCON temples around the world, and Prabhupada’s Palace of Gold at New Vrindaban, explained:

When I returned to Los Angeles in October of 1984, Sulochan happened to be the first devotee I met. It seemed as if he wanted someone to hang out with him. I don’t think many devotees were friendly to him due to his criticisms of Ramesvara Maharaja. . . .

I spent the day with Sulochan and we traveled to the Manu-Samhita Community near Sequoia National Park. One of the sights he showed me was his target practice range. He had a pistol and sharpened his skills by practicing with a target. He said: “Take a look at this!” The target was a picture of Kirtanananda Swami.

Sulochan spoke to me at length about his problems with his wife and children, and I suggested [to him] that I should call New Vrindaban [on the phone and see if I could help him, as I was friendly with management]. I got on the phone and spoke to Kuladri and Sudhanu [George Weisner, a longtime New Vrindaban resident and board member] and attempted to warn them that this fellow means business, perhaps they should consider his demands to get back his wife and children. Sulochan was sitting right there in the room listening to my end of the conversation. Kuladri and Sudhanu seemed concerned, but when they finally put Kirtanananda on the phone, he basically dismissed Sulochan and said: “Krishna will protect me.”¹⁰⁶

Kailasa-Chandra once practiced shooting handguns with Sulochan. Kailasa-Chandra reported, “It is a fact that Sulochan and I did some

shooting together, but it was only on one occasion. It was at Radha-Mohan's rural property near Gainesville, Missouri. We did not shoot at targets, so I never saw that Kirtanananda target.”¹⁰⁷

One of Sulochan's godbrothers in Berkeley, Visvamurti dasa (William Stacnowski), claimed that Sulochan told him he was going to kill Bhaktipada. A private investigator interviewed Visvamurti and explained, “Stacnowski says . . . that while both he and Bryant were in Berkeley, Bryant had talked to him about killing Bhaktipada. . . . Stacnowski states that he believed Bryant had the ability to do the killing as he had seen him with a sawed off shotgun while he was in Berkeley.”¹⁰⁸

CAN A FALLEN DEVOTEE DETECT HYPOCRISY MORE CLEARLY THAN A STRICT SANNYASI?

While Sulochan was living in his van in Berkeley, Hamsadutta asked to meet him. Sulochan showed up for his meeting carrying a loaded .45. Hamsadutta recalled, “We met for two hours. He said if the pages he was distributing didn't have an effect; he was going to kill Bhaktipada. I asked him, ‘Do you follow the principles?’ He said he smoked pot. I said, ‘Then what is the use of you writing all this stuff? You have no validity. First make yourself perfect, then criticize. Stop all this nonsense.’”¹⁰⁹

In his conversation with Sulochan, Hamsadutta expressed a belief common amongst ISKCON devotees: if one does not strictly follow the four regulative principles (no meat eating, no illicit sex, no intoxication, and no gambling), one cannot have transcendental knowledge. As noted earlier, Tapahpunja Swami also subscribed to this belief when he chastised Sulochan in June 1984 on the third floor of New Vrindaban's utility building, “Shut up; a fallen devotee is in no position to judge Bhaktipada.”¹¹⁰

Most devotees believe that fallen devotees cannot have transcendental knowledge, therefore they must be covered by illusion and ignorance. And if they are covered by illusion and ignorance, such fallen persons should just keep quiet and not criticize; anything they say is nonsense.

Prabhupada explained in *Sri Isopanisad*, “The regulative principles are such that one who follows them is promoted from the platform of fruitive activities to the platform of transcendental knowledge.”¹¹¹

In fact, without following the four regulative principles, one cannot even be considered a human being; one is little more than an animal. Prabhupada explained, “Austerity, penance, that is human life. Otherwise, it is animal life. Simply animal civilization. It is not human civilization.”¹¹²

However, on the other hand, a person who strictly follows the four regulative principles can also be covered by illusion and ignorance. So many of Bhaktipada’s followers, including dozens of sannyasis, such as Radhanath, Tapahpunja and Tirtha, served and worshiped him for years—even decades—before they discovered that they had been in illusion: serving and worshiping not a pure devotee, but a showbottle pretender. Considering this, it is the author’s opinion that even if Sulochan did not strictly follow the four regulative principles, he was still more knowledgeable than the New Vrindaban sannyasis who practiced austerities and penances, but were blinded by their deranged devotion.

When Hamsadutta asked Sulochan if he followed the principles, imagine where the conversation might have turned if Sulochan had replied, “Do *you* follow the principles?” If Hamsadutta was an honest man, he would have admitted defeat and stopped speaking himself. Even a devotee who did not strictly follow the principles, such as Sulochan, could plainly see the hypocrisy amongst the ISKCON gurus. Kailasa-Chandra agreed:

If a neophyte devotee or a mixed devotee or a fallen devotee is unable to recognize a bogus guru, then evil is supreme. Hamsadutta was engaged in illicit sex with his female disciple (or disciples at that time), and he was also engaged in thuggery with dangerous weapons and other criminal actions. He was a mental speculator about who could be guru, and his association was abominable. Yet, he could then preach

that Sulochan could not write about deviations that were becoming more and more obvious each day? Hamsadutta's method was simply to squelch the truth and cover up, and all of his cohorts were engaged in pulling any rabbit out of the hat that they could in order to do the same thing.

The Paramatma [the Lord in the heart] allows a person, even if he is having trouble with the regulative principles, to be able to see a bogus guru as being just that and a bogus Krishna movement as being just that, as well. Neophytes and mixed devotees are still afforded this protection, if they actually want it.

Sulochan wanted to expose bogus Vaishnava gurus, and he did just that. He wanted to expose the vitiated GBC, and he did that, as well. As a result, people and devotees benefited, but Hamsadutta tried to deny them that benefit. Hamsadutta was engaged in damage control, fix-it-as-you-go in order to buy the deviation more time. Fortunately, Sulochan was not intimidated by Hamsadutta's admonishment—at least, even if he was intimidated, it did not last for long. We should all be thankful for that.

The misleaders of "ISKCON" degraded everyone or almost everyone. Then, they made propaganda that fallen persons must keep quiet. The self-serving motivation in their doing so should be obvious to anyone, including fallen devotees. That kind of intimidation tactic allowed the deviation to go on for much longer than it should have, but we are now at the point where any "ISKCON" strategy can be seen for just what it is. Sulochan was anything but a qualified brahmin, but he had every right to speak up against the cataclysmic disaster that was being perpetrated by both the vitiated GBC and the eleven pretender mahabhagavats . . . and the aftermath. ¹¹³

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE: INDIAN PATRIOT

Ravindra-Svarupa (William H. Deadwyler, III), the Philadelphia temple president and a prominent leader of the Guru Reform movement (which

will be discussed in Chapter 3), alleged that Kailasa-Chandra encouraged Sulochan to threaten violence against the gurus. Ravindra-Svarupa explained:

He [Sulochan] went to the West Coast, very discontent, and who should he run into but Kailasa-Chandra, who convinces him that, “Oh, it’s not just Bhaktipada, it’s all the gurus. They’re all wicked and evil.” And Sulochan considered himself a ksatriya, and Kailasa-Chandra seemed to back up this idea, and that he should take some action of a ksatriya nature against the corrupt gurus.

And just as this whole thing is starting up, this reform movement starts, some of my papers [about Guru Reform] go out. I get the reputation as a leader. I get a letter from Sulochan, and Sulochan says to me in this letter, “Oh, your reform movement is very nice, and it has good intentions and everything, and I’m happy for that, but,” he says, “it won’t work.” He said, “You’re like Mahatma Gandhi, but I’m like Subhas Chandra Bose.” And that has to be violence. ¹¹⁴

In his letter to Ravindra-Svarupa, Sulochan referred to Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), an Indian nationalist whom Prabhupada highly regarded. Bose’s defiant patriotism made him a hero in India, but his attempt to force the British out of India by conspiring with Germany and Japan left a troubled legacy. In Calcutta, Bose was arrested by the British for organizing mass protests and was placed under house arrest, but he escaped in a disguise and fled to Germany in 1940, where he met with Adolf Hitler. With German funding, he formed Free-India Radio and an army: the Free-India Legion, which at its peak had 3,000 soldiers. When Germany decided not to invade India, Bose sought help instead from the Japanese and then created the Indian National Army to fight against the British.

Prabhupada and Subhas Chandra Bose were schoolmates at Scottish Church College in Calcutta. Prabhupada greatly admired him and often praised his resourcefulness and dedication to Indian independence. Prabhupada credited Bose, not Gandhi, for freeing India from British

subjugation. He said Gandhi's non-violence only prolonged British domination, but Bose's army and its threat of violence forced the British to give up.

Sulochan admired Subhas Chandra Bose and wrote, "Prabhupada spoke very highly of Mr. Bose because he gloriously executed his duties as a ksatriya whereas Prabhupada accused Gandhi of not properly executing his duty as a brahmin. It was Mr. Bose and his violent campaign that actually ousted the British from India and not Gandhi with his non-violent sentimentalism." ¹¹⁵

CORRUPT REGIMES OVERTHROWN BY REVOLUTION AND VIOLENCE

During a morning walk in Los Angeles in December, 1973, Prabhupada explained: "So without revolution . . . you cannot change old order. 'Old orders changes giving place to new.' That old order changes. Everywhere it is by violence. The *Mahabharata* also, the battle of Kuruksetra. Krishna was there. He tried to settle up. But it was not settled without violence. . . . Krishna also comes . . . for killing the demons." ¹¹⁶

Sulochan wanted to change the old order, and he believed, as Prabhupada indicated during his morning walk, that it would only be changed by violence. Although Ravindra-Svarupa intimated that Kailasa-Chandra "seemed to back up [Sulochan's] idea . . . that he should take some action of a ksatriya nature against the corrupt gurus," Kailasa-Chandra, on the other hand, insisted that he never encouraged Sulochan to use violence in his campaign against the ISKCON gurus. He claimed that Ravindra-Svarupa, through his allegation, falsely attempted to implicate himself in encouraging violence. Kailasa-Chandra explained:

I never at any time directly encouraged Sulochan to resort to violence. Instead, I encouraged him to follow the exact course that he was engaged in, viz., produce exposés combined with semi-position papers, to mass-produce them, and to distribute them as far and wide as possible.

That we shot handguns (once) together does not even provide substantial evidence to the fabrication that I encouraged him to violence. My handgun was cent-per-cent for self protection, and I had this handgun since Beaverton, Oregon, in 1979. I never at any time intentionally contemplated or planned to use it as an offensive manner and history proves that I never did so.

Now, it is a fact that Sulochan discussed one or two ideas of his own to me, and I remained neutral when he did so. One involved handcuffing Ramesvara to the Los Angeles deities and then remaining with him on the altar with a handgun to his head, inviting the press (and certainly the police) to then come to the temple and forcing them all to hear a full discourse of his (Sulochan's) complaints. I thought the idea not only extremely offensive to the Lord, but also hair-brained.

So, once again, Ravindra plays fast and loose with the "facts," and falsely claims that I was the one who was inciting Sulochan to violence. Simply no truth to that whatsoever. Ravindra's statement has the potential to put me in harms way with some of the remaining fanatics, especially if they are hatchet-men and/or enforcers. Ravindra is, in effect, through a false allegation, trying to put a big "X" on my chest. ¹¹⁷

In any case, Sulochan purchased a .22 caliber rifle with a scope and boasted to his friends, "I'd like to kill Ramesvara, and I wouldn't mind going to prison for it." Sulochan's carpenter friend in Los Angeles, Nistraigunya (Steven John Forbes), recalled, "Sulochan had a 22 caliber . . . light, very light rifle with a scope. I kept it for him in my house. I returned it to him a few weeks . . . before he was killed. . . . He said he would like to get rid of the L. A. guru and wouldn't mind going to prison for it." ¹¹⁸ Ravindra confirmed, "He [Sulochan] was really serious about killing a guru or two." ¹¹⁹

Sulochan believed killing for Krishna was authorized by Prabhupada, *Sri-Isopanisad*, *Bhagavad-gita*, and *Srimad-bhagavatam*. Prabhupada had clearly warned in *Sri-Isopanisad* that "so-called acharyas" are "rogues, . . . the most dangerous elements in human society." *Bhagavad-gita* (16.19)

noted that the ultimate destination for so-called acharyas were “bodies like those of cats, dogs and hogs.” “Those who are envious and mischievous, who are the lowest among men, are cast by Me into the ocean of material existence, into various demoniac species of life.” Prabhupada also claimed that the demon religious propagandists could not be overthrown without violence, “Without revolution . . . you cannot change old order. . . . That old order changes. Everywhere it is by violence. The *Mahabharata* also, the battle of Kuruksetra. Krishna was there. He tried to settle up. But it was not settled without violence. . . . Krishna also comes . . . for killing the demons.”

In *Srimad-bhagavatam*, Narada-Muni—a Vedic sage, traveling musician and storyteller who carried news and enlightening wisdom between the earth and the celestial planets (known in ISKCON as the “Transcendental Spaceman”)—claimed that even if one renders service unknowingly to a pure devotee, one makes spiritual advancement. Sulochan postulated that therefore, if one killed an offender to the pure devotee, one would also make spiritual advancement.

In addition, Prabhupada admired Subhas Chandra Bose for his army and his ksatriya spirit, but thought little of Gandhi’s non-violent satyagraha (civil disobedience) movement. Sulochan thought of himself as a ksatriya; he definitely had the warrior spirit. He felt that Prabhupada and Krishna were speaking to him; encouraging him to continue the noble, Vedic, ksatriya tradition of killing for Krishna. While visiting his friends, he waved his guns in the air and proclaimed, “Death to the gurus.” He frightened more than a few devotees in Berkeley, Los Angeles, Laguna Beach and New Vrindaban by his enthusiasm to root out rogues disguised as gurus and cleanse ISKCON by violent means. Sulochan was confident in his mission and he was prepared to go to prison, if he could kill a guru or two.

CHAPTER 2

The Kirtanananda Exposé

WITH KAILASA-CHANDRA AS HIS ANONYMOUS EDITOR, Sulochan compiled his research into a book, *The Guru Business: How the Leaders of the Hare Krishna Movement Deviated from the Pure Path as Taught and Exemplified by its Founder: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder/Acharya ISKCON*. Sulochan selected the title *The Guru Business* from a passage by Prabhupada: “*Sri Isopanisad* confirms that these pseudo-religionists are heading toward the most obnoxious place in the universe after completion of their spiritual master business.”¹²⁰

Sulochan’s book, essentially consisting of his candid (and sometimes inaccurate) commentary on excerpts from Prabhupada’s letters, was intended to expose the corrupt activities of the ISKCON gurus, whom, he believed, had usurped their positions of power within ISKCON. It was the first real hard-hitting collection of essays exposing the corruption within the movement. Sulochan canvassed among his acquaintances to support the publication of his book. He received a donation from his friend Naranarayan dasa, who explained, “I contributed toward the publication of Sulochan’s book, *The Guru Business*, as I also thought the ISKCON zonal acharyas were not bona fide.”¹²¹

One of Sulochan’s friends in Los Angeles, Nandini devi dasi, accurately assessed, “*The Guru Business* ranged from goofy to manic, from paranoid to deadly accurate.”¹²² A friend of Sulochan’s who lived at New Vrindaban recalled, “Steve struck me as an ingenuous Don Quixote

without a Sancho Panza, a man tilting against evil only he could see. Time, however, would vindicate him. The dragons were real.”¹²³

Puranjana explained: “Sulochan’s writings were a bit strident, to say the least. He would just blurt out things like: ‘Kirtanananda is not a guru but a demon who needs to be corrected with violence.’ I tried to say that this was not going to be effective writing, could we please use [my own book] *Our Living Guru*’s style of commentary? But he always refused. He wanted his hard copy to be as hard as nails, and it was.”¹²⁴

A former disciple of Hamsadutta Maharaja claimed that Sulochan’s book changed his life. Eric Johanson admitted, “*The Guru Business* . . . changed my life in Krishna consciousness. I realized that my relationship with Hamsadutta dasa was little more than one of a ‘cheap disciple’ with a ‘cheap guru,’ and that I had yet to be truly admitted into the Gaudiya-Vaishnava parampara.”¹²⁵

However, not all appreciated Sulochan’s book. Tapahpunja Swami recalled, “He [Sulochan] was writing tracts intended to pollute devotees. He was writing and passing out his own papers. They were full of fictitious nonsense. . . . Bryant twisted things to find the worst light he could put Bhaktipada in.”¹²⁶

KIRTANANANDA: “A CRAZY MAN.”

Sulochan wrote about his mortal enemy in Chapter 10: “The Kirtanananda Exposé: A Crazy Man.”

This chapter is an exposé on one of the new “gurus” in ISKCON. It is the first, but it most likely will not be the only one we will have to compile. Kirtanananda “Swami” deserves first recognition. He was among the first initiated devotees.¹²⁷ He was the first to be given “sannyasa.”¹²⁸ A week later, he was the first to attack Srila Prabhupada trying to usurp the ISKCON movement for himself.¹²⁹ Shortly thereafter he was the first to sit on a throne and accept worship of himself even during

Srila Prabhupada's physical presence¹³⁰ and of course he was the first to jump on a throne right after Srila Prabhupada's departure.¹³¹ He was the first to begin a drug dealing operation (the KSS: Krishna's Secret Service)¹³² and later to set up a counterfeiting operation.^{133 134}

While all these statements and accusations are essentially correct, Kirtanananda did not "begin" the recreational drug and counterfeiting money-making enterprises. New Vrindaban residents dreamed up these schemes. Kirtanananda did not want to personally "get involved" with illegal money-making enterprises, but he never refused the cash raised by these schemes.

In a telephone conversation with the author, Adwaitacharya dasa (Emil "Eddie" Sofsky), arguably New Vrindaban's biggest drug dealer of all time—whose illegal and highly-profitable money-making enterprise generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for Bhaktipada without which Prabhupada's Palace of Gold would probably never have been built, explained, "Dealing drugs was something *I* wanted to do. It wasn't Kirtanananda's idea. Maharaja always tried to discourage me from dealing. He never approved of it. He begged me to stop. He ordered me to stop. But I was insistent. I only stopped when I got busted."^{135 136} Sulochan continued his Kirtanananda exposé:

He [Kirtanananda] was the first to organize a women's sexploitation party¹³⁷ and encourage the leader of that party, . . . Dharmatma [Dennis Gorrick], to keep the women satisfied as their gigolo.¹³⁸ To our knowledge, he is the first "guru" to authorize an abortion of the gigolo's child in an underage girl.¹³⁹ He was the first to be utterly condemned by Srila Prabhupada. To this day, there are more letters of condemnation written about him than all the other bogus gurus combined.¹⁴⁰ He was the first (and hopefully the last) to put a crown on Srila Prabhupada's murti (statue) denoting him as a mere monarch, although Srila Prabhupada was not sent by the Lord for that service.¹⁴¹ He was the first, and maybe only, "disciple," to be so envious as to directly challenge his guru's authority by calling him "a tyrant."¹⁴² He was the

first “disciple” to be incarcerated in a mental institution (Bellevue).¹⁴³ He was the first to treat Krishna’s cows in such a way that dozens of them died of starvation, disease, and exposure (the local courts could not even bear these atrocities of Kirtanananda and prosecuted him for cruelty to animals.)¹⁴⁴ These are just a few of his “firsts.”

He is number one in many other ways. Besides being the oldest “devotee” physically,¹⁴⁵ he was/is the first full-blown homosexual in the movement¹⁴⁶ and he even bragged of this to Acyutananda Swami in Mayapura, 1971, when he said, “I was sucking (word for male genital) before you were born.”¹⁴⁷

Therefore, in observing his stressed seniority, we believe that he should be given the first chance to try and clear himself of the charges we level against him, and the other bogus gurus as well, which clearly state one thing: absolute power corrupts absolutely.¹⁴⁸

Sulochan pointed out that most of the New Vrindaban residents were not qualified brahmins. Therefore, he concluded that Kirtanananda was not such a great man for attracting hundreds of uneducated and indiscriminate followers to surrender to him. The Brijabasis may have regarded Bhaktipada as a king, but, Sulochan insisted, he was in fact only a “jackal” in a small forest who fooled the other animals into thinking he was a king. In addition, Sulochan accurately predicted that Kirtanananda would eventually be caught breaking the regulative principles.

Kirtanananda is claiming 500 residents at New Vrindaban and some persons consider this an impressive figure. On close analysis however we see differently. That figure includes the 100 hired outside workers on the payroll and the 100 fringe devotees who have little to no *sadhana* and receive a salary under minimum wage. At least two-thirds of the remaining members are women and children mostly from broken families. There are always at least 30-50 floaters who will stay a few months to a year at most. Most of the steady men who remain there have never studied the philosophy seriously and are there primarily because they get room and board and some work they like doing. Only half a dozen

men devotees in the entire community know enough philosophy to give a lecture. Out of 80 men Prabhupada disciples reported for the 1984 *Vyasa Puja* book, eleven left before the book went to print. Most of the remaining “Prabhupada disciples” were worshiping Kirtanananda even before Prabhupada left the planet. So we can safely say that he does not have “thousands of Americans following him.” But those who do follow, we must admit, see him as “king.”

In this connection Prabhupada says, “There is a Bengali saying that a jackal is king in a small forest. The story is that a jackal became king in the forest by fooling the other animals for some time, but he remained always a jackal and his ruse was at last exposed.” (Rupanuga, 11/13/70)

. . . . To the gross materialists, he has kept up a good front and has fooled most of the devotees thus far. But just as Bhavananda [Charles Bacis; an ISKCON guru who enjoyed sexual relations with young men and tricked Sulochan into giving him fellatio a decade earlier] ¹⁴⁹ was finally caught, so also Kirtanananda will eventually be caught. ^{150 151}

Sulochan concluded: Kirtanananda is a “rogue,” “a pseudo-religionist,” and “nothing but a sense gratifier.” Sulochan ended his chapter about Kirtanananda:

So the conclusion is that Kirtanananda has not been purified by his career in Krishna consciousness. This is because his motive was not to serve Prabhupada, but to use Prabhupada’s legacy to further his own guru business. One cannot make spiritual advancement by such thinking. Krishna is no fool. He knows everyone’s heart perfectly. Eventually everyone has got to pay. Prabhupada sums up the position of these “gurus” very lucidly as follows:

By a false display of religious sentiments, they present a show of devotional service while indulging in all sorts of immoral activities. (1) In this way they pass as spiritual master (2) and devotees of God. Such violators of religious principles (3) have no respect (4) for the authoritative acharyas, the holy

teachers in the strict disciplic succession. To mislead the people in general, they themselves become so-called acharyas, but they do not even follow the principles of the acharyas (5).

These rogues are the most dangerous elements (6) in human society. Because there is no religious government, they escape punishment (7) by the law of the state. They cannot, however, escape the law of the Supreme, who has clearly declared in *Bhagavad-gita* (16.19-20) that envious demons (8) in the garb of religious propagandists shall be thrown into the darkest regions of hell. *Sri Isopanisad* confirms that these pseudo-religionists are heading toward the most obnoxious place in the universe after completion of their spiritual master business (9), which they conduct simply for sense gratification (10). (*Sri Isopanisad* 12)

From reading the early letters about the character of Kirtanananda, and interviewing several dozen devotees who have been burned by him, we can easily see that this above description is actually a description of Kirtanananda. Here are some of the reasons why this is so:

1. Kirtanananda is a drug dealer.¹⁵² He passes women around amongst his workers as though they were all whores. He does not recognize anyone as a godbrother and has no respect for the rights of others. He directly tries to break up marriages if it furthers his own profit, adoration and distinction. Whether or not he is still engaged in homosexual activities will all come out in due course of time. There is strong indication that he is.
2. He always wanted to be a spiritual master. Even before joining ISKCON he was the guru in his local clique of friends, most of whom were also homosexual. He was into black magic. This combination earned him the title “Weird Keith.” After meeting Prabhupada he only waited one year before trying to usurp Prabhupada’s movement. He actually attempted to legally keep Prabhupada from entering the country.¹⁵³ Even after he so-called

came back, there are numerous instances where he was exposed as attempting to surpass Prabhupada. Now he is fully engrossed in posing as a spiritual master. Prabhupada directly stated in one letter that “he wants to be a spiritual master by disobeying his spiritual master.”

3. For a sannyasi, the first regulative principle is to not have any connection with women. Kirtanananda violates that principle constantly. He goes so far as to say that all women have an eternal relationship with him, but that their husbands are not important. This preaching is not only a violation, but it is Ravana [demon] philosophy. Actually it is worse. At least Ravana wanted to enjoy the women himself. Kirtanananda thinks women smell like fish. He steals women for the money they bring in and to pass around amongst his workers. A sannyasi is supposed to know sastra. Kirtanananda does not know sastra at all which is why he seldom quotes it. It is even rumored that he has not read all of Prabhupada’s books. But he constantly concocts statements and policies such as putting a crown on Prabhupada, authorizing women to have sex with the sankirtan leader, authorizing an abortion in an underage girl (because of the previous policy), etc. . . .
4. Prabhupada stated that Kirtanananda thinks guru and sastra are tyranny. That means no respect. Why should we think that he changed?
5. Prabhupada set certain standards of moral behavior, compassion, honesty, etc. Kirtanananda does not follow those standards. For example Prabhupada was very compassionate and thoughtful not to interfere in marriages. He always told the women to be fully devoted to their husbands. Kirtanananda openly tells the women to fully devote themselves to himself, even if it means totally neglecting the husband and children. In this way he controls the women and so naturally the husbands have to stay there also.

6. There are many dangerous elements in society. Thieves, rapists, murderers, etc. But here Prabhupada says that the most dangerous are those who exploit others in the name of religion. They are the most dangerous because they hurt people in the deepest way possible—their souls. This world has only one purpose; to teach people to surrender to God. When society is infested with rogues posing as saints, that stops the progress of human life. Thus most people are not inclined to trust anyone.
7. Since the government is demonic, the demonic “gurus” also escape punishment. But even the GBC falls in the category of a Godless government. They have allowed these “rogues” to remain in their positions even after having been exposed. For example the GBC determined that Kirtanananda interfered with, and destroyed the marriage of Sulochan dasa. But because the GBC is essentially a Godless body, the GBC had no potency to rectify Kirtanananda and return Sulochan’s sons to him. Thus he escaped punishment.
8. Here Prabhupada uses terminology that scares the sentimentalists who permeate ISKCON half to death. We have hardly met a devotee who has the guts to call a spade a spade. But the fact is, the current gurus, and especially Kirtanananda are nothing but envious demons as described above. If they were ever sincere, that remains to be seen.
9. The guru business is certainly lucrative. There is no need to go into the details of how the “gurus” have stuffed their pockets with money and luxuries. It is all too well known. Not a single one of them has even the slightest concept of simple living or austerity anymore. They claim they are beyond all that.
10. As of this writing it is unknown what different kinds of sense gratification Kirtanananda enjoys aside from the profit, adoration, and distinction. For some reason, the GBC always waits for the sense gratification to hit the lower levels before they recognize that the “guru” is actually nothing but a sense-gratifier. ¹⁵⁴

SULOCHAN MADE SOME INCORRECT AND VICIOUS ACCUSATIONS

Although Sulochan had stumbled upon many secrets of criminal activities, abuse and molestation at New Vrindaban, not all his sources were accurate. In *The Guru Business* he sometimes made false accusations and drew incorrect conclusions.

(1) His primary thesis—that Bhaktipada had stolen his wife—was not exactly correct. His wife may have loved Bhaktipada like a daughter loves her father, and he in turn may have given her shelter when she requested asylum from whom she considered an unstable and abusive husband, but Bhaktipada did not steal her affections from her husband. Jamuna never had much affection for Sulochan, and whatever affection she might have had for him had evaporated years earlier.

(2) Sulochan claimed that Prabhupada was not pleased by his Palace, as he could only find one letter in the BBT Archive in which Prabhupada mentioned it. However, Prabhupada many times glorified his Palace and even promised to come and live there. Prabhupada said: “One would have to be a great fool not to like it [my Palace].”¹⁵⁵

(3) Sulochan believed that Kirtanananda was rotten to the core. Others, however, claimed that Kirtanananda also had a noble side: he treated many devotees kindly. He could be a cruel tyrant, but he could also be a loving father-figure and wise spiritual guide. He had an exceedingly complex personality. Even today some former New Vrindaban residents still have affection for him, despite his history of duplicity.

Umapati Swami (Wallace “Wally” Sheffey), one of the three “Mott Street Boys” who shared an apartment in the Lower East Side with Keith Ham and Howard Wheeler from 1964 to 1966, explained: “Kirtanananda Swami did a lot of good too. He saved a lot of people. He brought people back who were on the verge of blooping [defecting from ISKCON]. But no one talks about this any more. People only want to talk about his mistakes. I do think it is unfair. And he will always have his place in my

heart. ‘The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.’”¹⁵⁶

(4) Sulochan heard that Kirtanananda was a “guru” even before he met Prabhupada. Sulochan claimed, “He [Kirtanananda] always wanted to be a spiritual master. Even before joining ISKCON he was the guru in his local clique of friends.” This was corroborated in the Introduction to Kirtanananda Swami’s 1978 *Sri Vyasa-Puja* book which claimed: “[Keith] became a leader to many of the young hippies who flocked to Greenwich Village in the mid-sixties. They would come to him for advice and to discuss philosophy. It was well known that no one could defeat him.”¹⁵⁷

Even Satsvarupa dasa Goswami (Stephen Guarino), the author of *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, propagated the myth that Keith was “something of a guru” in the mid-1960s, “Dressed in old denim cutoffs, sandals, and T-shirt, he [Keith] was something of a guru among the Mott Street coterie.”¹⁵⁸

Umapati Swami disagreed, and claimed that Keith had never been a guru nor a spiritual master during his Mott Street days, as he never had any followers. Howard and he saw Keith not as a guru, but as an equal. Yes, Umapati admitted, Keith might have been an “LSD guru,” but that was very different from being a spiritual master. Umapati Swami explained:

The idea that Keith was a kind of guru among his friends sounds like something made up by a zealous disciple. He was not seen as a guru, nor did he have a following. The people who came were just looking to get high. Of course, Keith was an intelligent guy, so people might ask him for advice, but they mostly just wanted to smoke a joint.

An LSD guru is someone who guides you through your trip. That, he did. He was an expert on tripping, but this idea of his being the big guru is childish fancy. An LSD guru can take you on a good trip, but that has nothing to do with spiritual knowledge. When people came to him for advice, do you know what advice he gave? “Smoke more pot.

Have more sex. And be uninhibited about it.” And if the listener was receptive, he might throw in a little hippie Zen. Sometimes he might even try some Christianity, but no one else was interested in that. Nor did he live according to any religious teachings.

Who would have seen him as a guru? Not Howard or I. We saw him as a friend, an equal. The others who came had little interest in spiritual life, if any. They did not care about a guru. Sure, he was a great talker with a fabulous sense of humor, but he was just a degraded hippie like the rest of us. He was nothing, absolutely nothing, till he met Srila Prabhupada. He owed everything to Prabhupada, and he never denied that. The fact is, he got it all, every ounce, from Srila Prabhupada.

The confusion comes from those disciples who want to make him out as a *nitya-siddha* [an eternally liberated soul] or almost. All Prabhupada had to do was brush off a little dust, right? No way. He got it all from Prabhupada.¹⁵⁹

(5) Sulochan claimed that most of Kirtanananda’s friends at Mott Street were homosexual. He wrote, “[Keith] was the guru in his local clique of friends, most of whom were also homosexual.” Umapati contested that statement. “It’s not true that most of Keith’s friends were homosexual. It amuses me that these so-called straight men who look down their nose at homosexuals are themselves so fascinated with the subject. Mott Street was a hippie hangout with free-flowing marijuana and LSD, and all kinds of people came. Still, not everyone came for the drugs. Some of them were real friends and came out of friendship. Some of them didn’t even smoke pot, and certainly many of them had no interest in homosexuality. Keith was gregarious and could relate with all kinds of people.”¹⁶⁰

(6) Sulochan heard that Kirtanananda had dabbled in black magic before meeting Prabhupada and was known as “Weird Keith.” Sulochan claimed, “He was into black magic. This combination earned him the title ‘Weird Keith.’” Umapati Swami disputed this claim, “He [Keith] was

not into black magic at all. We never even talked about it. There was nothing weird about him. I never heard anyone say he was weird.”¹⁶¹

(7) Sulochan believed Kirtanananda to be unschooled in the philosophy of *Bhagavad-gita*, yet Kirtanananda had been one of Prabhupada’s most respected preachers practically from the beginning of the movement. In February 1967 Swamiji asked him to go to Montreal to help start a temple. Later in May 1969, when Prabhupada was too ill to travel to preaching engagements, he appointed Kirtanananda to preach on his behalf. *Back to Godhead* published eighteen articles and poems by Kirtanananda between 1966 and 1986, including a series of eight essays on the first eight chapters of the *Bhagavad-gita*.¹⁶²

In 1984, Bhaktipada’s first book: *Song of God: A Summary Study of Bhagavad-gita As It Is* was published. It was a transcription of a series of lectures he delivered in Bombay during March 1984. Bhaktipada was not ignorant of the philosophy, he always stressed the conclusion of *Bhagavad-gita*: surrender to Krishna. However some might disagree with his interpretation of the scriptures. Later during the Interfaith Era he appeared to deviate, but at this time in 1985 he was basically still following Prabhupada’s program.

(8) Sulochan heard reports that Kirtanananda may have molested Hayagriva’s eldest son, S., but these rumors were denied many times by S., including once under oath in a court of law. Kirtanananda had the greatest respect and lofty aspirations for Hayagriva’s son. He treated him like a prince, and personally trained him to become a conscientious devotee; one who followed the principles strictly.

S. explained: “I lived at the New Vrindaban Community from the age of six until about sixteen. My father and mother were separated when I was five years old [1975]. Bhaktipada was more of a stepfather to me, took care of me, because my regular father . . . wasn’t there. I didn’t have a father. My father wasn’t around much. Bhaktipada treated me like a father. He never molested me. Nothing close.”¹⁶³

Vrindapati dasa (Walter Parry), a former Marine who served as the chief blacksmith at the New Vrindaban metal forge and also as an enforcer, affirmed: “The relationship between Kirtanananda Swami and S. was like that of an affectionate father. They slept in the same room. Sometimes in the same sleeping bag.”¹⁶⁴ Kuladri clarified: “Kirtanananda had a rubber mat on the floor, and he had open sleeping bags as quilts on those mats. They didn’t sleep *in* the same sleeping bag. It was a sleeping bag opened up on the mat.”¹⁶⁵

Kirtanananda sometimes publicly tickled the boy, even in the crotch. Vrindapati remembered: “Kirtanananda had a habit of tickling the boy, and not really making an effort of concealing from people around him that he would tickle him sometimes in the ribs and armpits, sometimes on the bottom of the feet, behind the knees, and it was my observation that more often than not he would end up tickling him in the crotch.”¹⁶⁶

Some considered this evidence that Kirtanananda molested S.: (1) they sometimes slept under the same sleeping bag, and (2) sometimes Kirtanananda tickled the boy in the crotch. But the former is hardly proof of child molestation. Many young children like to sleep with their parents. They appreciate the security of being close to a loving and protective parent. And tickling in public? I witnessed this tickling at least once and there were certainly no erotic overtones. It was just plain fun in my opinion. S. appeared to enjoy it and so did I. Actually I was a little jealous of S., getting all that attention from Kirtanananda Swami.

S. insisted that Bhaktipada never allowed him to have any sexual experiences whatsoever and described one incident (while he was still pre-pubescent) when he was punished severely for hanging out with some older boys who got into some mischief. S. remembered:

Once around 1979, during the morning program, some of the gurukula boys skipped out of *Bhagavatam* class and were hiding and hanging out in the guest reception room at Bahulaban. The

conversation turned to sex (a frequent topic during *Bhagavatam* class in those days), and some of the older boys demonstrated how they could get an erection. I, who was only about nine years old, happened to be with them.

Suddenly and unexpectedly Kuladri walked in and immediately reported our activities to Kirtanananda. Most of the boys received light to medium reprimands, but I was very severely punished personally by Kirtanananda, who instructed me to select a whipping switch from the bushes behind the grey house by the Palace, which Kirtanananda used to beat me. The chastisement was swift and painful.

Kirtanananda obviously had very high aspirations for me and he disciplined me strictly. He intended to raise me to become a great brahmacari and to fulfill Prabhupada's prophesy that I would mature into a powerful preacher who would "defeat all the mayavadis." ¹⁶⁷

Kirtanananda certainly molested other boys and teenagers, but Hayagriva's son claimed he was never molested by Kirtanananda. Unfortunately, Sulochan's (and others') allegations have caused much distress to S. and the resultant stigma from this rumor unfortunately persists even today after decades. However, many of Sulochan's other allegations have been proven in time.

GBC CONCERNED ABOUT BHAKTIPADA

As early as 1981, some GBC members privately expressed concern about Bhaktipada's novel innovation, established on Christmas day of 1980, of dressing Prabhupada at the Palace in the garb of a king. Ravindra-Svarupa recalled, "He [Prabhupada] was dressed not as a sannyasi, but as a king: the 'Royal Prabhupada,' or 'Prabhupada Rex.' Many GBCs were distressed about this and Kirtanananda insisted that it be maintained. It was his 'realization.'" ¹⁶⁸

In 1983, the GBC publicly expressed reservations about some of Bhaktipada's activities, especially using the title, "Founder-Acharya of

New Vrindaban.” Ravindra-Svarupa recalled, “They [the GBC] were starting to get worried about Kirtanananda [in 1983].”¹⁶⁹

The 1983 GBC resolutions addressed Bhaktipada’s use of the title “Founder-Acharya” and noted: “The title ‘Founder-Acharya’ [and ‘Founder’] can be used only in reference to Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada’s name must be prominently displayed with his title ‘Founder-Acharya’ on all printed materials, signs, buildings used by ISKCON, letterhead, and for all ISKCON projects.”¹⁷⁰

Although Bhaktipada was not permitted to use the title “Founder-Acharya,” he still won a victory at the 1983 Mayapura meetings when the GBC reluctantly permitted him to continue dressing Prabhupada in the Palace as a king. The 1983 resolutions indicated:

1. That ISKCON is appreciative of the wonderful contribution of HDG Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban have made to the Krishna Consciousness Movement by constructing the Prabhupada Palace. The GBC heard a personal request by Srila Bhaktipada to allow the present system of dressing Srila Prabhupada [as a king] in the Palace to continue. Although the system does not necessarily represent the consensus opinion of the body, out of respect to Srila Bhaktipada it has been decided to not change it.
2. This form of worship cannot be performed anywhere else in ISKCON.¹⁷¹

Ravindra-Svarupa commented, “So they [the GBC] just gave in, even though they didn’t agree with it [dressing Prabhupada as a king at the Palace].”¹⁷²

PRABHUPADA’S CROWN REMOVED

Despite this victory for Bhaktipada, Prabhupada’s crown did not stay on for much longer. In April, 1983, he agreed to terminate dressing Prabhupada in the Palace with regal attire and accouterments after the Palace Manager, Mahabuddhi dasa (Randy Stein), threatened to tell

all of ISKCON what Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja, a disciple of Prabhupada's sannyasa guru, said about the crown. Mahabuddhi remembered, "[Soon after the 1983 GBC meetings in Mayapura], Radhanath Swami and I visited Bhaktivedanta Narayana Swami in India regarding the 'crown' on Srila Prabhupada in the Palace. Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja told us that it was an 'offense' to Srila Prabhupada, as a sannyasi is higher than a 'king,' and that it was speculating on the *arcana* rituals of Gaudiya-Vaishnavism and much, much more." 173

After hearing Mahabuddhi's threat, Bhaktipada agreed to remove Prabhupada's crown, and, to save face, informed New Vrindaban residents that Prabhupada had come to him in a "dream" and informed him that, although the crown was a sincere manifestation of love for a disciple to the spiritual master, he should nonetheless remove the crown because it was creating a disturbance in ISKCON.

Radhanath Swami glorified Bhaktipada's "humility" and "pure love . . . for his guru" in a vyasa-puja homage: "Your glorification of Prabhupada in his Palace [with golden crown and regal attire] is indeed an offering of pure love and devotion. Prabhupada personally told the movement that he was accepting it as such and that there could be no limit to such an offering. Yet I have seen how you humbled yourself before your godbrothers in this regard in order to maintain cooperation within Prabhupada's movement. Others may not understand, but I have some idea how deeply painful and heartbreaking it was for you to see Prabhupada worshiped any differently. In this selfless act of sacrifice you have again demonstrated for all who have the eyes to see the pure love of a disciple for his guru." 174

SULOCHAN CHALLENGES BHAKTIPADA TO DEBATE

At first, the New Vrindaban community leaders seemed not to take Sulochan's exposé seriously and neither did ISKCON. However, when Sulochan threatened to mail out a 100-page statement of accusations (including testimony from former New Vrindaban parents about sexual

child molestation) along with a threat that the entire statement will be released to the press, Bhaktipada became concerned and requested that the GBC take measures to stop Sulochan's threats. Sulochan sent a few pages of his exposé to Bhaktipada and issued a challenge to debate:

From the enclosed first few pages of my exposé and challenge to you [at debate] I would hope that you will start to realize that you stepped on the wrong person when you stepped on me. . . . This book and challenge, totaling approximately one hundred pages, will be mass mailed out on April 8th [1985] if the following does not happen first:

(1) You, Kuladri, Dharmatma, Dulal-Chandra and anyone who supports you resign and go somewhere else. As Prabhupada said to you on 10/16/67, "anywhere you like, but not within the walls of ISKCON."

(2) You send a letter of resignation and apology to all the godbrothers you have grievously offended and a general letter of resignation and regret to all ISKCON temples.

(3) Radhanath, if he likes, be made temple president for the time being until a more suitable leader can be found. . . .¹⁷⁵

(4) You humbly touch the feet of my wife and apologize for polluting her and beg her to leave your contaminated association and rejoin me. If that is unacceptable to her then she must live in California where I will have access to my sons. If that is also unacceptable to her then she must relinquish her relationship to my sons and you must send them out here to me with escort. She will then be free to follow you straight to hell if that's what she wants.

(5) You send \$10,000 for damages to the above address. Make the check payable to Steve Bryant.

I guarantee you will not have an ounce of respect left after this book is mailed out. But you may not care if you have any respect from ISKCON since you are no doubt already thinking of breaking from ISKCON. Therefore if you fail to comply with the above then the next stage is to send copies of this book to all the Indian journals which will destroy your tourist business and make a lot of Indians very mad.

You can't imagine what this book contains. Keep in mind that during this time you will be losing more and more men since I will circulate the book at New Vrindaban also. And I will also be finding out more and more about your illegal dealings. Finally in the end you will have only a few followers left and nothing else. But you know all this. Your astrologer told you this would happen many years ago. He even said that it would be caused by a woman (my wife).

Needless to say I am not going to just go away and you will not be able to find me to kill me for I am now working in complete seclusion. No one knows where I am. You had better put a guard on my sons or send my wife away for now. If one hair on the head of my boys is touched by you or your zombies I shudder to think of what you are going to get in return. ¹⁷⁶

Sulochan called the GBC the “Gang of Blasphemous Conspirators,” and threatened, “This book contains enough filth on the new ‘gurus’ to burn their little kingdoms to ashes—the fire starting at New Vrindaban.” ¹⁷⁷

BHAKTIPADA THREATENS TO RESIGN FROM GBC IF SULOCHAN IS NOT SILENCED

Bhaktipada was apparently not satisfied with the result of his request to have the GBC discredit Sulochan, and attempted to speed up the process by threatening to resign from the GBC. In February 1985 he wrote:

My dear GBC Godbrothers. . . .

I am writing this letter of resignation to be effective immediately, because I do not believe anyone should sit on this august body about whose character there is even a shadow of a doubt.

As you are well aware, during the past few months, Sulochan dasa has been spreading all manner of rumor and accusations about myself and New Vrindaban. Although I have tried my best to be very strict in my life and to guide the community by example, and, although it is a fact that I have not broken even one of the regulative principles in

almost two decades, still there seems to be some question of my qualifications to lead. Nor do I feel any necessity to defend my life prior to coming to Krishna consciousness, as, according to sastra, the former life of a Vaishnava should never be taken into account. Furthermore, a Vaishnava does not want to defend himself, but sees all as Krishna's special mercy upon him.

Still, as long as this matter is not completely resolved to the satisfaction of all, I think it best for me not to participate in the actions of the GBC. Let there be inquiry and investigation. If I am at fault, I pray to be corrected. If not, the mission of Lord Chaitanya should not suffer needlessly due to gossip and envy. ¹⁷⁸

At the March 1985 GBC meetings in Mayapura, India, the ISKCON Privilege Committee, under the direction of Tamal-Krishna Goswami, agreed to hear and dispose of the matter. Tamal-Krishna Goswami, the zonal acharya for China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Korea, wrote to the other members of the Privilege Committee (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, Jagadish Goswami, and Rupanuga):

My dear Privilege Committee Members,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. You may recall that in Mayapura [last month] we decided to take on, at the request of our esteemed godbrother Srila Bhaktipada [who is also a member of the Privilege Committee], the allegations against himself and the New Vrindaban community made by Sulochan dasa. Balavanta Prabhu [William Ogle, an aspiring politician and president of the Atlanta ISKCON temple] has informed me that Srila Bhaktipada has received a 100-page statement of accusations launched against himself from the same person attached with a threat that the entire statement will be released to the press. Balavanta Prabhu is informing Sulochan that the matter is now going to be heard and disposed of by the Privilege Committee. . . . In order to diffuse a possibly volatile matter, your prompt response is highly appreciated. ¹⁷⁹

Around the same time, March 1985, Sulochan filed a complaint with the ISKCON Privilege Committee and charged Bhaktipada with initiating his wife without his permission. The committee ruled on the two cases six months later (to be discussed in Chapter 4).

In Chapter 10 of his book, *The Guru Business*, Sulochan concluded that Kirtanananda was a “rogue,” “a pseudo-religionist,” and “nothing but a sense gratifier.” However, with the help of his editor Kailasa-Chandra, he came to recognize that all the zonal acharyas were illegitimate. How did the zonal acharyas gain control of ISKCON? Were they appointed to that position by Prabhupada? That is the subject matter for my next book,¹⁸⁰ but for now a short summary is in order.

CHAPTER 3

The Guru Reform Movement

AFTER PRABHUPADA'S DEATH IN NOVEMBER 1977, eleven senior disciples—whom Prabhupada a few months earlier had appointed as ritvik acharyas to initiate new disciples on his behalf—installed themselves as his diksa-guru successors, although Prabhupada did not personally appoint them in that capacity to the exclusion of his other disciples. During a room conversation in Vrindaban, India, a couple weeks before his death, when Prabhupada was asked, “Who will succeed you as the leader of the Hare Krishna movement?” he did not personally name any successors. Prabhupada instead responded with a broad statement, “All of my disciples will take the legacy. . . . It's not that I'll give an order, ‘Here is the next leader.’ . . . All my disciples are leaders, as much as they follow purely.”¹⁸¹

“The Magnificent Eleven,” as they were known among their supporters, claimed that, by the blessings and mercy of Prabhupada, they had been miraculously promoted to the *paramahansa* (swan-like) stage of self-realization. They claimed to have an exclusive and direct connection with the absolute truth and cause of all causes: Lord Sri Krishna. Novices were taught that the new ISKCON gurus, during previous lifetimes, had been personal associates of Lord Chaitanya and maidservants of Krishna's consort, Radharani.¹⁸²

The eleven were called “zonal acharyas.” An “acharya” is the spiritual head of an Indian religious institution and “zonal” means a geographic

“zone” of control. Therefore the term “zonal acharya” refers to a spiritual leader who presides over a specific geographical region. Each of the eleven had their own “kingdoms” where they were worshiped as good as God.

Large and ornate vyasasanas (elevated thrones) were installed in Prabhupada’s temples for the new self-appointed acharyas. They were offered elaborate daily guru-puja (a ceremony to honor the guru) with incense, lamps and flowers by both their disciples and godbrothers. Special pranam mantras (Sanskrit verses) were composed to glorify them and were sung in public. They received honorary titles like Vishnupada, Gurupada, Acharyapada, Acharyadeva, Tirthapada, and Bhaktipada to indicate that they now represented the lotus feet of Vishnu (one of the principle deities of Hinduism) or had taken the position of Vishnu to “deliver their disciples from the material world.”

In essence, the self-appointed gurus conveniently assumed that everything that Prabhupada had taught about bona fide acharyas were applicable to themselves. They took to heart Prabhupada’s instructions, such as, “It is recommended in authoritative scriptures that the spiritual master should be worshiped on the level of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”¹⁸³ Unfortunately, the system of guru succession that the zonal acharyas established was fraught with unanticipated and unresolvable issues, least of all that the entire system was based on a fallacy.¹⁸⁴

Sulochan had become convinced that Bhaktipada and the zonal acharyas were pretenders, but he was not alone: others also had doubted the alleged “pure devotees.” As early as 1978, a small, but dedicated band of concerned disciples—Pradyumna, Yasodanandan Swami, Guru-Krpa Swami, Giriraja Swami, Kailasa-Chandra, and others in Vrindaban, India, and a few years later Jadurani in New Vrindaban and Los Angeles—had campaigned to remove the zonal acharyas from office, but they had been defeated and then shunned by the society. Jadurani had been beaten bloody. Ramesvara threatened, “If Kailasa-Chandra doesn’t stop talking about this guru issue, I’m going to have my disciples kill him.”¹⁸⁵

**ISKCON TEMPLE PRESIDENTS BEGIN ORGANIZING
AGAINST THE ZONAL ACHARYAS**

A few years later, however, a new group of devotees began organizing together to combat the menace of the zonal acharyas; devotees with real political power in ISKCON: the temple presidents in the United States and Canada. During September 1984, at a routine meeting of the North American temple presidents at the ISKCON temple in Towaco, New Jersey (a “grand old country house built on a grassy hillside”),¹⁸⁶ the discussion spontaneously turned to the problem of the zonal acharyas. It seemed nearly every temple president (with the exception of Kuladri at New Vrindaban) had insurmountable problems with the ISKCON gurus. At this meeting, what became known as the Guru Reform movement was inaugurated. Some of the more prominent leaders of this movement were: Ravindra-Svarupa (Philadelphia), Atreya-Rsi and Trivikrama Maharaja (San Francisco), Rochan (Seattle) and Bahudak (Vancouver).

Ravindra-Svarupa recalled, “In the autumn of 1984 a routine meeting of the temple presidents of North America led to a collective and public acknowledgement that nearly everyone held deep private misgivings about the manner in which the position of ‘guru’ had been established in ISKCON. They organised an immediate second meeting, to further consider the issue, and thus the ‘Guru Reform’ movement was born. With the engagement of a significant number of second-tier leaders, men whose loyalty to ISKCON was not in doubt, a credible and potent movement was established. The majority of North American temple presidents believed something was drastically wrong.”¹⁸⁷

The former Seattle ISKCON temple president and the Regional Secretary for Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, described some of the problems he had with the zonal acharyas and the GBC which was controlled by the Acharya Board. Rochan dasa (Van Charnell) explained:

Before 1977, the GBC served ISKCON as Prabhupada intended: to uphold the standard of *sadhana* and preaching, and to inspire the devotees to serve Prabhupada’s mission. The temple presidents, as

Prabhupada set up the system, were seen by new disciples as *de facto* siksa gurus [instructing spiritual masters]. The new devotees saw the temple presidents as their link to Prabhupada, and consequently they were willing to work day and night to assist the temple presidents in their preaching.

ISKCON was a success story to a great extent due to the free labor of thousands of devotees who were inspired by their temple presidents. Devotees were willing to do what the temple presidents asked them to do: to wash pots, clean the floors, worship the deity, go out on Hari-Nam, distribute books, collect money, cultivate Life Members, etc. Devotees were happy to assist the temple presidents in their preaching, and they infrequently disagreed with the temple presidents' particular vision for preaching in their city or zone.

However, after Prabhupada passed away, the GBC no longer functioned to assist the temple presidents; they began to control excessively and they amassed power and actively suppressed the temple presidents. When new devotees began to take initiation from the "zonal acharyas," the power of the temple presidents eroded. They no longer could motivate devotees to follow their direct instructions, let alone their vision for preaching. The new disciples often looked down on temple presidents, especially if they were householders, and consequently they rebelled in subtle and less-than-subtle ways against the temple presidents' authority.

Many problems for local temples were caused by the "zonal acharyas" and the GBC which supported them. Satsvarupa caused one particular type of problem, Hridayananda caused another. Kirtanananda caused other problems, especially for the Eastern Canada temple presidents.

Many ISKCON temple presidents, including myself, recognized the "zonal acharyas" deviations and fought to uphold Prabhupada's standard, but we faced an uphill battle. The GBC were entrenched and had access to large amounts of funding. We were, on the other hand, dependent on funding from temple sankirtan collectors. It cost money

for airfare to attend meetings in India and the Eastern United States, and the new disciples didn't want us to spend the money they collected to fight against their own "gurus." Bahudak, to a large extent, lost the entire Vancouver ISKCON temple because he was a very vocal critic of the "zonal acharyas." He was so bent on fighting the blight within ISKCON that he neglected his own temple where he was president, and was evicted.¹⁸⁸

ENDING THE FRATRICIDAL WAR

In November 1984, Ravindra-Svarupa completed a paper expressing his ideas about the need for Guru Reform titled, "The Next Step in the Expansion of ISKCON: Ending the Fratricidal War." Ravindra recalled:

I called the finished paper a "preliminary proposal," and gave it the title, "The Next Step in the Expansion of ISKCON: Ending the Fratricidal War." My realisations were quite personal; I had conducted no surveys, nor much textual research, on the guru question. So, tentatively, I mailed photocopies to three or four devotees to get their responses. (Remember that at this time—November 1984—facsimile machines were not yet in common use; it was photocopying, then ubiquitous, that carried the reform movement.)

What happened next astonished me: within two weeks strong responses—some of them very personal—began flooding in from devotees all over the world. Chain-photocopying had geometrically propagated the paper swiftly throughout ISKCON. I received phone calls from devotees who complained that I had left them off my mailing-list—I had to explain that the paper had published itself.

Clearly, I had struck a nerve. The response was overwhelmingly favourable. However, Ramesvara Swami, the head of the North American BBT, was outraged, and he charged me with the worst of malfeactions: because I was discouraging the devotees, I was hurting book distribution. This I worried about until the Christmas mail delivered a store-bought card from Los Angeles displaying on front the words

“Good Job!” and “Thank you!” inside. It was signed by Ramesvara Swami’s biggest book distributors—“Mothers Kaumadaki, Jagaddhatri and friends too shy to write their names”—who added the message: “Dandavats for your ‘Preliminary Proposal’ for ISKCON. At last some hope!!”¹⁸⁹

Ravindra-Svarupa summarized, “It was not long before ISKCON had to confront, at last, its own shadow, as over the decade intractable failures and shortcomings—abuse of authority, enjoyment of position, attachment to material pleasures, and the like—emerged within the group of initiating gurus. The movement was forced to begin facing, frankly and openly, the gap between its ideals and its actual achievements.”¹⁹⁰

MANY PRABHUPADA DISCIPLES DISILLUSIONED

A large number of Prabhupada’s disciples left ISKCON between 1978 and 1985, many because they felt that Prabhupada’s pure mission had become corrupted by the eleven new gurus. The scholar of ISKCON and Professor of Sociology and Religion at Middlebury College in Vermont, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., confirmed:

An unknown but significant number of Prabhupada devotees left ISKCON because they believed ISKCON’s leaders had forsaken the mission of their spiritual master to preach Krishna Consciousness. . . . The ideological work of the leaders could be understood as no more than self-serving rationalizations. . . .

Other devotees began to organize themselves to protest the movement’s reorganizational policies—in particular the guru system. Instead of simply questioning the spiritual and organizational abilities of specific gurus, however, the dissident elements within ISKCON and the growing contingent of ex-members overtly challenged both the legitimacy of the guru system and Prabhupada’s supposed appointment of the gurus to their position. Virtually without exception, those protesting against the guru system were disciples of Srila Prabhupada who

felt that Prabhupada's role as spiritual leader of the movement had been weakened by the policies initiated by the new gurus. . . .

Many devotees had been reluctant from the beginning to accept the legitimacy or the claimed spiritual status of the new gurus, because prior to their elevation they had had equal standing with them. Many of Prabhupada's disciples found it difficult to take seriously the claim that their godbrothers, whom they often knew rather intimately, were now "realized souls," pure in their Krishna Consciousness, and capable of teaching others the path to self-realization. ¹⁹¹

Some sources claimed that by 1986 eighty-eight percent of Prabhupada's disciples had left ISKCON. *Hinduism Today* reported, "Out of the 4,000 disciples . . . that Srila Prabhupada personally initiated into the Hare Krishna *bhakti sadhanas*, only 12%, or 500, are still official ISKCON members. . . . What happened to the 3,500 initiates who dropped away from ISKCON? Most couldn't sustain the *sadhanas*, the Hare Krishna *niyamas* and *yamas*: no illicit sex . . . no gambling, no intoxicants, no meat-eating; and the daily round of rising early, doing japa, kirtan chanting, puja, study, Krishna service. . . . But there were many Prabhupada disciples who delighted in the *sadhana*, loved Prabhupada and his mission, but couldn't accept the new leadership, the successor spiritual masters. They either left or were expelled, even formally excommunicated." ¹⁹²

The GBC had, to their credit, made some attempts to clean house. In 1980 three "gurus" were disciplined: Jayatirtha dasa, Hamsadutta Swami and Tamal-Krishna Goswami. 1982, the GBC expelled Jayatirtha Swami from ISKCON and ordained three new gurus: Gopal-Krishna Goswami, Pancadravida Swami and Bhaktisvarupa-Damodara Swami. In 1983 the GBC removed Hamsadutta from his responsibilities in the society and demoted him from sannyasa. In 1985 four more gurus were added: Bhakti-Tirtha Swami, Agrani Swami, Gaura-Govinda Swami and Jagadish Goswami. Although the GBC had disciplined or removed the most ostentatious fallen "gurus," the reformers believed it would only be a matter of time until they all fell. Something had to be done.

ISKCON GURUS: ABOVE THE LAW

J. Stillson Judah, author of *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture*, explained: “When they [ISKCON] made the gurus gods on earth, they made a tremendous mistake. Each [guru] could do no wrong, so each could do whatever he wanted to do. Each was free to define what was right. That’s called antinomianism. A religious figure believes he is empowered by God, so he believes he is above the law. He cannot be criticized, because he is a representative of God on earth.”¹⁹³

Ravindra-Svarupa accurately assessed the big problem with Bhaktipada and the other ISKCON “gurus”—envy—in his November 1984 paper:

A society of devotees in which proper Vaishnava relations is not yet the norm is called a *kanistha adbhikari* society. Its distinguishing characteristic is contentiousness because of envy. Envy is a product of false ego. Because of envy the members are no longer able to establish spiritual friendships among themselves. Instead they vie with each other, compete with each other for prestige, power and prerequisites.

Intensely desiring the honor and respect of others, the contentious neophyte pretends to be more advanced than he actually is. He tries to conceal his shortcomings and fall downs and in so doing he develops a secretive mentality and holds himself back from entering into open and honest relationships with his godbrothers. Because he cannot reveal his mind in confidence he remains aloof from real fellowship. He strays from the path of devotional service but his peers do not help him, for he thinks if he allows someone to preach to him he implicitly admits his own subordination.

Therefore, he cuts himself off from hearing and becomes impervious to instruction or good advice. Because he has many secret misgivings about himself he becomes eager to find the faults of others. In this way he reassures himself of his own superiority in spite of his many unacknowledged weaknesses.¹⁹⁴

Clearly, by 1984 and 1985 there was great dissatisfaction amongst the elder devotees in and out of ISKCON. Soon the temple presidents would unite, exercise their power and attempt to overthrow the zonal acharyas once and for all.

AUGUST 1985 EMERGENCY GBC MEETINGS AT NEW VRINDABAN

In August 1985, the North American GBC, temple presidents and ten ISKCON gurus attended a two-day emergency meeting at New Vrindaban to discuss issues, such as the development of a constitution, expanding the number of gurus, discussing the role of the spiritual master within ISKCON and evaluating the qualifications of current and future gurus. *New Vrindaban News* reported, “The North American GBC, temple presidents and gurus convened in New Vrindaban for two days of meetings. . . . The most prominent issue discussed by the members was the guru issue—who should be guru, what are the qualifications, etc. Few resolutions were finalized. This September 16, worldwide GBC members, gurus, temple presidents and Prabhupada disciples will be meeting here to further discuss these and other ISKCON topics. The decision to stage the meeting at New Vrindaban was unanimous.”¹⁹⁵

Ravindra-Svarupa wrote an essay titled “Under My Order: Reflections on the Guru in ISKCON,” which he presented at the August 1985 New Vrindaban meetings. In his essay, he concluded that the zonal guru system was a mistake, the level of worship too high, and the gurus too powerful within the GBC. Ravindra-Svarupa explained the origin of his paper, “Under My Order”:

Bahudak dasa [Peter Chatterton—an ISKCON regional secretary and the president of ISKCON Vancouver from 1972 until 1986], the chairman of the North American temple presidents and leader of the reform movement in America, was a little disappointed [with my November 1984 paper: “Ending the Fratricidal War”]. He wrote me that: “We need solid research to understand what should be the role and position of guru. With that paper we can push on strongly for real change. ISKCON as Prabhupada set it up has changed radically and the primary cause is the serious mistakes being made regarding the position of guru. How can we establish the importance of *sadhana* in our movement when the majority of gurus give the worst example in this regard?”

As Bahudak wanted, I did go on to write a further paper about the misunderstanding of Prabhupada's order concerning the position of guru in ISKCON. "Under My Order: Reflections on the Guru in ISKCON" (August 1985) became accepted as the position paper of the reform movement, and the paper's thesis helped lead, two years later, to the formal dismantling of the "zonal acharya" system.¹⁹⁶

Ravindra's "Under My Order" "lit a fire that spread across the United States. . . . The cry for guru reform reached a crescendo."¹⁹⁷

BRAHMACARI CLAIMS ISKCON "GURU" SEDUCED HIM

Coincidentally, during the New Vrindaban meetings a message came from a brahmachari in Atlanta, Georgia, alleging that one of the current ISKCON zonal acharyas (who had for years been suspected of having homosexual relations with boys and young men) had approached him for sex in Vrindaban, India, five years earlier. This disturbing news served to strengthen the resolve of the Guru Reformers and create fear in the zonal acharyas, who realized that the end of their reign was fast approaching.

Rochan recalled, "In 1985 and 1986, things came to a head. During the 1985 GBC meetings at New Vrindaban, it was announced that Bhavananda [Charles Bacis—the ISKCON zonal acharya for Australia and parts of India] had been accused of having homosexual relations with young men. A brahmachari in Atlanta actually wrote a report saying that Bhavananda had seduced him and he even had it notarized by a notary public."¹⁹⁸

The GBC Privilege Committee discussed his case and ordered Bhavananda to refrain from initiating any new disciples until a future unspecified date when the committee might be convinced that he had rectified his behavior. Interestingly enough, the Privilege Committee determined that one of the main factors in Bhavananda's fall down was the zonal acharya system. In other words, Bhavananda Goswami broke his sannyasa vows because of a faulty ISKCON guru system.

BHAKTIPADA'S 48TH BIRTHDAY PARTY

On Monday, September 2nd (during the annual New Vrindaban Labor Day Festival), Bhaktipada's 48th birthday was celebrated with great pomp and circumstance. Clearly, no offering could be too extravagant for the spiritual master. *New Vrindaban News* described some of the exciting festivities commemorating the birthday of the spiritual master, "Srila Bhaktipada's vyasa-puja began early [Monday] morning with a fire yajna and initiations. . . . The procession, offerings, gift presentations, feast offering and remnant pass-out lasted almost three hours and were accompanied by an ecstatic kirtan. The temple reception was followed by a swing ceremony in Bhaktipada's yard, and the most spirited and highly-bid auction to hit New Vrindaban. A set of Bhaktipada's counter beads went for \$3,000, his japa beads for \$7,000 and a peacock feather from his fan went for \$80." ¹⁹⁹

Hamsadutta dasa (Hans Kary)—one of the original eleven zonal acharyas who had been demoted two years earlier by the GBC for illicit sex, intoxication, and shooting bullets into a Berkeley liquor store and Cadillac dealership—attended Bhaktipada's birthday celebration and lead a glorious kirtan. When Hamsadutta returned to the West Coast, he spoke to the Seattle temple president about the exuberant kirtan at New Vrindaban which, he claimed, "proved Kirtanananda was a pure devotee." Rochan recalled:

Hamsadutta also tried to make a come back by taking shelter of another psychotic, Kirtanananda dasa. Birds of a feather flock together. Kirtanananda "swami" was still in ISKCON at the time, in fact, it was around the time the reform meetings were taking place at New Vrindaban. Hamsadutta, at this time, had become pro-Kirtanananda. . . .

Kirtanananda's birthday came at just about the same time as Janmastami [the annual Vaishnava feast day commemorating Lord Krishna's birthday which occurs during the month of *Sravana* (August/September)] and Srila Prabhupada's birthday, so New Vrindaban was

into merging all three into one great love festival. Hamsadutta dasa attended and apparently also spoke, trumpeting the glorious accomplishments and personal glories of “Bhaktipada.”

The peak of the festivities occurred when there was a kirtan, with Kirtanananda on his opulent throne, and his disciples and followers and well-wishers glorifying the birthday of the “acharya.” Perhaps Hamsadutta led this kirtan; I do not know. But I do know what he said about it.

He said that it was the loudest and most enthusiastic kirtan he had ever heard or seen anywhere at any time. He compared it to kirtans done in the presence of Srila Prabhupada on his vyasasana and said that the intensity and potency of those kirtans for Srila Prabhupada was dwarfed by this ultra-ecstatic kirtan for Kirtanananda. He said that if Kirtanananda was not a pure devotee, it would not be possible for a kirtan of this overwhelming exuberance to take place. The kirtan proved that he was a pure devotee.²⁰⁰

NORTH AMERICAN GBC AND TEMPLE PRESIDENTS MEETING AT NEW VRINDABAN

During September 16-19, the long-awaited North American GBC and Temple Presidents meetings were held in the large hall on the first floor of New Vrindaban’s guest lodge. This conference was popularly known amongst New Vrindaban residents as the “Prabhupada Disciples’ Meeting.” Balavanta served as chairman for the conference. The *Wheeling News-Register* reported, “The major topics scheduled for discussion include the development of a constitution for ISKCON, re-evaluation of the society’s preaching goals and movements and discussion of the role of the spiritual leaders and gurus in the ISKCON society.”²⁰¹

Important speakers from the Guru Reform movement included Bahudak (the President of the North American Temple Presidents), Ravindra-Svarupa (Vice President) and Krishna-Gopal (Secretary). Many participants, especially temple presidents and other Prabhupada disciples not

affiliated with the GBC, attempted to establish reforms within ISKCON aimed at restricting the power of the zonal acharyas by stopping simultaneous guru-puja ceremonies, removing vyasanas from the temples and reserving the use of “His Divine Grace” and the “pada” and “deva” honorifics only for Prabhupada. Some temple presidents wished to dismantle the zonal acharya system completely, throw all the ISKCON gurus out, declare their initiations null and void as they had no authority to accept disciples, and start from scratch, as if Prabhupada had just passed away.

At this meeting, the reformers argued that the zonal guru system was a mistake, the level of worship too high, and the gurus were too powerful within the GBC. A motion of no confidence was issued to the Governing Body Commission with a demand that all power to be returned to the direct disciples of Prabhupada. Trivikrama Swami, one of the leaders of the opposition, spoke up against the zonal acharyas, “You guys had your chance and now it’s our turn.”²⁰²

“ON HIS ORDER”

Bhaktipada was adamantly opposed to any measures which would limit the absolute relationship between guru and disciple, or limit the amount of worship, such as the ceremony of guru-puja, which disciples offered to the spiritual master. Therefore, Bhaktipada characteristically boycotted the New Vrindaban meetings, except only once on September 17th when he attended solely to read his recently drafted paper, “On My Order”—a rebuttal to Ravindra-Svarupa’s “Under My Order.” Bhaktipada’s paper—later expanded and published as a book with the same title—claimed that the position of guru was absolute and could not be accepted or rejected by an ecclesiastical body. He cited many scriptural verses to support his claims. He asserted that ignorance had bewildered ISKCON in general and the GBC in particular, because they had offended Srila Prabhupada by (1) authorizing the editing of his books after his disappearance and (2) failing to complete his samadhi (mausoleum) in Vrindaban.²⁰³

Bhaktipada admonished his godbrothers in the guest lodge meeting hall:

That there is a problem in ISKCON, nobody can deny. The nature of the problem, however, is not clearly understood. . . . Essentially, the disturbance in ISKCON centers on two questions: the nature of guru and the organization of our preaching mission. Due to ignorance, we concoct momentary solutions that are no solutions, only to be plagued with the same problems tomorrow. Unless we consult the transcendental sources of guru, sadhu, and sastra, we will not obtain real knowledge. . . .

First, what is guru? . . . The spiritual master is the most confidential servant of God, the very representative of God. He is great because he has surrendered to the All-Great, who is visible through him. . . .

Who can be guru? Lord Chaitanya says . . . “He can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Krishna.” . . . Thus we can safely conclude that anyone who strictly follows the regulative principles and preaches Krishna consciousness without deviation may, upon the order of Lord Chaitanya or his own spiritual master, initiate disciples all over the world. . . .

One does not become guru by the rubber stamp of a commission or even another guru. One becomes guru on the order of the Lord and the spiritual master. . . . You cannot rubber-stamp an acharya, nor can you eclipse him. Since he is the direct representative of the Personality of Godhead, nothing can impede his progress. . . .

A person falls from a high position not because he is worshiped—how can guru not be worshiped?—but because he does not accept this worship transparently. One who always remembers that what is offered to him is really meant for Krishna will never fall. . . . The bona fide guru cannot be limited. Sri Guru is Krishna, the Lord and Master of everyone; therefore, Srila Prabhupada once said that everyone was his disciple, only some knew it and some did not. . . . The power of the GBC comes not from armies and material resources, but from the will of Srila Prabhupada. Conversely, without following the will of Srila Prabhupada, the GBC will have no potency. . . .

Unity, like the position of guru, cannot be rubber-stamped. We may all be technically within one organization, but if there are different opinions, where is the unity? Purity is infinitely higher than unity, as Srila Prabhupada taught us by his own example in regard to the Gaudiya Math [the preaching mission established in Calcutta, India, in 1920 by Bhaktivedanta Swami's spiritual master, His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, which dissolved into squabbling factions shortly after his death in 1937]. . . .

We have the example of the Gaudiya Mathees becoming useless due to disobedience. But where is the disobedience in the present circumstances? . . . What is that disobedience so grave and so offensive as to cause havoc in the whole society of Vaishnavas? The essence of our disobedience surely lies in the thought that we have become Srila Prabhupada's replacements rather than his servants.

Have we not neglected his order and disobeyed his instructions by considering ourselves so intelligent that we can alter his books after his disappearance? . . . Due to this disobedience and offense, our intelligence is now lost and we are full of ignorance, so much so that we do not know who or what is guru, but concoct something to fit the need of the day, something that will again be changed tomorrow because it is not eternal truth but mental speculation. It happened to the simple, clear teachings of Jesus Christ nineteen hundred years ago, and now it is happening to the simple, pure teachings of Srila Prabhupada, less than ten years after his disappearance. I call this the Christianization of Krishna consciousness, or, more succinctly, "Krishnanity." . . .

Perhaps our greatest failure and our greatest disappointment to our spiritual master is our failure, after almost ten years, to complete his Samadhi[s] in Vrindaban [and] in Mayapura. . . . I can personally testify that whatever success we have achieved in New Vrindaban comes only from our having built Srila Prabhupada a Samadhi, his Palace of Gold. . . . We built the Palace, and by that glorification of Sri Guru, Krishna has been pleased and has showered all blessings upon us. . . .

Let us avoid the foolish mistake of thinking that the guru is connected to a piece of land or a geographical area, or that one becomes guru by the endorsement of the GBC. Let us endorse everyone who follows the path of Srila Prabhupada. . . .

Let us create a real GBC, a spiritual entity for preaching the glories of the sankirtan movement, a GBC that inspires and enthuses devotees around the world to take up the order of Lord Chaitanya, and, at the same time, maintains the highest standard of purity by personal example and preaching. . . . Krishna and guru are fully manifest to the surrendered soul who is always chanting the holy name. ²⁰⁴

Ravindra-Svarupa remembered Bhaktipada's lecture (and the politics of furniture) at the September GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting at New Vrindaban. Ravindra recalled:

Kirtanananda boycotted the meeting. Although it was at New Vrindaban, he wasn't coming. He didn't approve of it. And he had issued a paper ["On His Order"] about that.

But also at the previous emergency meeting of the North American GBC [in August] he said that he had made a mistake; that it was wrong for him to initiate Sulochan's wife without his permission, and so in protest for this he was not going to attend any more functions. So he didn't attend this istagosthi at all, nor did his people. This [important conference] was going on at New Vrindaban, but everyone at New Vrindaban was sort of boycotting the whole thing. . . .

He [Kirtanananda] hadn't participated in the meeting and then we heard that in *Bhagavatam* class from the vyasasana he was going to give us a lecture about the position of the guru, and we thought, "Oh boy. What a thing that is. Use all his position. Sit on the vyasasana and down and announce the truth." . . .

So we let it be known that if that happened we were going to walk out of the class. So that plan [of his] got cancelled. And then he wanted to address the meeting, the istagosthi. . . . Later on he came in and addressed the meeting. It was very interesting what happened. . . .

So everybody's sitting on the floor, same level, and the first thing that happens is a guy walks in with a big chair and puts it down, then Kirtanananda walks in and sits in the chair. And his followers come in for the first time, and at that time Umapati was one of his followers and Umapati says [shouts loudly], "We love you Srila Bhaktipada!"

It's a huge room. "We love you Srila Bhaktipada!" [Umapati shouts] and he [Kirtanananda] says, "Be quiet! You can't say that in here!" So that was the beginning. . . . The whole thing was just the language of furniture at this point. So he [Kirtanananda] really objected to this meeting.²⁰⁵

At the New Vrindaban meetings, the North American Governing Body Commissioners made a list of resolutions to bring to Mayapura in five months. Members of the Guru Reform movement wanted to end the zonal acharya system as well as make it easier for other men to become official initiating ISKCON gurus.

Preaching from the Protection of a Jail Cell

SULOCHAN HAD HEARD THAT THE GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting would be held at New Vrindaban and that members of the Guru Reform movement would challenge the zonal acharya system. Sulochan saw this as a positive incentive for change. He hoped the conference would be an “international inquisition,” and he wanted to assist by filing charges against various gurus from around the world, but especially against Bhaktipada.²⁰⁶

Sulochan anonymously produced a publicity flyer for the GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting titled “Jonestown In Moundsville? The Truth Behind the Palace of Gold,”²⁰⁷ which he mailed to New Vrindaban devotees and local Wheeling and Moundsville newspapers. (Jonestown was the name of the Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ community in northwestern Guyana—founded by Reverend Jim Jones—which became infamous after 909 members died by drinking cyanide-laced Kool-Aid on November 18, 1978.)

David Gold remembered, “Bryant had produced a flyer entitled ‘Jonestown in Moundsville?’ and printed a couple thousand copies. Part of his plan was to distribute this flyer to Marshall County citizens, and thereby, he hoped, incite an uprising that would bring down the Swami.”²⁰⁸ Sulochan’s flyer was seen by a few New Vrindaban residents, who recognized immediately who was the author. Sections of the flyer were subtitled:

Corruption at “Krishna Land”
History of Greed and Insanity
Committed to Mental Hospital
Ham Ascends His Throne, Claims Himself Superior to Christ
Reign of Terror
How the Palace of Gold Was Financed
Child Abuse and Animal Husbandry
Separates Families
The Notorious Nursery
Divide and Conquer
Child Deaths
Torturing of Children
Child “Marriages”
Ham’s Role in Child Abuse
The Abuse of Women
Women as “Fish”
Ham’s Accomplices: Gigolos and Rapists
Encourages Beating the “Wives”
Women as Commodities
Ham’s Current Sexual Status
The Dark Side of New Vrindaban
What Can You Do?

Sulochan traveled to West Virginia, but as he was afraid to personally attend the conference due to legitimate concerns for his safety, he placed himself in protective custody under the Marshall County Sheriff. Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher said he felt it was his “duty to provide Sulochan with protection, as he would for any individual who claims to fear for his life.” ²⁰⁹

One anonymous former resident of New Vrindaban formed a “Committee to Clear the Name of Steven Bryant.” She said: “Steve was trying to uncover a lot of stuff. I don’t feel safe myself. Every time a car pulls up, I shake. I’ve talked to the FBI. The situation is pretty much out of hand.” ²¹⁰

Sulochan's former wife, Jamuna, said that she was "scared to death that he will come here and try to steal my children and hurt us." She called her former husband "a wife beater" and "a child beater," saying he was continually intoxicated and never regularly employed. She claimed, "He . . . repeatedly forced me to have illicit sex, which is contrary to my religious vows. . . I think it's odd that he wants police protection," she said. "I want police protection if he comes here."²¹¹

Yet Sulochan had good reason to fear for his safety; at this early date (even before Triyogi's nearly-fatal assault on Bhaktipada, which will be discussed in the next chapter), some New Vrindaban leaders had already discussed silencing him. One California devotee who attended the GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that when Sulochan's name came up during conversation and it was mentioned that he had placed himself in protective custody at the Marshall County Jail, one high-ranking New Vrindaban leader boasted: "That guy should be afraid. There are 250 residents here looking to blow his head off."²¹²

Who was that New Vrindaban leader who wanted Sulochan's head blown off? Perhaps it was Hayagriva, arguably the most senior devotee at New Vrindaban (as senior as Bhaktipada, as he was, after all, a co-founder of the community), who early on made it known that Sulochan should be silenced "once and for all." Tirtha dasa (Thomas A. Drescher), a Vietnam war veteran and a New Vrindaban enforcer initiated by Bhaktipada in April 1978, claimed that it was Hayagriva who first suggested to him that "someone should silence Sulochan once and for all."

Before Triyogi attacked and almost killed Bhaktipada . . . I had a conversation with Hayagriva about Sulochan. . . . It took place at Randall Gorby's house at the behest of Gorby. . . . They had in their possession one of the latest of Sulochan's publications ["Jonestown In Moundville"], a newsletter that he put out, and it was sort of a rambling dissertation of all of the compilation of rumors, smut, hearsay and whatever else he could get on Kirtanananda. . . . They were discussing it.

Hayagriva said, “You know, this is getting serious. This is starting to disturb Bhaktipada and something has to be done about this. This guy is getting out of control. It would be nice if someone would silence him once and for all.”

I asked him, rather beating around the bush, I said, “Well . . . are you so sure that that’s what Kirtanananda wants?” He said, “He’s very concerned and he’s to the point where he thinks something needs to be done about it, but he doesn’t want to have any direct involvement in it himself.”²¹³

Russell Clark Gorby (known to his friends as “Randall”) also confirmed that as early as September 1985, Hayagriva told him, “We need to take that son-of-a-bitch off the face of the earth.” An FBI investigator noted, “Gorby stated that sometime in September 1985, after the ISKCON conference, he was at a meeting that was attended by Keith Ham, Howard Wheeler, Arthur Villa, Dick Dezio, Umapati, and a reporter named Kathleen Allen from the *Wheeling News-Register*. Gorby stated that the meeting took place at Keith Ham’s home. The meeting was primarily a public relations/press conference at which time the Krishnas had one of Bryant’s former friends named Gopish [Gabriel Fried] repudiate Bryant to the press. Wheeler stated to Gorby as the meeting was ending, ‘We need to take that son-of-a-bitch off the face of the earth.’”²¹⁴

Hayagriva’s involvement in the murder plot was corroborated by Bhaktipada’s attorney, James B. Lees, Jr., who claimed that Hayagriva “admitted to him in an unprivileged conversation that he (Wheeler) participated in the conspiracy to kill Steven Bryant.”²¹⁵

During the September 1985 GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting, Sulochan spent his time in protective custody on the telephone with reporters, “relating stories of New Vrindaban drug dealing, prostitution, and child abuse. Sulochan spoke of a GBC ‘hit list’ and claimed he was the number-one most-wanted man on that list. From the safety of his jail cell, he called GBC leaders to demand that Kirtanananda be expelled.”²¹⁶ Sulochan called Bhaktipada a “bogus swami,” and

challenged him to a debate on the philosophy of the *Bhagavad-gita* and the other Vedic scriptures. He said: “I guarantee he will not agree because he is not the least bit knowledgeable on either topic.”²¹⁷

Sheriff Bordenkircher spoke with Sulochan during his protective custody and told him he had little solid evidence. “I kept telling him, ‘Steve, you’ve got a beautiful story but no substance.’”²¹⁸

“THE STORY OF A CHEATER”—THE “REAL FACTS” ABOUT SULOCHAN

Under the auspices of the New Vrindaban Community, a six-page article titled “The Story of a Cheater: The Real Facts on the Sulochan Story” was produced which credited Jamuna and her new husband, Raghunath as the authors. This document, a rebuttal to Sulochan’s inflammatory flyer, “Jonestown In Moundsville? The Truth Behind the Palace of Gold,” was copied and distributed among the visiting devotees at the GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting. Although some of the allegations in the paper were accurate, some were exaggerated or invented. Why did New Vrindaban authorities feel they needed to exaggerate or invent accusations to discredit Sulochan?

Following are selected excerpts from the September 1985 article, and Jamuna’s revealing August 25, 2008 e-mail commentary to the author:

Article: We should begin this story in 1979, in London, England. At that time Steve was living outside the London temple. His Krishna conscious *sadhana* was almost nil, and he was known to be associating with drug addicts. He was a steady movie-goer and a regular patron of the local pubs.

Jamuna: This is not true to my knowledge. I don’t know where this came from. At the time that I met him he was attending the temple regularly, chanting his rounds and associating with devotees.

Article: Shortly after the marriage, they moved into an incense warehouse(?!), where she recalls being subjected to an endless series of his warped “trips” such as being physically beaten daily if she did not memorize a certain literary passage of his choosing.

Jamuna: This sounds rather drastic, as if he was beating me to a pulp.

In fact he did hit me if I did not memorize the verses correctly, but not enough to cause physical injury.

Article: “After some time, I became so totally repulsed by the guy,” Jamuna recalls, “that I didn’t want him anywhere near me.” Still, he would regularly force her to have sexual intercourse. In her own words, “He seemed sexually preoccupied, and frustrated.”

Jamuna: I wish this kind of detail had not been included. The fact was that he struggled to follow the strict standard set by Srila Prabhupada and sometimes was unsuccessful.

Article: At this time, Jamuna was going to the morning program practically every day, reading, and chanting her rounds, despite the overload of work that he placed upon her. He, on the other hand, went to *mangala-aroti* only once a week, and HE NEVER READ ANY OF PRABHUPADA’S BOOKS as long as they were married, except when he was being paid to index them.

Jamuna: This would seem to indicate that he had never read Prabhupada’s books. However he was quite well-read and knowledgeable of the books, it was just that during the time of our marriage he was absorbed in business and was less inclined to be scholarly.

Article: In October, 1983, the motor home completed, he packed everything into it and headed east. During the two months that they lived in the motor home, Steve was almost always intoxicated on marijuana.

Jamuna: I don’t remember this.

Sulochan claimed that his former wife could not have written the paper; she could not have even seen it, it was so outlandish. He wrote: “This document is ninety percent false. . . . There is only one point in their paper that I feel ashamed about. That was my failure to love her son as if he were my own. . . . So even though I am not proud that I was unable to love Jane’s son as if he were my own, it is certainly an extreme exaggeration for her to say that I mistreated him.”²¹⁹

Sulochan continued: “I never beat her hard or in anger. I used to slap her bottom one or twice if she didn’t learn a verse out of *Bhagavad-gita* every day, but she enjoyed that. She liked it. . . . I never hurt her. I got angry and tried to slap her on the face on two occasions years apart but both times I missed her. I never did it. I never wanted to. I just yelled at her. Physical fighting is against my nature. I never hit anyone. . . . I don’t remember once telling her I wanted her to take initiation. I told her lots of times that Kirtanananda was my favorite ISKCON devotee but that’s all I remember telling her.”²²⁰

Jamuna admitted: “This paper . . . appeared rather inflammatory against Sulochan’s character, which of course was the intention. The circumstances at the time need to be understood. Sulochan was threatening Bhaktipada, threatening the community and also threatening to take my children away from the community. This letter was an act of self-defense and an attempt to clarify some issues. In retrospect I think that Sulochan was not a bad person. In fact many people found him quite likeable. As his wife, somehow I got the raw end of things. I think that he was eccentric by nature, somewhat unstable and ungrounded, but had a good heart and was a sincere devotee. It is my opinion that he was very adversely affected by five years of heavy brahmachari training coupled with a father from a military background. These things combined together destroyed his ability to function as a sane husband.”²²¹

GBC PRIVILEGE COMMITTEE RULES IN SULOCHAN VS. BHAKTIPADA

Six months earlier in March 1985, Sulochan had filed a complaint with the ISKCON justice department against Bhaktipada for initiating his wife without his permission, and Bhaktipada filed a complaint with the same committee to put a stop to Sulochan’s rantings. The Privilege Committee, which included Rupanuga dasa and Mukunda Swami as members, investigated the allegations and presented their ruling at the New Vrindaban GBC meeting.

Sulochan’s editor recalled, “Regarding the 1985 face-off at Moundsville, Sulochan had high hopes that Rupanuga would represent

his cause, and he had contacted both Rupanuga and Mukunda previous to the meeting to discuss his situation. He talked to Mukunda (from the Moundsville Jail, where he was holed up for protection) during the meetings.”²²²

Sulochan reported about his unsuccessful quest with the GBC Privilege Committee, “I had been pressuring the GBC to rectify Ham for nearly six months before they finally realized I was serious about going to the media for justice. I spent many hours on the phone with Rupanuga and he generally sympathized with me but at the same time continually admitted that there wasn’t much the GBC could do to influence Ham since he was legally independent from ISKCON.”²²³

BHAKTIPADA ERRED BY INITIATING SULOCHAN’S WIFE WITHOUT PERMISSION

The ISKCON Privilege committee concluded that it was an “injudicious mistake” for Bhaktipada to initiate Sulochan’s wife as his disciple without her husband’s knowledge and permission. The committee reported:

It was an injudicious mistake [for Bhaktipada] to initiate the wife of Sulochan dasa without his knowledge or voluntary acceptance. There is no evidence that he agreed with her initiation or actually recommended it to anyone that she be initiated. . . .

It is a matter of honest and judicious relations and good faith between godbrothers that an initiated disciple of Srila Prabhupada be consulted before his wife is initiated by another godbrother. . . . A husband and wife should be treated as one unit by spiritual authorities, not separately, even though either husband or wife may be having spiritual difficulties. . . .

The mistake or failure to do so [consult the husband before initiating the wife] should be acknowledged by Kirtanananda Maharaja. Sulochan dasa should at once desist his attack upon Srila Bhaktipada and Srila Bhaktipada should in turn immediately arrange for Sulochan’s association with his two sons. That is our opinion.²²⁴

Bhaktipada actually admitted that he had made a mistake by initiating Jamuna without her husband's permission. Ravindra-Svarupa recalled: "At the . . . [August 1985] emergency meeting of the North American GBC he [Kirtanananda] said that he had made a mistake; that it was wrong for him to initiate Sulochan's wife without his permission, and so in protest for this he was not going to attend any more [GBC] functions." ²²⁵

Sulochan commented on the report: "The reason they [the GBC] didn't recommend that Ham return my wife as well is because he'd already allotted her to one of his followers, Raghunath. That was the reason Ham couldn't heed their advice. He knew Jane would not tolerate losing her sons and at the same time, she was already pregnant by her new paramour. So Ham's response was to bury his face in the sand and hope I would just go away." ²²⁶

SULOCHAN EXCOMMUNICATED

As a response to Bhaktipada's complaints against Sulochan, the committee excommunicated him from ISKCON for issuing death threats in "abhorrent" and "blasphemous" language." The committee noted that Sulochan's "unsubstantiated allegations" about Bhaktipada molesting boys and other crimes were "blasphemous" to the highest degree. The Privilege Committee reported:

We find abhorrent the blasphemous and insinuating language, as well as the prematurely broadcasted and unsubstantiated allegations against Kirtanananda Maharaja, Srila Bhaktipada, by Sriman Sulochan dasa Adhikari. Although not included in his formal complaint to the GBC/PC, the allegations made by Sulochan dasa in letters and papers distributed widely in ISKCON, have merely served to demean, slander and blaspheme the character of Srila Bhaktipada in a manner unprecedented in ISKCON. Such unsubstantiated allegations, especially when accompanied with blasphemy, are clearly *vaisnava-aparadha* [offenses] to the highest degree. . . .

Thus any complaint, legitimate or not, becomes distasteful and disgusting to one's brahminical sense when overshadowed by blasphemy and invective. Sulochan dasa should, therefore, seek forgiveness from Srila Bhaktipada for his offenses.²²⁷

Ravindra-Svarupa recalled, "The GBC did several things at this meeting. One thing they did was excommunicate Sulochan from ISKCON as he had begun to threaten people's lives, and he was excommunicated."²²⁸ Sulochan's editor claimed, "These men [Rupanuga and Mukunda] completely let him down. It is quite likely that they used him as a pawn."²²⁹

Regarding his excommunication from ISKCON, Sulochan noted, "I'm honored. I hate to have my name associated with a cult that endorses active homosexuality among its gurus. The real religion as introduced by Srila Prabhupada has no place for such men. I will continue exposing them [the corrupt members] until the real religion is fully revealed."²³⁰

PURANJANA INTERCEDES ON SULOCHAN'S BEHALF

In October 1985, disciples and followers of Hamsadutta dasa at ISKCON Berkeley, California, asked Bhaktipada to take over management of their temple. The former ISKCON "guru" for Berkeley, Hamsadutta—who had been demoted from sannyasa and stripped of his position within ISKCON two years earlier by the GBC—claimed he had recently recognized that Bhaktipada was the only pure devotee in ISKCON. He preached that his disciples should surrender to Bhaktipada, the "World Acharya."

In addition, Hamsadutta and his followers were not happy with Atreya-Rsi (Faramarz Attar)—the recently-appointed GBC representative for Berkeley and the Northwest United States, the ISKCON Minister of Finance and a leader of the Guru Reform movement—who had lost their favor. If Atreya-Rsi, the guru-reformer, was deposed and Bhaktipada took

over as GBC representative for Berkeley, Hamsadutta thought he might regain much of his former influence and power.

New Vrindaban News reported, “Devotees from the Berkeley temple (New Jagannath Puri) called Srila Bhaktipada recently and requested that he take charge of the temple there. They expressed a strong desire to come under the protection of Srila Bhaktipada and increase their preaching. In response to their plea, Srila Bhaktipada is sending Radhanath Maharaja to Berkeley for a week to help the devotees there.”²³¹

While Radhanath Swami was in Berkeley, Sulochan’s best friend Puranjana, who often visited the Berkeley temple, approached Radhanath and interceded on his friend’s behalf. Puranjana related Sulochan’s side of the story and suggested that he had a right to see his two sons and be involved in their lives. A few days later, Puranjana confided to Sulochan:

It seems that Radhanath Swami didn’t really realize how serious the problem was with your wife. But after I talked with him and explained that you were getting the testimonies of many former devotees from New Vrindaban and other ISKCON areas, and that this was going to be exposed soon unless some action was taken, he began to realize the significance of the situation. . . .

[I spoke with Radhanath Swami for] four or five hours that first session, but I don’t think the impact of it really hit him until he got back to New Vrindaban. We had gone over a lot of the points you were making about New Vrindaban. That there were a lot of off things going on there. His reply was that they were all lies. That everybody was lying. All the disgruntled masses were just liars. I said that’s not so, that there were some very bona fide complaints. I said that if he was prepared to defend himself from all those statements to the media then he had nothing to worry about, but on the other hand if there was some genuineness to any of these complaints and problems, then they were definitely going to be in trouble.

So he phoned me (two days after he left) [on Friday, October 25th] and he said, “Yes, I’ve thought about it, and I think this media thing will be a lot of trouble for us. I want to try and negotiate something now to resolve this so it doesn’t become a mass media issue.” He said that I should find out what your minimum demands were. . . .

So I conveyed to him that your minimum demands was just to get your children back, and . . . that you weren’t demanding money, or that Ham had to step down. You just wanted your children back and that’s it. I said that otherwise you would be forced to go to the media. So he said he would try to talk to your wife and see if she would be agreeable to anything at all and what she would be agreeable to. He was also going to talk to Kirtanananda. . . .

Then they called Atreya on Sunday morning [October 27th], which was just a couple days after I spoke with Radhanath. Atreya told me that Radhanath and Kirtanananda had both spoken extensively with him that morning. According to Atreya, they were going to try to work out some arrangement because Radhanath repeatedly said that you should have some access at least to your children. He agreed that for Jane to have full custody and for you to be totally cut out of the picture was unfair. Radhanath agreed to that when he was talking to me. So he conveyed to Atreya that perhaps we should bend a little bit and Sulochan can bend a little bit and maybe we can work some deal to where his children could be accessible to him.

Atreya told me that one of the things they discussed was having your wife live in California. Atreya wanted the three of us to sit down and discuss it and then make a proposal that was practical so we could convince Radhanath, Kirtanananda, and ultimately Jane that this was practical. . . . Either Radhanath or Kirtanananda Swami had proposed that your wife come and live here in Berkeley and you could live nearby somewhere and perhaps even her husband would come out with her. ²³²

Sulochan must have been greatly encouraged by this conversation with Puranjana. Perhaps his dream would materialize: he would be able to see

his children again, have a relationship with them, and be part of their lives as they grew to adulthood. This thought undoubtedly was a source of great pleasure for him. However, one fateful event during the evening of October 27, 1985, caused great concern for New Vrindaban authorities, and forced them to reassess Sulochan's tactics and carefully reconsider their tentative negotiations with him.

Puranjana concluded his conversation with Sulochan: "The idea was to remove Jane from New Vrindaban and put her and the kids closer to where you were. And then it was that afternoon that we got the call that Kirtanananda Swami had been attacked." ²³³

CHAPTER 5

An Attack at the Heart of ISKCON

TRIYOGI DASA (MICHAEL C. SHOCKMAN), originally from LaMoure, North Dakota,²³⁴ a small town of about one thousand people in the southeastern part of the state, had been initiated by Prabhupada in September 1973 in Detroit. He lived in temples in Denver, New York City and Columbus, Ohio, and had come to New Vrindaban in September 1985 to attend the much publicized North American GBC and Temple Presidents Meeting. After the conference ended, he decided to stay at New Vrindaban for a time. His services at New Vrindaban were menial; he assisted in the kitchen and picked up litter around the Palace. He appeared to have some prominent personality dysfunctions, he was sometimes observed muttering under his breath to himself, and the New Vrindaban residents who had occasion to associate with him considered him mentally unstable.

“Shockman was not a member of the community,” Bhaktipada explained. “I think he was pretty much an aberration.”²³⁵ New Vrindaban management indicated, “Mr. Shockman . . . is not a devotee, but a drifter.”²³⁶

Tulsi dasa (Richard Allen “Dick” Dezio), the director of New Vrindaban Public Affairs who formerly served as an Instructor of Economics at West Virginia University at Parkersburg,²³⁷ said that Triyogi had lived in temples in Denver, New York City and Columbus, Ohio, but had been asked to leave each because of conflicts with temple leaders. Tulsi said, “In each place, he had argued with the leaders about

the way things were done. I guess he thought he should be the leader. But he had been no trouble since coming here [to New Vrindaban].”²³⁸

During the Guru Reform meetings, 32-year-old Triyogi had heard that the GBC had greatly streamlined the appointment of new ISKCON gurus: any Prabhupada disciple in good standing could become a duly-authorized ISKCON guru after receiving endorsements from three members of the GBC. Ravindra-Svarupa, on the recommendation of Bahudak and other members of the Guru Reform movement, became an ISKCON guru at that meeting after receiving endorsements from Hridayananda Goswami, Tamal-Krishna Goswami, and Satsvarupa dasa Goswami.²³⁹

Despite his formidable spiritual and material handicaps, Triyogi had lofty and unrealistic ambitions; he wanted to become an ISKCON spiritual master himself and initiate disciples. But he also knew that he was practically unknown in ISKCON, despite twelve years of sporadic service in various temples. He knew that he could not get three endorsements and become guru in his current position. However, he thought if he became a sannyasi, perhaps then he could get the required endorsements. He asked Bhaktipada to initiate him into the order of sannyasa, to better support his ambition for guruship. Bhaktipada refused, and explained that he must first prove himself as a preacher. Bhaktipada told Triyogi, “I’ve never seen you before. First you have to become qualified.”²⁴⁰

In an interview with a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter, Bhaktipada explained: “I told him [Triyogi] I didn’t feel I could do it [award him sannyasa]. I didn’t know him well enough. I told him to stay here at New Vrindaban for six months to a year first, and he became disturbed about that.”²⁴¹ At another time, Bhaktipada spoke about the high standard for a sannyasi:

Generally . . . [sannyasa] is not given to someone unless they have already proved themselves to be very dedicated and are sure that they are going to follow it. It is a disgrace to fall down from sannyasa and it is a great spiritual offense. It [sannyasa] is not lightly given.

I said to him [Triyogi], “I don’t really know you. I have never seen you before, but if you want to stay around and study and let us observe you, I have no objection.” He left immediately. I didn’t realize he was so angry.²⁴²

Triyogi was visibly upset and confided in another New Vrindaban devotee, “I feel I have to either kill myself, kill Bhaktipada, or leave.” In this statement, Triyogi had paraphrased a verse from *Srimad-bhagavatam* (4.4.17) which instructs how one should deal with an “irresponsible person who blasphemes the master and controller of religion.” However, during a subsequent conversation with the same Brijabasi, Triyogi changed his mind and said that he would not kill anyone; he would simply leave.²⁴³

But before Triyogi left New Vrindaban, he approached Bhaktipada once more and “demanded” to receive the sannyasa initiation. Bhaktipada refused again and the two exchanged heated words. This was apparently too much for the disturbed Triyogi to bear.

TRIYOGI TRIES TO KILL BHAKTIPADA

At 5:50 p.m. on Sunday, October 27, 1985, Triyogi—in the midst of dozens of devotees—quietly approached Bhaktipada (who was supervising an outdoor bricklaying marathon near the temple) from behind, and struck him once in the head and twice on the back with a three-foot-long iron bar reported to weigh twenty pounds: a stake used to hold the curb molds.²⁴⁴ Dick Dezio (Tulsi) later claimed that Bhaktipada was hit thrice in the head, but Sheriff Bordenkircher insisted that the original police reports were correct: once in the head and twice on the back.

Bhaktipada lost consciousness due to severe head trauma and fell to the ground. He explained, “This man came up behind me with a lead pipe, or steel pipe, and began beating on my head as if it were a drum. Of course, I don’t remember it at all, thank God.”²⁴⁵ Tulsi explained, “The assailant wound up and hit him, and then he [Bhaktipada] fell face down on the concrete.”²⁴⁶

Kuladri exhibited the exemplary qualities of a leader when he instantly assessed the situation, disarmed and restrained Triyogi, and transported Bhaktipada to the hospital, against the wishes of some others who apparently thought Bhaktipada's injuries were fatal. They wanted instead to take the unconscious spiritual master into the temple where he could leave his body in the presence of Sri Sri Radha-Vrindaban Chandra with the sound of Krishna's holy name in his ears, but Kuladri overruled their objections. His quick thinking and decisive action ultimately saved Bhaktipada's life. Kuladri explained:

We had this system of roads and parking lots that were put in by bricks, so every evening, after people did their work . . . the community would come together and lay bricks every evening to finish over. It was a community project. Men, women and children came up to lay bricks in this parking lot to finish it.

At that time, I was there with my son laying bricks, and I heard a scream and turned around to see Kirtanananda Swami hitting the ground falling over, and Triyogi running away with a pipe in his hand. I immediately ran after Triyogi, tackled him on the grass part of the parking lot, took the pipe away from him, and asked the devotees to call the police.

I then ran over to Bhaktipada, found him surrounded by a number of devotees who were chanting and praying, and basically told them I was going to take him to the hospital. It seemed like some of them wanted to keep him there and bring him into the temple and pray over him, but I backed up his car and rushed him to the hospital with a couple other people.²⁴⁷

TRIYOGI RESTRAINED, ARRESTED BY THE SHERIFF

Madhava-Ghosh (Mark Kjos Meberg—a former New Vrindaban farmer who had become involved in real estate) remembered, “Another thing Kuladri did was have Triyogi put in a small room with a guard to protect him from some devotees who wanted to kill him on the spot.”²⁴⁸

Devananda dasa (Daniel Van Pelt), the New Vrindaban temple commander, cut off Triyogi's neck beads and sikha. Devananda remembered, "I went in the room. I cut off his beads and cut off his sikha hairpiece. I know he was demonic." ²⁴⁹

Sheriff Bordenkircher arrived within ten minutes and found an angry crowd surrounding Triyogi. "We had to pry him loose from the group for his safety," he said. ²⁵⁰ Marshall County Sheriff's Deputies first took Triyogi to Reynolds Memorial Hospital where he was treated for minor injuries, and then to the Marshall County Jail where he was held in protective custody and placed under a suicide watch. He was charged with malicious wounding, arraigned before Marshall County Magistrate David Buzzard on November 4th, and returned to jail after failing to post \$50,000 bail.

Bordenkircher said he had a general discussion with Triyogi but nothing specific was brought out that explained the reasons for the attack. Bordenkircher said, "It was a philosophical discussion. I got the feeling that he believes whatever occurred, occurred for the good of Krishna and to cleanse the church." ²⁵¹

JAIL BREAK ATTEMPT

After six months of incarceration, Triyogi attempted to escape from the Marshall County Jail on April 19, 1986, but was apprehended by a correctional officer. On May 29th, in the Marshall County circuit court, Judge Richard A. Warmuth sentenced Triyogi to a fifteen-month term in the county jail for unlawful assault and jail escape charges. The original charge of malicious assault had been reduced to unlawful assault under a plea bargain, and he was given a one-year term for the offense. Triyogi also received a one-to-five year term in the West Virginia Penitentiary for a felony charge of jail escape. Warmuth suspended the sentence under the agreement and placed Triyogi on three years' probation with a 90-day jail sentence. ²⁵²

Bhaktipada thought Triyogi got off too easily and complained bitterly that Triyogi was not charged with “attempted murder.” Bhaktipada said Triyogi “was not even charged with attempted murder. And his sentence for that crime, plus the crime of attempting to break out of jail was fourteen months. Now it could appear here that there was some kind of deal here.”²⁵³

Bhaktipada forgave Triyogi for his offense, but he indicated that he should still stand trial. Bhaktipada said, “Spiritually, I forgive him, but I will not interfere with the laws of the state. In this way his trial will go on unabated. The local sheriff wants him tried properly.”²⁵⁴

Two years after the assault, on September 10, 1987, Triyogi sent a letter of apology to Bhaktipada and asked for forgiveness. Bhaktipada replied: “Dear Triyogi dasa, Hare Krishna. I am in due receipt of your letter of September 10th. Yes, I forgive you. Please be very careful never to do anything to harm the spiritual master again, as he is representing Krishna.”²⁵⁵

Also in 1987, Triyogi visited Kailasa-Chandra at the Mount Kailasa California farm and expressed his appreciation for Kirtanananda’s magnanimity. Kailasa-Chandra recalled:

I was sitting on my rocking chair on the front porch, basking in the early afternoon sun, when he [Triyogi] arrived. About four or five peacocks were resting on the steps immediately below me, apparently they liked the ambiance, and they trusted me. Triyogi charged up the steps and scared all of them away. I considered him self-absorbed and most inconsiderate in doing so, but I don’t think he even noticed it.

At any rate, our brief discussion (I had never met him before) was not to my liking, and, from my perspective, was mostly unfavorable. I was tactful, but all he wanted to talk about was how magnanimous Kirtanananda was in forgiving him. I doubt that he even stayed for an hour, in no small part because I did not reciprocate favorably with where he was coming from. I never heard from him again, and we never made any effort to contact each other after that brief meeting.²⁵⁶

BHAKTIPADA RUSHED TO HOSPITAL

Within minutes of Triyogi's assault on Bhaktipada, Kuladri subdued the crazed attacker and instructed devotees to call the local police. Immediately the unconscious and bleeding Bhaktipada was put in a vehicle by Kuladri and others and transported to the hospital. He was unresponsive, although during moments of semi-consciousness he periodically uttered the names of "Prabhupada" and "Krishna." One New Vrindaban article described the attack in great detail:

Srila Bhaktipada is directing all the young gurukula boys to move the broken bricks. Walking through the crowd of working devotees, he encourages everyone. It's 6:00 Sunday night, and all the devotees are working hard to finish the brick marathon so Bhaktipada can begin the Rama Vijaya Mahotsava celebration by piercing Ravana with an arrow. The 15-foot demon scowls at the devotees as the time draws near.

The parking lot is a beehive of activity, everyone running around doing their various little tasks. A dozen gurukula boys are buzzing around Bhaktipada, following his instructions. Michael Shockman approaches him from behind, carrying a 20-pound steel spike used for anchoring the forms and prying bricks. But he is not interested in service. His purpose is demonic.

He approaches Bhaktipada from behind, lifts the spike well over his head, and sends the spike deep into the top of Bhaktipada's head. Blood showers the gurukula boys around him as they scream in terror. He then pulls the steel rod back like a bat and takes two shots at the base of Bhaktipada's head, throwing Bhaktipada face down on the bricks. Blood pours from the back of Bhaktipada's head. Devotees scream in agony: "Bhaktipada's dead! He's killed him! Oh, Krishna!" As the screams resound, the other devotees look up from their tasks, and Michael Shockman turns and runs across the parking lot with the spike.

At the first scream, Kuladri looks up and sees Bhaktipada on the ground. He chases Michael Shockman across the parking lot. They race 100 feet, and Kuladri catches up with him. Shockman turns to face Kuladri, swinging the bar at his head. Kuladri is grazed as he tackles

the assailant and throws him to the ground. Kuladri pulls the bar away from him and puts it against his neck. He turns him over to the other devotees. Then he jumps up, runs over to Bhaktipada's car, backs it up to Bhaktipada, and tells the devotees, "Put him in. We're going to the hospital." The parking lot is filled with terror and fright. The devotees are weeping hysterically, stunned at the unbelievable, inconceivable, demonic act that has just occurred.

"Call the hospital, call the police. Have the police come and pick him up. Tell the hospital we're coming in with Bhaktipada and he's dying of head injuries." The car flies up the hill towards town. We're passing everyone, lights flashing, as Bhaktipada is convulsing in the back of his car, sometimes pushing the devotees away, sometimes calling out "Krishna" or "Prabhupada."^{257 258}

Several teenagers helped Kuladri lift Bhaktipada into his vehicle and accompanied him to the hospital. One teenage boy confirmed that Bhaktipada called out to Prabhupada and Krishna between lapses of unconsciousness. Chaitanya-Mangala (Christopher Walker) recalled:

[Kuladri] came running over. He got me and somebody else and said, "I am going to get his [Bhaktipada's] truck and back it up, grab him, and put him in the back." So two others and myself, one grabbed his shoulders, another his legs. We opened the truck up and set him in the back. We were all sitting in the back. [Kuladri] was in the front and off we went. Going up the road. . . . He was driving on the other side of the road, passing people, honking, going crazy.

As we were driving, Bhaktipada kept coming in and out of some form of consciousness. It was actually kind of sentimental, but he kept saying, "Prabhupada, Prabhupada." "Krishna, Krishna." When you're in that state, you're not making that stuff up. . . . We were chanting to him. Telling him to lie still. "Hare Krishna. Hare Krishna."²⁵⁹

Bhaktipada was taken to Reynolds Memorial Hospital in Glen Dale, but when the emergency room doctor saw the severity of his injuries, he ordered an ambulance to take him to Ohio Valley Medical Center in Wheeling,

where an emergency craniotomy was performed to relieve hemorrhaging on the brain. Kuladri said: “There [at the hospital] I stayed at his side . . . making all medical decisions. That night the doctor asked my opinion of operating on him. I don’t know if they couldn’t get a hold of his parents or not, but based on my bringing him there and my decision they operated on him, and the doctor said he had saved his life that night.”²⁶⁰

Four days later, Bhaktipada was transferred by helicopter to Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where a second operation was performed to remove a blood clot in his brain. New Vrindaban residents imagined that they saw in his brain scan the image of the protector of the devotees, the fierce half-man half-lion incarnation, Lord Nrsimhadeva, and took this to be an auspicious sign that Krishna would protect their master.

Bhaktipada later explained, “When I was attacked, Krishna absolutely incarnated to protect me. The brain scan, the X-ray, taken just after the accident, showed an unmistakable image of Lord Nrsimhadeva. . . . Krishna incarnated to protect me from the blows of that man, . . . when every doctor that I talked to said it was enough to kill a hundred men.”

²⁶¹ Bhaktipada lay helpless in a coma for ten days and was listed on the critical list for almost three weeks. ²⁶²

BRIJABASIS DEVASTATED

I speak for nearly all of the Brijabasis when I say our love for Bhaktipada increased tremendously during that extremely trying period while he lay for ten days in critical condition in intensive care, unconscious in a coma. We did not know whether he would live or die. Because of our intense love for him, we became heartbroken and overwhelmed with grief. We felt vacant on account of his absence. We thought of his smiling face, his sweet words and his past affectionate dealings, and we petitioned Lord Nrsimhadeva: “If it is your will, please return Srila Bhaktipada to us.” At

New Vrindaban, and at other ISKCON temples throughout the world, devotees performed twenty-four-hour kirtan for Bhaktipada's recovery.

It was during this time, while leading a kirtan in the RVC temple at New Vrindaban, that I began chanting *jaya jagad-guru srila bhaktipada*. I had always considered Bhaktipada to be a Jagad-Guru (a world-class spiritual master), but I never was bold enough to chant that refrain during kirtans until he was nearly taken away from us. Because of the extenuating circumstances, none of my senior god-uncles protested the heartfelt glorification by a disciple for his master; in fact, some of them joined in the chanting. It is said that one doesn't appreciate the object of one's affection until it is taken away. Our love for our spiritual father became stronger due to the fire of separation. For all we knew, we might never see him again.

I had the privilege of spending four hours with my unconscious spiritual master at Allegheny General Hospital; I was on duty with him from 1 a.m. until about 5 a.m., at which time Umapati dasa ²⁶³ relieved me. When I first saw Bhaktipada's condition—his bandaged head was swollen, his face was blackened with bruises, and various tubes were inserted through his mouth and nose—I became light-headed and had to sit down. Although he was comatose, I thought there might have been a chance that he could be internally conscious and still be able to hear. Therefore, I spent the early morning hours reading to him, telling him stories, and singing the entire morning program. I wrote about my experience in a paper titled "Forever By His Side." ²⁶⁴

Radhanath Swami, one of New Vrindaban's most-respected preachers, who joined the community in 1972 and was initiated into the sannyasa order by Kirtanananda Swami ten years later, shared his thoughts about Bhaktipada's "painful condition" with the assembled Vaishnavas during a *Srimad-bhagavatam* class at New Vrindaban. Radhanath indicated that "a very divine purpose" was behind the assault, and he compared Bhaktipada to great Vaishnavas and saintly

devotees, such as the Pandava brothers,²⁶⁵ Haridasa Thakur,²⁶⁶ Jesus Christ and Srila Prabhupada. Radhanath explained:

Spiritual life is *sat-cid-ananda*, eternal, full knowledge and bliss. So why does Krishna sometimes put such great souls in apparently painful conditions? The Pandavas were in a painful condition. Haridasa Thakur was in a painful condition from being beaten in twenty-two market places. When Lord Jesus was being crucified, he was put into a painful condition. Srila Prabhupada was suffering a painful condition when he was suffering heart attacks, severe cold and physical abuse. Nobody came to help him in this foreign land. It was a painful condition. . . .

So now we are all very personally suffering due to the recent incident which has caused Srila Bhaktipada to accept a painful condition. How are we to understand this? How are we to react to this situation? There is a very divine purpose. In the end there is no doubt that Srila Bhaktipada's glories will be hundreds of millions of times more manifested in this world. We have unflinching faith that this is Krishna's arrangement. . . .

Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, . . . [the author of] *Caitanya-caritamrita* [the definitive biography of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu], explains: "I am crippled. Due to my attachment for this material world, I'm an invalid, and my feet are always slipping, and I'm always falling while trying to traverse this path of bhakti. Therefore, my only shelter is to pray for and grab on to the stick of the mercy of the great souls to support me."

So at this time when Srila Bhaktipada is in a very critical condition, many of us are realizing how much we need him, how much we need the stick of his transcendental mercy to support us—to support our crippled legs so that we can go on in Krishna consciousness. How much this world needs his vision, his sacrifice, his guidance, his example. Srila Bhaktipada does not need this world, but this world needs him. Therefore, let us pray very fervently to Krishna and express to His Lotus Feet how much we need Srila Bhaktipada's association, how much we are depending on his guidance.²⁶⁷

ISKCON LEADERS OFFER SUPPORT

While Bhaktipada lay unconscious in the hospital, ISKCON leaders from around the world visited New Vrindaban or sent letters and faxes to offer support. Satsvarupa dasa Goswami ²⁶⁸ (Stephen Guarino), an ISKCON guru and Senior Editor for *Back to Godhead* magazine, accompanied by a few of his associates, flew to Pittsburgh International Airport and took a taxi to Allegheny General Hospital to see Bhaktipada. The cab driver recognized his passengers as Hare Krishna devotees by their attire and inquired about Bhaktipada's welfare. It seemed that everyone, even non-devotees, had heard the news about Bhaktipada's attack. Satsvarupa said:

On the way to the hospital, we took a taxi from the airport, and had an interesting talk with the taxi driver. . . . The taxi driver was a simple man. He wore a baseball cap with the words "Vietnam Veteran" stamped on it. . . . When we told him we wanted to go to the Allegheny General Hospital, he said: "How's your man?"

I didn't know whether he knew anything about Bhaktipada, so I said, "The leader of our community is in the hospital." "I know. How's he doing?" "Well, I don't know. I think he's in a very grave condition," I said. . . . And he said, "He'll be all right. You just gotta have faith." ²⁶⁹

After visiting Bhaktipada in the hospital, Satsvarupa came to New Vrindaban and, during his morning lecture, explained how he saw a similarity between Bhaktipada's recent assault and Prabhupada's 1967 stroke: both events caused the devotees to intensely pray to Krishna to "please let our master stay with us and finish his work." Satsvarupa suggested that the Brijabasis pray to Krishna to "let Bhaktipada do his nice service, instead of going back to Godhead."

Devotees are not supposed to ask Krishna for anything, but when you become helpless and don't know what to do, then you have to ask Krishna: "Our master has not finished his work. Please allow him to come back."

Prabhupada said that because so many devotees prayed for him, he stayed in the world, although he was supposed to leave.

According to the medical report, he was hit with a stroke that would have killed a man. He said he lived because all the devotees were praying for him. . . . So let Bhaktipada do his nice service, instead of going to Godhead. It's too soon; there's too much to do. Let him do his service. ²⁷⁰

Satsvarupa compared an attack on Bhaktipada to an attack on ISKCON. In his *Journal and Poems*, Satsvarupa wrote, "He [Bhaktipada] has done more than anyone in building that [New Vrindaban] community, and an attack on his life is an attack at the heart of ISKCON." ²⁷¹

Satsvarupa also wrote an article published in *Back to Godhead* magazine titled "Tribute to a Pure Devotee" in which he compared Bhaktipada to other saintly devotees who had been unjustly persecuted: Haridasa Thakur, Prahlada Maharaja, the five Pandava brothers and Jesus Christ. Satsvarupa wrote: "We should take care lest we forget how rare Vaishnavas like Srila Kirtanananda Swami are. . . . Srila Bhaktipada is a truly outstanding leader and teacher of Krishna consciousness. . . . New Vrindaban is quickly becoming one of the most prominent and important places of religious pilgrimage in the world. New Vrindaban . . . is a hallmark of Srila Bhaktipada's pure God-conscious vision." ²⁷²

Bhakti-Tirtha Swami (John E. Favors), the ISKCON guru for most of Africa, who received his sannyasa initiation from Bhaktipada in March 1979, came to lend support and offer encouragement. He said: "We see that Srila Bhaktipada is not just a great spiritual teacher, he is not just guru, but we see he is the senior-most guru in our society. . . . Srila Bhaktipada is the major hope, the major guiding force on this planet at this time. . . . Sometimes it is very difficult to understand why the pure devotee often suffers. . . . Srila Bhaktipada is . . . the major nucleus of ISKCON's future. Serious devotees will take this as a time to take inventory in their own devotional life, and they will also see and feel that they are responsible." ²⁷³

Harikesh Swami (Robert Campagnola), the zonal acharya for Eastern Europe, visited New Vrindaban, gave a class, and claimed that the violent attack against Bhaktipada was caused by offenses from members of the Guru Reform movement at the GBC and North American Temple Presidents meeting a month earlier. Ravindra-Svarupa recalled, “[Kirtanananda] got clobbered over the head really badly by this devotee [Triyogi]. At that point, Harikesh Maharaja came and delivered his lecture at New Vrindaban blaming the violence on the [September Emergency GBC and Temple Presidents] meeting that had created such chaos and anxiety and offense.”²⁷⁴

Devotees in Atlanta, Australia, England, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Yugoslavia, France and South America put Bhaktipada’s picture on the altar or vyasasana and read daily from *Christ and Krishna* and his *Vyasa-puja* book or chanted Nrsimha prayers or held 24-hour kirtans for his recovery. In Los Angeles, Mukunda Swami encouraged all ISKCON devotees to pray for Bhaktipada’s recovery.²⁷⁵ Sampat Bhattacharya, the head priest for the famous Tirumala temple (near Tirupati) in India, whose son was the priest for the Venkatesvara temple in Pittsburgh, offered special homas (oblations) for Bhaktipada.²⁷⁶

The New Vrindaban fund-raising department prepared a special letter to be sent to all New Vrindaban Life Members and Friends “requesting members to write prayers and the mahamantra to help speed Srila Bhaktipada’s recovery. . . . Mr. Kumar Podar, a fund-raising consultant for the department, has volunteered to pay the entire cost for the mailer—\$15,000.”²⁷⁷

Even some Wheeling residents prayed for Bhaktipada’s well-being. Radha-Govinda dasa (Robert Seguin) heard many sympathetic comments from elderly Wheeling residents as he delivered free vegetarian meals on the Palace Charities route: “Practically at every stop, people asked me how Srila Bhaktipada was doing, and said they were praying for him. At one of my last stops, a very favorable lady took me by the hand and told me that

she'd heard the news on the radio Sunday night, and that she had prayed all night for Bhaktipada." 278

SOME WANT BHAKTIPADA TO DIE

Bhaktipada later claimed, however, that local government officials prayed for him to die. During a conversation at Prabhupada's Palace with a reporter from CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, Bhaktipada said: "When I was attacked, and I was in the hospital in a coma, one local official told us they were praying for me to die . . . because they're trying to get rid of this community." 279

Not all the Brijabasis were devastated by Bhaktipada's near-death experience; some New Vrindaban residents actually wanted him to die. One gurukula boy, Bhima-Karma, the son of Chakradhari and Kusumapida, remembered the evening of Triyogi's assault:

Regarding Bhaktipada, I was standing maybe two to three feet away from him when he got whacked on the head. My class—Jiva Goswami's class [Jacques Meloche from Quebec]—was there with the bricklaying crew. We'd carry bricks to the layers. [One of the forklift operators] would bring over a pallet of bricks and we'd pick up four or six bricks and unload them.

I was carrying bricks at the time and I was trying to show off to Bhaktipada: "See how I'm carrying these bricks!" He was about five feet behind me when I heard a couple hollow thud sounds when the iron bar hit his head. When he fell down he fell right by my feet. I saw his body drop like a sack.

I remember the guy [Triyogi] ran towards the lawn. It took everybody a couple seconds to realize what had happened, but then I saw a flock of people running after him and got him down pretty quickly on the lawn. . . . Then our teacher came and herded us off to the side. People sat in groups murmuring and talking. . . . I remember we stayed up all night in our ashram. The teacher was outside; they all wanted

to be part of the action and see what was going on, so we stayed up all night in our beds talking. And we took a poll in the room, who wanted Bhaktipada to die and who wanted him to live. I don't remember which got more votes, but there was definitely a number of us who wanted Bhaktipada to die. It was common knowledge amongst us gurukula boys that Bhaktipada condoned the teachers beating and hitting us.²⁸⁰

The paddle which was used to discipline the boys had a name: *ugradanda* ("terrible stick"). One boy remembered, "I came to New Vrindaban in 1980. . . . Sri-Galim [Gary Gardner, the headmaster for the boys' school] came and took me to (Old Nandagram). Every day I would run away and every day I would be beaten with what was called the (*ugradanda*): a paddle with 30 holes swung by a man six feet four inches tall and two hundred pounds, against a five-year-old's butt wearing only a cotton dhoti."²⁸¹

Another boy remembered the *ugradanda*, "I joined the gurukula at the age of five. I spent six years in gurukula and all of them were at New Vrindaban. While in the ashram I suffered both physical and mental abuse from a few different teachers. . . . I can remember Sri-Galim beating me because I would wet my bed. He would spank me over and over until my ass would have blisters from the paddle which had holes in it."²⁸²

The former school headmaster confirmed that Bhaktipada approved of spanking in the school. Sri-Galim wrote, "As far as I was concerned, to spank a kid was proper discipline. We did have a paddle and Kirtanananda Swami approved of it."²⁸³ Bhaktipada explained, "If you don't use the stick once in a while, how is it effective? You shouldn't have to use a stick on a child; you should just threaten, but if you don't use it at all, then the child knows you'll never use it."²⁸⁴

Unfortunately, most of the New Vrindaban parents didn't learn until years later that a few especially uncontrolled and sadistic teachers beat some children severely. No wonder some of the gurukula children wished Bhaktipada were dead.

BHAKTIPADA AWAKENS FROM COMA

Early during the morning of November 6th, ten days after his head injury, Bhaktipada exhibited the first signs of external consciousness. The *New Vrindaban News* reported, “Dayasara [Gary Wright from Australia] asked Srila Bhaktipada if he knew what had happened to him and Srila Bhaktipada replied softly, ‘I’m not sure.’ Two doctors were in the room at the time and verified the incident.”²⁸⁵ One of Bhaktipada’s followers, Yogadeva [Dave Martin], happened to be at Allegheny General Hospital soon after Bhaktipada woke up from his coma. Yogadeva remembered:

I visited Bhaktipada at the hospital right after he came out of his coma. I was really worried about him. Radhanath took me to the hospital and he [Bhaktipada] came out of the coma. Everybody came in. He was in a daze, really groggy and out of it, and suddenly someone said, “Here’s Yogadeva to see you, Bhaktipada.”

He raised his head, his eyes and gaze was so intense, he had just come out of the coma. I started to cry. I didn’t know what to say. What do you say to someone who’s almost been murdered? I started crying.

Then Bhaktipada said, “If it took this to bring you to love of Krishna, then it was worth it.” That just devastated me to no end. I was blown away. I heard that the spiritual master accepts the karma of his disciples and suffers from their sins, and even though I wasn’t officially initiated, I had accepted Bhaktipada as the guru in my heart. He had suffered for me, just like Jesus Christ suffered for his followers. I couldn’t stop crying. Bhaktipada loved me so much.²⁸⁶

Slowly but surely Bhaktipada began recovering from his injuries. The *New Vrindaban News* reported on his conversations with devotees.

Yesterday morning, Umapati was watching Bhaktipada very intently as Srila Bhaktipada seemed to be absorbed in thought. “Bhaktipada,” asked Umapati, “Just what are you thinking about? You seem to be thinking of so many things.” In a quiet but distinct voice Srila Bhaktipada replied, “I’m thinking about getting out of here.” . . .

Although Srila Bhaktipada still gets extremely exhausted after speaking even a little, he is constantly reciprocating the devotees' care in various ways. Last night as Kumar [Craig Thompson] was rolling Bhaktipada over on his side, Bhaktipada at first resisted. This is usually a normal reaction when he is moved, so Kumar didn't really know if Srila Bhaktipada was opposed to moving or not. Finally during Kumar's endeavor, Srila Bhaktipada punched him in the side of the head four or five times. . . . The first sauce, as predicted, landed on Umapati when he said, "Gee, Bhaktipada, I wish it was me lying there instead of you," to which Bhaktipada replied, "So do I."²⁸⁷

BHAKTIPADA RETURNS HOME

Bhaktipada returned to New Vrindaban on Friday, November 22nd, after four long weeks in the hospital. Tears flooded the eyes of the Brijabasis and the eyes of their beloved master during the emotional reunion; the Brijabasis became joyful when their very life and soul had returned. The *Brijabasi Spirit* described Bhaktipada's return to New Vrindaban and the emotional ecstasy of the Brijabasis, who shed tears of joy continually:

He's coming home soon. We've been waiting so long, feeling almost dead. We can hardly believe it—he's finally coming home at last! . . . The waiting, the anticipation, and the meditation on Bhaktipada builds and builds, and finally, just a few minutes later a silver van rounds the bend, its lights on, slowly moving. A tidal wave of affection crashes, and the devotees go wild—Srila Bhaktipada has returned home!

Everyone runs to the van. It seems like thousands of devotees are jumping and dancing around it. . . . Bhaktipada is looking out at all the devotees, who are now waving and screaming, "Bhaktipada! Bhaktipada!" Bhaktipada is sitting up, so beautiful, radiant, dressed in saffron. . . . He's beaming and smiling like a thousand suns.

As the van turns into Bhaktipada's driveway, Hayagriva stands alongside the garden, his hands grasped around a large conch shell, blowing tunes imported from Goloka Vrindaban. Waves of devotees are

swarming all around Bhaktipada. The expression on Bhaktipada's face is indescribable—as if he is experiencing the agony of separation, but also great ecstasy. Bhaktipada and everyone are simply crying like crazy. Sudhanu, Kumar, Kuladri, and Umapati wheel Bhaktipada inside, and the doors are shut, although many devotees manage to get in.

They wheel Bhaktipada before his deities, Radha-Vrindaban Chandra, ²⁸⁸ beautifully dressed on Their decorated silver *srngasana* [throne]. Bhaktipada is still crying. . . . He bends over, trying to pay full dandavats. But he has to compromise and bends over [just] a little to offer his obeisances. . . .

After a short darshan with the Deities, Bhaktipada is wheeled into his bedroom, and everyone follows, practically tripping over one another. As Sudhanu and others lift him into his bed, Bhaktipada says in a barely audible voice . . . “Now I am aware of what real separation is,” and he begins to cry as they gently lift him onto the bed. The atmosphere is so intense; sweet waves of affection sweep up everyone. . . .

The devotees are overwhelmed with relief and happiness. Srila Bhaktipada is so warm, so rich, so loving. . . . Hladini [Linda Jury, a gentle and devoted pujari for Lord Jagannath who, at the time, was married to Bhavisyat (Burton Smith), head of New Vrindaban's direct-mail fund-raising department] comes in and kneels a few feet from the bed. . . . She starts comparing Bhaktipada's return to the *Mahaprakasa* of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu [*Mahaprakasa* refers to the Lord's pastime of displaying His opulence]. . . . “You're the king, Srila Bhaktipada. You're the king!” Bhaktipada shakes his head: “I'm not the king of anything. I'm the servant of the king.” . . .

Hladini tells how Dhruva Maharaja [a king of the ancient world mentioned in *Srimad-bhagavatam*, the son of King Uttanapada and his wife Suniti and the grandson of Svayambhuva Manu, who at the age of five, meditated in the forest and fasted for six months from food and water in order to attain the darshan of Lord Vishnu] affected the whole universe: “By his austerities, the three worlds trembled. And now, by your great austerities, you're shaking the whole planet. Everyone is chanting

your glories.” Bhaktipada begins to cry softly. The exchange of emotions is intense. . . . Umapati stands next to Bhaktipada and occasionally hands him tissues to wipe his mouth. . . .

Bhaktipada asks for Hayagriva, and when he comes in Bhaktipada’s eyes light up more than ever. “I heard you trumpeting.” “Well,” Hayagriva says in his deep voice, “it’s a special occasion.” . . .

Kasyapa [John Mowen, the head of the New Vrindaban heavy equipment department], who’s standing near the door, realizes that Bhaktipada wants to talk to him and goes over to him, kneels down, puts his head in Bhaktipada’s hand and begins sobbing. “Bhaktipada,” Kasyapa manages to say, “Your leaving us was just like when Visvarupa [the elder brother of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu], who was the greatest devotee, left Navadvipa [the village on the western bank of the Bhagirathi River in West Bengal where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu revealed his childhood pastimes]. They still had the Lord there, but in the absence of the perfect devotee, Visvarupa, the abode of Jagannath Misra [the father of Visvarupa and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu] was turned into the abode of mourning and tears. Actually the whole of Navadvipa was devastated by the separation from Visvarupa. Similarly, when you left New Vrindaban, it was the same condition here. I know you’re not bound by our desires or needs, but out of your causeless mercy, you’ve come back and answered our prayers, because we were praying for you twenty-four hours a day.”²⁸⁹

THE JOY OF REUNION

I was away on traveling sankirtan during the weekend when Bhaktipada returned from the hospital. Monday morning, when I returned to New Vrindaban, I nimbly bounded up the steps behind his house and entered the back door. I recalled:

I expected the worst: Would you be able to walk or talk? Would your mind be able to function properly after brain injury? Would you even be able to recognize me?

My godbrother Kumar [Craig Thompson] greeted me quietly: “Bhaktipada is taking rest now.” I sat down patiently on the floor and began chanting *japa*. Kumar disappeared and presently reappeared: “Srila Bhaktipada is up. You can go in. But,” he cautioned me, “don’t excite him.” I tiptoed to the door and peeked in, chanting Hare Krishna in my mind, not sure what to expect. I remembered my heartbreak a week or two earlier seeing Bhaktipada during his coma in the hospital; his swollen head was wrapped in bandages, blackened with bruises, punctured with needles and inserted with tubes.

To my surprise, he didn’t look so bad. He was laying on his bed, propped up with several pillows, incredibly weak and thin, but alive! I stood there silently, waiting. Bhaktipada detected my presence and whispered hoarsely: “Hrishikesh?”

“Bhaktipada!” I shouted in joy, bounding over to his bedside. He extended his arms and I embraced him affectionately, resting my head on his chest. My soul’s ecstasy knew no limit to see him alive and well. “Bhaktipada! Bhaktipada!” I sobbed, kneeling on the floor besides him. I raised my head, wiped my eyes and looked intently into his eyes: “You scared us too much! We thought we might never see you again!”

Bhaktipada started chuckling and then explained: “You and I can never be separated. You know that I’m not this body, and you’re not yours!” We both started laughing and I quipped: “Yes, that’s true, Bhaktipada. But it sure is lonely back here without you!” He concluded: “Yes, that’s how I feel about Srila Prabhupada. But still, you must never forget the philosophy; on the spiritual platform we cannot be separated.”

We loved Bhaktipada and he loved us. How many times, during my telephone conversations with Bhaktipada during those many years while I served in separation out on the road, he reminded me: “And don’t forget, Hrishikesh—I love you!”²⁹⁰

Toshan-Krishna dasa (Thomas Allin), the manager of the Palace, shared the Brijabasis’ communal feelings when he expressed his heartfelt feelings for his elder godbrother: “Dear Srila Bhaktipada. . . . You have returned

to us. This special gift of Krishna's mercy, a response to our desperate prayers, gives sign of your compassion to us. You, free to leave us at your time, are welcome in Krishna's land, your natural place. With this attack all the lights in my universe went out, seeing the vast world condemned. A soothing dream of mine then pictured your triumphant return complete with banners, marching gurukula bands, and decorated floats with joyous crowds of devotees and flower petal showers. It was a transcendental ticker tape parade all to give a hero's welcome. Relieved, I tried to think of how to do some service, if only a little extra." ²⁹¹

Hrdayananda Goswami (Howard J. Resnick), the zonal acharya for most of South America, came to visit, as did Bhaktipada's 82-year-old mother Marjorie Ham (her first visit to New Vrindaban). Hrdayananda flattered Bhaktipada: "I just heard some of your new tape, *Eternal Love*, when I was down in Key West. You've become very prolific—so many books. This is the symptom of a self-realized person, a surrendered soul. . . . Bhaktipada, actually you are a brilliant scholar. We all knew you were quite a scholar before you came to the movement, but then you got involved in building such a big project [New Vrindaban]. But now, you are manifesting that scholarly opulence. . . . New Vrindaban is actually a great pillar to our preaching all over the world." ²⁹²

Bhaktipada's bill for the three days he spent at Ohio Valley Medical Center came to \$11,368.77. New Vrindaban paid \$3,000, and OVMC sued Bhaktipada for \$8,368.77 plus interest and costs for "necessary expenses." ²⁹³

Bhaktipada's bill from Allegheny General Hospital was much greater, about \$50,000. The State of West Virginia contributed \$20,000 towards Bhaktipada's bill through a West Virginia Victims Reparation Claim, although one West Virginia senator, John Karras (Republican from Ohio County) protested, "What's wrong, don't they make enough money up there selling flowers on the street corner to cover these kinds of debts?" Senator Darrell Holmes, a Democrat from Kanawha County, replied, "Well, after all, he is a crime victim." ²⁹⁴

PRABHUPADA'S CROWN RETURNS

After Prabhupada's crown at the Palace was removed in April 1983, it remained in a cabinet at the Palace for two and a half years. While Bhaktipada was still recovering from his head injuries in the hospital, on Prabhupada's disappearance day (November 14, 1985) Bhaktipada's first initiated disciple, Jadabharata dasa (Jean Thibeault), put the crown back on Prabhupada and announced in his French-Canadian accent: "Bhaktipada wanted the crown on Prabhupada and only took it off at the insistence of his envious godbrothers. If anyone tries to take off this crown, it will be over my dead body." ²⁹⁵

Kasyapa dasa explained, "Since Prabhupada's disappearance [day], Jada has found a new excuse every day to keep dressing him as a king. Sundarakar [Stephen Fitzpatrick, the manager of Palace Press] comes each night with his [cameras and lighting] equipment to take pictures. I couldn't believe how everybody on Prabhupada's disappearance day simply kept looking and talking about Srila Prabhupada. They were all saying how glorious he looked." ²⁹⁶

Community leaders were naturally reticent to force a distraught disciple to remove Prabhupada's crown, despite the "fact" that in April 1983 Prabhupada had personally appeared to Kirtanananda Swami in a "dream" and ordered him to remove the crown. When Bhaktipada returned from the hospital, he was requested by New Vrindaban management to tell Jadabharata to remove the crown. Bhaktipada refused and exclaimed in a weak, hoarse voice: "Why should we take off Prabhupada's crown? Jada is right. My godbrothers *are* envious. Leave it on." ²⁹⁷

Bhaktipada praised Jadabharata's intelligence and claimed that ISKCON had never convinced him that Prabhupada at the Palace should not be dressed with a crown, cape and scepter. *New Vrindaban News* reported:

After *aroti* at his house, Srila Bhaktipada saw Jada looking through the doorway. He told Kumar to call him over. Jada made his way through

the crowd and sat at Bhaktipada's feet. Srila Bhaktipada said, "Jada, is Prabhupada all dressed up?" "Yes," said Jada.

Bhaktipada smiled and kept looking at Jada who replied, "I thought that if we would start treating Srila Prabhupada with all opulence again, you would recuperate faster." Bhaktipada said, "Krishna is giving you intelligence."

Then Bhaktipada laughed and said, "Wait until the news goes around [ISKCON] that we are dressing Prabhupada with gold and diamonds again." He laughed again and added, "They never convinced me that we shouldn't treat Prabhupada like that." ²⁹⁸

When Bhaktipada was asked "Do you think we should continue dressing Srila Prabhupada with all opulence again?" he took a deep breath and replied without hesitation, "This will solve all the problems of ISKCON." ²⁹⁹

CHAPTER 6

He Was a Very, Very Different Person

THE SPEED OF BHAKTIPADA'S RECOVERY was phenomenal. By December 22, 1985, one month after being released from the hospital, Bhaktipada began driving his Chevrolet Blazer around the community, and by January he felt he was well enough to travel to India for a two-week preaching tour. *New Vrindaban News* reported, "He [Bhaktipada] was greeted in Bombay by a thirty-car motorcade led by an elephant and was driven to the [Juhu Beach ISKCON] temple in a gold Rolls Royce."³⁰⁰

In February, Bhaktipada traveled to New Orleans during Mardi Gras where he held a darshan with a dozen of his sankirtan "pickers" who were working the Super bowl and the streets in the French Quarter. Bhaktipada also met with Vrkodara dasa (Victor Mistretta), the New Orleans ISKCON temple president, and Jayapataka Swami Acharyapada (John Gordan Erdman), the ISKCON zonal acarya for Mayapura, India, and Louisiana and Mississippi. Bhaktipada also visited the ISKCON New Talavan farm near Carriere, Mississippi.³⁰¹ On February 26th, Bhaktipada embarked on a hectic ten-day tour of India, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.³⁰²

Early in May 1986, Bhaktipada made a short trip to Italy, where he visited several cathedrals, including Saint Marks in Venice.³⁰³ A few weeks later, he traveled to The Netherlands and Germany. Obviously Bhaktipada had made an amazing recovery; despite frequent headaches and periodic memory lapses, he continued to direct the operations of

the community in intricate detail. He didn't seem to have much choice; New Vrindaban residents practically demanded that he continue to lead the community. We thought that Bhaktipada's amazing recovery was proof that he was truly God's representative on earth. Bhaktipada said: "The surgeon told me it [the blow on my head] was enough to kill a hundred men."³⁰⁴

BHAKTIPADA'S BRAIN DAMAGE

When Bhaktipada returned home, nearly a month after the attack, he could barely walk or talk as he was in a partially paralyzed condition as a result of brain trauma, and his left vocal cord was unresponsive, making speech difficult. He also suffered permanent hearing loss in his right ear and had difficulty with his vision and memory. By regular therapy Bhaktipada regained the use of his arms and legs, although he was hampered because of the polio he suffered in his youth. Bhaktipada explained, "I have permanent loss of hearing in the right ear, total loss. My vision is double much of the time. I suffer from imbalance. The pituitary gland was partially destroyed."³⁰⁵

Bhaktipada had difficulty with his lungs. His personal servant recalled, "He used to have a build up of liquid in his lungs. While he coughed he would ask his staff to hit him hard on the back to help dislodge the phlegm. He would keep asking us to hit him harder and harder. Most would stop and not hit him as hard as he wanted. He would get angry and call them useless. I would follow his command and keep hitting him harder and harder. There were times when I felt like I was beating on his back but he'd keep asking me to keep hitting him and tell me to go harder if I started to soften the blows."³⁰⁶

Bhaktipada also had grand mal seizures from time to time, which began soon after he returned from the hospital to New Vrindaban. Fifteen months after his head injury, in January 1987, he traveled to India and visited his recently-acquired ashram in Tikli—"Dronacharya's

Ashram”—about an hour’s drive south-west from New Delhi. Early one morning he fell in the bathroom, hit his head, lost consciousness and was afflicted by a series of grand mal seizures. He went into shock and his body became cold and rigid. His disciples were at their wit’s end. The chastising words Bhaktipada spoke to his bewildered disciples after he regained consciousness revealed to them his exalted status. The *Brijabasi Spirit* reported:

The 17-acre parcel of desert that Srila Bhaktipada plans to transform into Vaikuntha had lain vacant since Maharishi [Mahesh] Yogi attempted an ashram there eight years ago. Into this setting on 16 days notice, the devotees attempted to receive Srila Bhaktipada as well as they would receive the Supreme Personality of Godhead. His room, a 9x17 dungeon of granite chips and a two-day old coat of stucco, had all the homey warmth and charm of the Bastille. A rough finish cement floor, which rejected every type of flooring we put down, allowed all the cold and damp to penetrate and permeate the room. . . .

Since the space heater failed to heat the room and the electric supply would not carry another heater for the bathroom, an auxiliary heating system was needed for the bathroom. This turned out to be the second-class Indian method: an open-top iron bucket filled with charcoal bricks, which puts all its heat (and smoke) directly into the room. This was the source of heat for Srila Bhaktipada’s bathroom as he attempted to bathe at 3:30 one morning.

Some devotees had gathered in his room to chant japa and were distressed upon hearing him cry out, accompanied by the sound of his falling, coming from the bathroom. Ranaka [Douglas Fintel, the manager of New Vrindaban’s Govardhan Dairy] was the first one on the scene and he immediately called for help from the other room. Srila Bhaktipada had left external consciousness and had fallen to the floor, hitting and cutting his arm and his head in the process. His body was convulsing furiously in spasms; his eyes were rolled back in his head with his mouth open and tongue extended.

He did not respond to external stimuli of the devotees picking him up, trying to get him to stand or any of the questions they asked him. His body was completely limp, except for the periods when the spasms would convulse his whole body. All his muscles would go as rigid as a board. No vehicle or telephone was available to us. The nearest doctor being several miles and as many hours away, the devotees moved Srila Bhaktipada to his bed and attempted to treat him for shock as best they could.

The spasms came initially at intervals of about one minute and lasted about equally as long; that is: one minute of total rigidity and then one minute of complete limpness. The devotees continued speaking to Srila Bhaktipada, but as no response was forthcoming, the questions became more frantic, “Srila Bhaktipada, don’t do this to us!” Finally, after several minutes, which seemed more like years, his body relaxed and a response came to his lips. In reply to “Don’t do this to us,” he shot back, “Do you think I’m doing this? I’m not the controller. Krishna’s the controller. Don’t you know that?”

The intensity of his attack on our Maya-laden brains sent us scurrying, but the gravity of the situation and another spasm of his body brought our feeble Krishna consciousness back to the side of the current Reservoir of Transcendental Knowledge, Srila Bhaktipada. His body temperature had dropped drastically and the devotees rubbed his feet and hands to try to restore circulation. All the blankets and sleeping bags in the ashram were piled on, creating a stack of wool and polyester about three-feet high on Srila Bhaktipada’s body. Still no response from the bodily functions and his body remained cold as ice.

Finally, he responded to our plea, “We need you,” by screaming, “You need Krishna! Just surrender to Krishna! It’s so easy. Why does everyone make it so difficult? Just surrender to Him!” The lecture on Krishna consciousness that followed, amid the return to normalcy of his bodily functions, was taped by Ranaka prabhu, and many have already heard it.

The spasms became less intense and less frequent, and finally he asked to have one blanket removed. This seemed funny considering the pile of ten or twelve that were still on him, but it indicated an awareness of his body. *Jai!* We had returned Srila Bhaktipada to our level of understanding. Shortly, Srila Bhaktipada was up and behind his computer, punching the keys to take another generation back to Godhead. He refused any medical attention. (“What can they do?”) He joked later that day when his doctor disciples arrived from Bombay, “You should have been here this morning; I almost died.”³⁰⁷

ANTEROGRADE AMNESIA

Although Bhaktipada’s recovery seemed remarkable indeed, his memory had been permanently affected by his head injury. We did not know it at the time, but he had suffered considerable brain damage which significantly affected his memory and personality. He could not remember recent conversations only a few days apart, and he sometimes acted in impulsive ways. While Bhaktipada was hospitalized at Allegheny General Hospital in November 1985, the attendant physician predicted he might be afflicted with a “neurological deficit.” “I could not say we will have a recovery without any neurological deficit, but the extent of the neurological deficit? We’ll have to wait and see.”³⁰⁸

After returning to New Vrindaban, Bhaktipada began exhibiting symptoms of anterograde amnesia, a condition in which new events contained in the immediate memory are not transferred to the permanent as long-term memory. The disorder is usually acquired in one of two ways: it is either drug-induced or it follows a traumatic brain injury in which there is usually damage to the hippocampus or surrounding cortices. Patients who suffer from anterograde amnesic syndromes are afflicted with widely varying degrees of forgetfulness and lose declarative memory or the recollection of facts.

Two years after his brain injury Bhaktipada admitted that his memory had been adversely affected, “Even to this day [December 11, 1987], I can be told something and two minutes later I won’t remember it, and then again in five minutes I may remember it.”³⁰⁹

Bhaktipada also admitted that he suffered from brain damage, “You must bear with me. I suffer from a little brain damage.”³¹⁰ Bhaktipada’s personal servant noted that his master had “serious problems with his memory as well as his ability to control his actions and emotions.” Chaitanya-Mangala remembered:

I was Bhaktipada’s personal servant and secretary for nearly a year, from December 1985 until November 1986. During this period I spent a great deal of time with him. In fact, Bhaktipada would hardly let me out of his sight.

This was the time immediately following his head injury. I noticed that he had serious problems with his memory as well as his ability to control his actions and emotions. He just couldn’t remember things. For example, one time a devotee came into his room to speak with him. I was massaging Bhaktipada’s head, as he often had severe headaches at that time. The devotee asked for advice, and Bhaktipada gave it. A few days later, the same devotee returned and asked him to clarify what he had previously said. This time Bhaktipada told him something completely different. The devotee left visibly shaken and confused.

After the devotee left, Bhaktipada asked me why the devotee seemed so shocked. I explained that just a few days earlier, he had spoken with the same devotee and that he had given a completely different set of instructions. Bhaktipada said that he had no memory of the previous conversation and asked me to remind him of what he said. I repeated the original instructions and Bhaktipada said, “Hmmm; that makes more sense than what I just told him.”

Because of this, Bhaktipada and I devised a system of signals we would use to help him in his conversations with people. When devotees came to him for instructions, and when Bhaktipada became confused

or forgetful of previous discussions, he would look at me and I would either give him some nonverbal signals by making expressions with my face or I would gently butt into the conversation to offer enough information for Bhaktipada to know what he had previously said. In this way, Bhaktipada was able to continue to give advice and relatively few people realized how badly his memory was affected. This went on for many months. When I left this service in November 1986, he still had significant problems with his memory. Little by little his memory improved, but it never returned to the levels from before his head injury.

Most of the New Vrindaban Community leaders of that time understood that Bhaktipada had problems with his memory and with his ability to make rational decisions. I recall that other leaders in ISKCON and India also suspected serious problems, but didn't know for sure. Most ignored or didn't want to believe that their perfect and pure leader had somehow become damaged or imperfect. Bhaktipada wanted everything to be okay just as much as his followers wanted him to be okay. All engaged in mutual denial.

Bhaktipada was in no shape to care for himself, physically or mentally, much less lead a community of hundreds of devotees or a worldwide movement. Many times he felt such extreme pressure in his skull that he suffered incredible agony. Several times he told me he wished he was dead because the pain was so unbearable. One time, on an airplane to India, he told me he could see the Yamaduttas (agents of death) surrounding him.

In retrospect, New Vrindaban Community and ISKCON leaders should have at least temporarily stepped in and relieved Bhaktipada of his duties. Yet no one really gave him a break; individuals continually came to him for advice and instruction. I think one of the main reasons was because they wanted to believe so badly that everything was going to be okay, that nothing had changed. They continued to prop him up even as he continued on his downward slide. I admit that even though I was only seventeen years old at the time, I was part of that attempt. All Bhaktipada's close associates who knew that he was incapable of

leading and did not work to remedy the situation were also responsible for propping him up, all in the name of keeping up appearances. In the end, it was a disservice to everyone involved.³¹¹

Bhaktipada on occasion attempted to use his memory loss to his own advantage. He discovered he could conveniently forget something when he wanted to forget. Kuladri recalled, “After he had been hit on the head he had told me that this injury was very convenient for him because he could lose his memory whenever he felt like it. He could forget when he wanted to forget.”³¹²

It seems clear that Bhaktipada was unwilling to (1) admit his inability to function normally and provide competent leadership, (2) get professional help from a neurologist or qualified therapist for his memory problems, and (3) temporarily delegate important decision-making responsibilities to senior New Vrindaban managers. With assistance from his teenage personal servant, he used deceitful means to try to keep up the appearance of being in control of his faculties and keep his followers in the dark about his actual debilitated mental and physical condition.

Bhaktipada understood the mechanics of the guru/disciple relationship; a disciple would only surrender completely to a completely perfect spiritual master. If the guru began showing symptoms of weakness or uncertainty, his disciples would lose faith and eventually abandon him. Therefore, in order to maintain his power and position, it was essential that he try to continue as if nothing had happened. Bhaktipada was not selfless—he was self-centered. He was attached to being “the guru,” and he was not about to give up the post and the benefits he had enjoyed for so many years.

NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

Bhaktipada had exhibited symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)—defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and

a lack of empathy”—since childhood,³¹³ but after his head injury the symptoms appeared to intensify. Some psychologists believe that NPD functions to compensate for an extremely low sense of self-esteem.

Persons are considered affected with NPD if they exhibit symptoms beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- has a grandiose sense of self-importance
- is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
- believes that he is special and unique
- requires excessive admiration
- has a sense of entitlement
- is interpersonally exploitative
- lacks empathy
- is often envious of others or believes others are envious of him
- shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes³¹⁴

Bhaktipada exhibited all nine symptoms of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder at different times in varying degrees. Certainly he could be kind and affectionate to a surrendered disciple (and why not?—the disciple was providing the excessive admiration necessary to justify his grandiose sense of self-importance), but he could also be callous and cruel if someone did not constantly bend over backwards to please him. Such persons—even long-time dedicated servants like Kanka and Kuladri, who eventually recognized he had a problem and disagreed with or challenged him—were more often than not thrown out of the community and labeled as “envious.”

In and of itself, there is no harm in having NPD. Most leaders of human societies have narcissistic tendencies: they believe in themselves, they tend to try to control others, they have grandiose fantasies which function as motivators and guidelines for achievements and goals, and they have a realistic sense of self-entitlement. However, there are varying degrees of NPD: (1) Healthy, (2) Extraordinary, (3) Arrogant, and (4) Psychopathic.³¹⁵

Dr. Elsa F. Ronningstam described the qualities of an Arrogant Narcissist in *Identifying and Understanding the Narcissistic Personality*: “Inflated and vulnerable self-esteem with inner sense of superiority and uniqueness. Strong reactions to criticism, defeats or other threats to the self-esteem. Grandiose fantasies support and enhance self-esteem. . . . Mood variations including depression, irritability, elation or hypomania reflect shifting levels of self-esteem. Interpersonal relations serve to protect and enhance self-esteem: arrogant and haughty attitude, seeking admiring attention, and entitled and controlling and hostile behavior. Impaired empathic processing. . . . Compromised or inconsistent superego functioning ranging from temporary extreme moral perfectionism to corruptive consciousness, deceitful manipulative behavior.”³¹⁶ A Psychopathic Narcissist may also exhibit an extreme “lack of remorse or guilt.”³¹⁷

As the degree of NPD becomes more severe, it becomes more and more difficult for the narcissist to function in society. Certainly, an Arrogant or Psychopathic Narcissist would have great difficulty in nearly all occupations, except perhaps in the occupation of guru. The guru has absolute authority over his disciples’ lives, and the disciples expect to receive chastisement on occasion, but if the guru’s narcissism is Arrogant or Psychopathic, then he will abuse his disciples to further his own agenda, which is always self-aggrandizement. It appeared that Bhaktipada’s head injury caused his NPD to intensify, and eventually this resulted in unsound decisions being made which negatively affected the community.

THE GREATEST DISEASE: TASTING ABSOLUTE POWER

A person who accepts the post of guru must be extremely careful not to become puffed up with false pride. Bhaktipada liked to preach about false pride, and he often quoted Proverbs (16:18): “Pride goeth before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” The spiritual master should not be proud of his position; he should preach the chanting of Hare Krishna with all humility. However in this regard, there is reasonable doubt whether Bhaktipada actually practiced what he preached.

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu explained the importance of humility in his *Siksastakam Prayers*: “One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honor yet is always prepared to give all respect to others, can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord.”

Prabhubada commented on this verse and insisted that the spiritual master must be humbler than everyone else: “The grass is specifically mentioned in this verse because everyone tramples upon it yet the grass never protests. This example indicates that a spiritual master or leader should not be proud of his position; being always humbler than an ordinary common man, he should go on preaching the cult of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra.”³¹⁸

It is very dangerous to be a guru, as the guru is constantly admired, glorified and worshiped by adoring disciples. If one has the slightest tinge of material desire, this adoration will eventually go to his head, and he will become addicted to adulation, with disastrous results. Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad wrote about this condition in *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power*:

Most people enjoy feeling special. . . . Adulation, the ultimate form of special treatment, has an addictive quality difficult to resist. Being the focus of such attention would activate the excitation levels of any sentient being on the receiving end of it. Whether for a guru or a rock star, this can be a more powerful experience than the strongest drug. It is also one of the great seductions of power.

Successful gurus, rock stars, charismatic leaders of any sort, experience the intensity of adulation amplified beyond most people’s ken. . . . Being the recipient of such adulation and devotion is exceedingly addictive. . . . Since adulation is totally a function of image, should the images crack, adulation disappears, demonstrating that it is essentially empty of real care.

Psychoanalytic theory would say that adulation is the emotional experience a narcissist most craves. What better profession

for a narcissist than being a guru? . . . For a guru, adulation and power are intricately connected since the disciples' surrender is the ultimate source of his power, and adulation is the prerequisite for surrender. A guru is made to feel he is the center of the universe by his disciples.³¹⁹

One of the members of the Guru Reform movement, Rochan, diagnosed the disease which infected Bhaktipada and other gurus: "There is no greater disease known to man than that which inflicts those who have tasted absolute power. It is an experience they can never free themselves from. In fact, they are cursed, in this lifetime and probably many lifetimes to come."³²⁰

Hamsadutta, one of the eleven original zonal acharyas (who fell down from his vows), concurred: "When most conditioned souls are exposed to immense wealth, unlimited prestige, adoration from women and devoted disciples, we go crazy. We can't help it. Our constitutional position is not lord and master of all we survey, our position is servant of the servant: *dasa dasa anudasa*. We go crazy. Nearly any conditioned soul would."³²¹

DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS PARALYZED BECAUSE OF ENORMOUS EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT

Bhaktipada's disciples and followers who were aware of his discrepancies were unable to admit that their guru had become flawed. They pretended everything was fine, or they tried to rationalize his behavior. They would do practically anything except acknowledge that something had gone terribly wrong. Bhaktipada's disciples and followers had become paralyzed because of their enormous emotional investment in their guru's sanctity. Kramer and Alstad explained:

People justify and rationalize in gurus what in others would be considered unacceptable because they have a huge emotional investment in believing their guru is both pure and right. Why? Why do people need images of perfection and omniscience?

This goes back to the whole guru/disciple relationship being predicated on surrender. Surrender of great magnitude requires correspondingly great images of perfection. It would be difficult to surrender to one whose motives were not thought to be pure, which has come to mean untainted by self-centeredness. How can one surrender to a person who might put his self-interest first?

Also it is difficult to surrender to someone who can make mistakes, especially mistakes that could have significant impact on one's life. Consequently, the guru can never be wrong, make mistakes, be self-centered, or lose emotional control. He doesn't get angry, he "uses" anger to teach. ³²²

BHAKTIPADA'S PERSONALITY CHANGED

Some devotees began to suspect that Bhaktipada's head injury also changed his personality; it seemed to make him less compassionate and more callous—one symptom of Arrogant or Pathological NPD. One long-time associate even thought he appeared to become "possessed" by an evil disembodied entity. Kanka devi dasi (Susan Hebel), a senior woman in ISKCON, described her relationship with Bhaktipada and how the relationship changed after his head injury:

Kirtanananda Swami and I go way back, to 1971, when I lived at the New York temple; my service was sewing outfits for [the presiding deities of New York ISKCON] Radha-Govinda. When he visited New York, I would take him out shopping to purchase jewelry and things for the deities at New Vrindaban. He was always so nice to me. Then during the summer of 1972 he invited me to come to New Vrindaban. The Radha-Vrindaban Chandra deities [at New Vrindaban] needed outfits. So I came and sewed a beautiful outfit for Their Lordships. Kirtanananda would come and see me every day in the sewing room. After Prabhupada's visit [during August and September of 1972], I returned to New York.

In 1978, when my marriage was falling apart, he invited me to come back to New Vrindaban with my three kids. The community had just purchased a house; the first on the ridge coming in from highway 250. It was a nice house, with wood paneling. I trusted him; I knew he would take care of me.

The house burned down three weeks later; I believe the fire was set by our karmi [non-devotee] neighbors. I was lucky to get out with my children. Within five minutes flames shot out the front doors. The fire engine came after ten minutes, but by then it was too late. Since then, the place was called "*Agni-dhama*." I lost everything I had, except for an inheritance; I had \$11,000 left.

When my house burned down, Kirtanananda was in India and I was freaking out. My sister had sent me a plane ticket to come and live with her in California. My bags were packed and I was leaving the community when Kirtanananda unexpectedly pulled up in his vehicle and begged, "Don't leave." He wasn't scheduled to return from India for several more days. He said that he had heard about the fire and cut his trip short to come back and see if I was okay. He invited me to stay in the guest house and he visited me nearly every day. That's when I gave him the \$11,000. I felt useless, like a burden. I could only do a half-day of service, on account of my three children. Yet I was very close to him; we were friends. He would come visit me and we'd sit and talk about stuff.

During the summer of 1979, I worked really hard helping to gold leaf the Palace. I slept only four hours a night for that entire summer. Then I'd go out on the "pick" with Lajjavati, Krishna-Bhava and Premamanjari. We were weekend girls; we were such loving and supportive friends. Sometimes I had some friction with Kirtanananda when I occasionally refused to go out on sankirtan, but overall we had a good relationship. He loved me.

But after he got hit on the head, everything changed. He was not the same person. He got hard and calloused. It seemed that there was

another entity in his body; like he was possessed. He lost his pious side. Dark energy came out. We didn't have the same relationship anymore. He became abusive to the sankirtan mothers. I was freaking out, "Who *is* this man?" I never saw him chant anymore. I decided I had to get out of there and so I left the community. ³²³

High-ranking New Vrindaban managers and local Marshall County politicians also noticed a change in Bhaktipada's personality after his head injury. Kuladri said: "After the attack, he was never the same. I didn't want to face it at first, but after a while I could not ignore it. Even the local politicians noticed something was different. At that time, we had been making friends amongst the leaders of local and state government; we were the second largest employer in Marshall County; we were contributing a lot to the local economy. After Kirtanananda returned from the hospital, our politician friends came to visit him. But they saw that he was not the same person; they became uncomfortable and gradually retreated and pulled away from us. They saw that something had gone amiss." ³²⁴

Radhanath Swami described three classes of New Vrindaban devotees according to their reactions to Bhaktipada's compromised mental abilities and personality changes: (1) those who rejected Bhaktipada as spiritual master and left the community, (2) those who saw Bhaktipada's words and actions as the "ecstatic symptoms of a great acharya," and (3) those who knew something was terribly wrong, but remained faithful because they thought if they were patient Bhaktipada might, in time, recover from his brain injuries. Radhanath explained:

When he [Kirtanananda Swami] was hit on the head, not only devotees at New Vrindaban, but devotees all over the movement, were really crushed by that, by seeing him in that condition, especially devotees who were at New Vrindaban who were very close to him. They were praying for him and praying for him and praying for him, and when he finally came out of his coma . . . he was a very, very different person. He was an extremely different person.

At that point devotees did one of a few things. . . . Some devotees just saw that he was acting very sporadic, erratic, irrational, and they left [the community]. Other devotees thought that . . . [Bhaktipada's bewildering words and behavior were] like ecstatic symptoms of a great acharya, where he has just realized that he doesn't have much time to do his mission. He just wants to cut through all political institutional formalities and just do what has to be done the way Krishna's directing him.

And other people . . . [like] myself, were thinking, "He's really acting irrationally and pretty crazy, but . . . he's done so much service for so many years. He's just coming out of the hospital. . . . He has some brain damage, and let's just kind of be patient and stand with him and let him get better, rather than just . . . surrendering to him as an ecstatic symptom or just rejecting him in this condition." So that's the reason I stayed with him.³²⁵

HEAD INJURY CAUSED INCREASED SEXUAL DESIRE?

Years later, around 1993, some Brijabasis theorized that Bhaktipada's increased sexual activity with boys and young men might have been a result of brain damage from his October 1985 head injury. Bhaktipada himself admitted that since his accident, he had "a problem with attraction for young men."³²⁶

Some common symptoms of brain damage include: reversion to old compulsive habits, impulsiveness, increased or decreased emotionality and loss of control of sexual behaviors. Perhaps Bhaktipada lost some of his self control and natural inhibitions after his head injury, but his inability to resist engaging in sexual activity with boys and young men was not caused by the injury; he had been engaging in activities of a sexual nature since the late 1960s.

For example, Naranarayana dasa Visvakarma (Nathan Baruch Zakheim)—an ISKCON artist who carved the big Jagannath, Subhadra

and Balarama deities at New Vrindaban and who served as the Art Director for the BBT—visited the community in 1968 and noted, “[When I visited New Vrindaban] Kirtanananda and Hayagriva appeared to still be lovers. They acted very curiously when around each other: like a husband and wife. Hayagriva was the dominant partner.”³²⁷

Two years later, in September 1970, while preaching with Prabhupada in India, Kirtanananda started a daily program of bathing naked boys (street urchins) at the Calcutta temple. This caused great anxiety to his godbrother Tamal-Krishna Goswami, who tried, without success, to convince Kirtanananda to stop. Prabhupada himself had to personally get involved; he chastised his disciple and ended Kirtanananda’s “bathing program.”³²⁸

When Kirtanananda Swami returned to New Vrindaban after some months of preaching with Prabhupada in India, his homosexual and pedophilic tendencies continued. He personally picked boys from the gurukula to stay with him overnight in his cabin at Bahulaban. This was common knowledge. The *Brijabasi Spirit* explained: “When Maharaja was living in his cabin, it was considered a great privilege to get to stay in the back room. Only a handful of selected boys got the opportunity.”³²⁹

New Vrindaban residents assumed that Kirtanananda gave the boys his personal association and taught them about Krishna consciousness. Little did the naïve Brijabasis understand what really happened to the “handful of selected boys” behind closed doors. One mother of a gurukula boy remembered a revealing conversation she had with her seven-year-old son who exclaimed: “He [Kirtanananda Swami] fondled my genitals!”

I joined in Columbus, on May 1, 1979 when Narada-Muni was temple president. I gave them \$6,000 right off the bat. My seven-year-old son, [D] went directly to Nandagram [gurukula] after spending a week with Bhaktipada at Bahulaban probably during June or July. I stayed in the Columbus Temple until December 1979, when I went to visit my son at the New Vrindaban gurukula.

When I saw him, he proudly exclaimed to me: “Did you know that I had a great honor when I first came here!? Kirtanananda selected me out of all the kids to be his personal servant and live with him for a whole week. Do you know what he did? He fondled my genitals!”

I was shocked with disbelief, as I had never used that word “fondle” in my son’s presence. Where did he learn it? However I dismissed his complaint as a weird manifestation of a child’s fantastic imagination and chastised him: “Don’t make up stories like that! Kirtanananda Maharaja is a pure devotee. I don’t ever want to hear you say nonsense things like that again!” ^{330 331}

The boy’s mother’s quick condemnation of her child’s statement was not unusual; parents often deny a boy’s accusation or admission of sexual abuse by a family member, teacher or church elder. Due to the great emotional investment in the accused, the rational mind cannot comprehend evidence which contradicts a cherished belief, and so the parent or guardian automatically rejects the evidence and chastises their child.

“FOOLISH CONSISTENCY”

Some close associates certainly recognized Bhaktipada’s failing memory and personality change, but most of us, who only rarely had close contact with him, were ignorant of this condition. Yes, we may have noticed time to time that Bhaktipada seemed perhaps a little absent-minded and that he sometimes acted in impulsive ways which appeared bewildering or paradoxical to us. Yet, we still loved him so much that we instinctively followed him submissively like a small child obediently follows a parent, even if the parent might behave inconsistently.

When Bhaktipada was asked, “Can the spiritual master make a mistake?” he responded, “Even the mistake of the spiritual master is perfect. Krishna uses it for his service. Maybe there is some little

mistake sometime. When you look at a very big painting very closely, there may appear to be some ugly parts. But on the whole, it is beautiful.”³³²

Periodically, when Bhaktipada was informed that he had contradicted himself, he quoted the American poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote in his essay, *Self-Reliance*: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” In other words, if we couldn’t understand Bhaktipada, it was because our minds were too small. The guru is always right, even when he’s wrong.³³³

Bhaktipada also liked to quote Walt Whitman, who wrote:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)^{334 335}

Bhaktipada also quoted F. Scott Fitzgerald: “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” Bhaktipada explained, “That’s exactly Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s thought: inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference. They are two opposing concepts held in the mind at the same time. That is Absolute Truth.”³³⁶ When asked why he changed his mind so often, Bhaktipada answered: “If Krishna changes, I change. What can I do?”³³⁷

Devamrita Swami (Jay Matsya), an African-American devotee and a powerful preacher who had worked behind the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe under the direction of his sannyasa guru Harikesh Swami and came to live at New Vrindaban around March or April 1986, confirmed, “Guru changes his mind because Krishna changes his mind.”³³⁸

Bhaktipada told us that Krishna was inconceivable, and because guru was the perfect servant of Krishna, he also was inconceivable. Our duty was simply to surrender to Krishna through guru. Bhaktipada always

hammered home Krishna's conclusion of *Bhagavad-gita*: "Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear." (18.66) We didn't challenge Bhaktipada; after all, Krishna demanded surrender from Arjuna (Krishna's warrior disciple), and Bhaktipada demanded it from us. We were following in Arjuna's footsteps. And besides, our vision had been transformed "with the eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love." ³³⁹ We would do anything to protect our beloved spiritual father, absolutely anything.

CHAPTER 7

The Cast of Characters

ABOUT A DOZEN ISKCON DEVOTEES in West Virginia, Ohio and California (and one non-devotee friend of New Vrindaban) worked sporadically together for six months to permanently silence their avowed enemy, Sulochan, who had threatened violence and promised death to the ISKCON gurus. The principal members in West Virginia and Ohio were Bhaktipada (Keith Gordon Ham), Hayagriva (Howard Wheeler), Tapahpunja Swami (Terry Sheldon), Randall Gorby, Kuladri (Arthur Villa), Tirtha (Thomas A. Drescher), Janmastami (John Sinkowski), Radhanath Swami (Richard Slavin) and Dharmatma (Dennis Gorrick).

In California, the principal players were Ramesvara Swami (Robert Grant) and his security guard disciple, Krishna-Katha (Jeffrey Breier). A few others played supporting roles, such as Devamrita Swami (Jay Matsya), Gaura-Shakti (Gregory Carlson), Sthayibhava (Robert Hamilton), Devananda (Daniel Van Pelt), Mrgendra (Harvey Mechanic), and Kumar (Craig Thompson) in West Virginia, and Yudhisthira (Jeffrey Michael Cornia) and Mahamantra (David Fuller) in California. In this chapter, we will pause the dramatic action to discover more about the backgrounds and personalities of the main characters.

HIS DIVINE GRACE KIRTANANANDA SWAMI BHAKTIPADA

Although Bhaktipada was an integral character in the conspiracy to murder Sulochan (after all, Bryant was murdered to protect him), he tried to remain, for as long as possible, uninvolved in and ignorant of the assassination plot,

which was planned, funded and executed by his lieutenants. After the murder, however, under pressure from Tapahpunja Swami and others, he reluctantly authorized and acquired (in the company of Radhanath Swami) the sum of \$6,000 from Dharmatma for escape money for Tirtha and Tapahpunja to leave the U. S. and flee to India.

Keith Gordon Ham (September 6, 1937-October 24, 2011) was born in Peekskill, New York, a town of 17,000 people about fifty miles north of New York City on the east bank of the Hudson River. He was the fifth child of Reverend Francis Gordon Ham (1903-1979) and Marjorie Grace Clark (1905-1988). During her fifth pregnancy, Keith's grandmother admonished her daughter, "Why another child?" Marjorie Ham is said to have prophesied in reply, "This child is going to be a great preacher."³⁴⁰

Keith's father, Reverend Francis Gordon Ham, was a minister in the Conservative Baptist Church and served as pastor for two congregations in Peekskill. His income was meager and the family learned to be extremely thrifty. As a young boy, Keith imbibed his father's missionary spirit and attempted to convert his childhood friends to the Baptist faith. He had his first "religious experience" at the age of twelve.³⁴¹

Keith's parents sent their son to fundamentalist Christian boarding schools. He began 10th grade at Bob Jones Academy in Greenville, South Carolina, but was sent home after he contracted hepatitis. He continued 10th grade at Stony Brook School in Long Island, but had a relapse of hepatitis. He contracted a severe case of polio during the summer of 1953 and spent months in the hospital.³⁴² The muscles in his legs and abdomen were permanently damaged, and henceforth he had a limp and had to use a cane for ambulation. (At New Vrindaban, years later, sometimes he would strike disobedient or naughty Brijabasis with his walking cane, which was an especially relishable form of "sauce.") He also experienced hernia problems and later developed a pot belly.

Despite his health problems, Keith graduated with honors from Peekskill High School where he excelled in debate and drinking prodigious quantities of beer at parties (kept secret, of course, from his strict

Baptist parents).³⁴³ Keith attended Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee, as a history major and graduated *magna cum laude* (May 20, 1959). In college Keith abandoned the last vestiges of his strict, Baptist upbringing. An unbridgeable rift was created between the nineteen-year-old son and his 53-year-old father when he was caught smoking cigarettes in the college dormitory and his parents were notified.

While pursuing graduate studies in the history of religion at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, Keith met his lifelong lover, friend and partner, Howard Wheeler, an undergraduate English major three years his junior. After that propitious meeting, the lives of the two “wild and crazy guys” (as noted by Keith’s older brother, Francis Gerald Ham)³⁴⁴ were inseparably entwined until Howard’s untimely death from bone cancer nearly thirty years later, in 1989.

HAYAGRIVA

Howard Morton Wheeler III (September 2, 1940–August 31, 1989), was born in Pensacola, Florida; he was an only (and spoiled) child of middle-class Roman Catholic parents. A century earlier the family had been wealthy; they had owned an exquisite mansion and an expansive plantation, but lost nearly all of their properties after the Civil War. Howard’s father, Howard Morton Wheeler II, worked as a newspaper editor; his mother, Edythe, was a youthful and pretty Southern housewife.

At an early age (five years), Howard discovered that he became strangely excited when wrestling with his young playmate. “Bubba is a very poor boy with no toys but a pretty blue-eyed face and long white hair,” Howard recalled in his autobiography. “Bubba and I play and wrestle and when Bubba is over me and leaning against me with his full weight and his breath in my face, I feel an inexplicable delight, a giddiness and dizziness, of butterflies in the stomach and a certain tingling excitation (in the genitals) which I tell to no one, not even Bubba, because for me there are no words to express it and it is unique and awesome. For a

five-year old there are few things that are as awesome as what I feel when near or touching Bubba, and few of them felt to such intensity and fewer indeed whose intensity seems to grow with time as this one does.”³⁴⁵

Although Howard dutifully attended Sunday Mass with his family, he could not accept Roman Catholic dogma. He remembered a traumatic spanking he received from a parish priest:

I can remember a priest visiting my family down in Pensacola, Florida . . . when I was only seven years old and feeling cocky even then to have the guts to ask the old red-faced Irish fart *why* the Catholic Church was the only true church.

We were standing on our front porch—I can see him now, Father Farrell we called him—and after he nearly dropped his teeth he seized me by the ear and said, “*Why?* Boy, you tell *me* why,” and I said, “I don’t know,” and he pulled my ear harder and said, “Because, young Wheeler, Holy Mother Church is . . .” and the bastard started twisting my ear and I squealed, “One, holy, catholic and apostolic, Father,” and he let me go and said, “Exactly.”

And I said, “But what’s keeping other churches from saying the same thing?” and with that he grabbed me and gave me a thrashing right before my mother and every time he whacked my ass with his hand he said, “One, holy, catholic, apostolic,” over and over and when he was done he asked me again why the Catholic Church was the only true church and I said because it’s “One, holy, catholic and apostolic,” and he smiled and left and afterwards when my mother told my father about Father Farrell giving me a beating my father asked why and she said because I doubted the church was one, holy, catholic and apostolic and when my old man said he had his own doubts I could have kissed him.”³⁴⁶

After a few casual sexual experiences with teenagers in high school, Howard decided during his senior year that he could not fully discover himself unless he moved out away from the watchful eyes of his parents. Against his father’s wishes, Howard attended the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill (some 700 miles distant), and began his undergraduate studies in English in 1958. Although Howard was big, strong and masculine, he had a sensitive nature and was prone to emotional hysterics. He was a heavy drinker and often got drunk and rowdy.

In his junior year at UNC, in October 1960, Howard met his lifelong lover and partner, Keith Ham, a graduate history student, at Tanya's, a gay bar in town. Despite his exemplary grades, Howard's studies were prematurely interrupted when he and Keith were involved in a sex scandal and threatened with an investigation.³⁴⁷ Rather than appear before a judicial board, they both resigned from the University on February 3, 1961.³⁴⁸

Howard and Keith moved to New York City, and in July 1962 rented apartment No. 3-A at 274 Mott Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The two brewed homemade beer in their bathtub and later discovered marijuana, peyote and LSD. Both imbibed heavily. They were not monogamous and often had casual sex with other young men, sometimes several acquaintances in one day. For a time, they kept an attractive, homeless seventeen-year-old boy (Jimmy) in their apartment. They provided him food, lodging, beer and marijuana in return for sex.³⁴⁹

Keith enrolled in a doctorate program at Columbia University, but lost his determination to complete his course work and he dropped out. His roommate and partner, Howard, thought he was spending too much time hanging out in public men's rooms at the subway and the university, and he chastised Keith for his uncontrollable and obsessive compulsion for sex.

Howard, on the other hand, was a diligent student and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at The New York School for Social Research in 1963. The next year he received his Master Degree in English from New York University. He accepted a position teaching English at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. At OSU Howard shared an office with Mohan Lal Sharma, an Indian professor who encouraged him, "You must visit India."³⁵⁰ Keith and Howard departed from New York City on the

Indian freighter *Jaladhir* on September 29, 1965, in an attempt to find a guru. Their friend and roommate Wally Sheffey looked after their Mott Street apartment while they were away.³⁵¹

After about two-and-a-half months in India without finding a guru, Keith and Howard returned to New York in January 1966. Howard reflected on his fate, “I had returned from India with practically no money, and though I hadn’t worked for over a year, I wasn’t even interested in looking for a job. I did have a feeling, however, that the *Bhagavad-gita* was a key to a larger consciousness of which I could somehow partake. I desperately wanted a teacher to lead me into a world which I knew existed and which I felt was very near to me, yet somehow could not reach.”³⁵²

Six months later, in July 1966, Howard serendipitously met A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, who had arrived in New York City from Calcutta the previous year, on the corner of Bowery and Houston Streets—only a few hundred feet from his Mott Street apartment—and immediately, along with Keith and Wally, began attending Swamiji’s *Bhagavad-gita* classes. Howard was initiated on the day following Janmastami (September 9, 1966) and became Hayagriva. He served as Swamiji’s editor.

Keith was initiated on Radhastami (September 23rd) and became Kirtanananda. He was a serious student and Swamiji personally taught him how to cook vegetarian Indian dishes. When Swamiji suffered a severe stroke on Memorial Day, May 31, 1967, Kirtanananda became his nurse and traveled with him to India to help Swamiji recover his strength. In Vrindaban, on Janmastami (August 28, 1967), Swamiji initiated Kirtanananda into the sannyasa order. From now on, he would be known as Kirtanananda Swami.

Kirtanananda, however, was afflicted with dysentery, and requested permission from his master to leave India and return to New York. Swamiji told him to go to London and try to start an ISKCON temple there. His homesick and headstrong disciple, however, disobeyed his spiritual master and returned directly to New York, where he announced to his

godbrothers that Swamiji was too ill to return to America and he would probably die in India. But, Kirtanananda said, Swamiji had had the foresight to award his most-advanced student (himself) with sannyasa, so that he could lead the movement in Swamiji's absence. ³⁵³

Kirtanananda cut off his sikha (the tuft of hair at the back of the head which identifies a Vaishnava). He began growing his hair and beard, dressing in a black robe and cape, and preaching that Krishna consciousness was merely one of many ways to approach the Supreme. ³⁵⁴ The New York devotees were bewildered and wrote to Swamiji in India for clarification. In many letters to his disciples Swamiji chastised Kirtanananda like a thunderbolt and declared "Kirtanananda is a crazy man." ³⁵⁵ Brahmananda (Bruce Scharf), the New York temple president, kicked him out of the building and some godbrothers spat on him. ³⁵⁶

Kirtanananda left ISKCON and became inimical to Swamiji. He had stationery printed for an organization he called "First United Church of Krishna—Youth Organization Underground," to send nasty letters to Swamiji and some of his godbrothers. The first letters of each word formed an acronym (FUCK-YOU) which reflected his profane mood toward Swamiji and ISKCON. He took Bhaktivedanta Swami's *Bhagavad-gita* manuscript from Hayagriva, removed his spiritual master's name from the cover, replaced it with his own name, and visited religious book publishers in New York in an attempt to get a publishing contract. When he was unsuccessful he returned the manuscript to Hayagriva.

On Swamiji's recommendation, in September 1967, Hayagriva accepted a position teaching English at Lucerne County Community College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Kirtanananda came to live with him after he was banned from New York ISKCON. Hayagriva taught there for less than a year, however, as he was allegedly fired for chanting Hare Krishna kirtan during his English classes. A few months later, in September 1968, Hayagriva accepted a teaching position again at OSU in Columbus, Ohio.

In March of 1968, Hayagriva and Kirtanananda first visited the Marshall County, West Virginia, wooded hillside property owned by Richard Rose (1917-2005)—a mystic, philosopher, author, poet, and investigator of paranormal phenomena who published a number of books and spoke widely in universities and other venues across the United States during the 1970s and 1980s—which later became New Vrindaban. In July of that year, Kirtanananda and Hayagriva visited Swamiji (now addressed by his disciples by the venerable title “Srila Prabhupada”) in Montreal and begged forgiveness. Prabhupada “forgave his renegade disciples in Montreal with a garland of roses and a shower of tears.”³⁵⁷

As Prabhupada had forgiven and forgotten Kirtanananda Swami and Hayagriva’s offenses, he admonished his other disciples to do the same. His two wayward disciples had returned to the flock; everyone should treat them as respected godbrothers in good standing and offer them obeisances. He wrote to Brahmananda, “Let us forget about our past incidences with Hayagriva and Kirtanananda. Treat Kirtanananda as bona fide and address him as Kirtanananda Maharaja. He should be first offered obeisances and he will return the respect to his godbrothers. . . . Please be brotherly with Hayagriva and Kirtanananda. They have come back with sincerity.”³⁵⁸

Prabhupada consistently praised Kirtanananda Swami and encouraged the New Vrindaban residents to serve him:

“He [Kirtanananda] is educated. He is intelligent. He has studied our philosophy.” (1969)³⁵⁹

“We must all follow in the footsteps of Kirtanananda Maharaja.” (1969)³⁶⁰

“Whatever Kirtanananda Maharaja asks, please help him.” (1970s)³⁶¹

“He [Kirtanananda] is worth ten of you [ISKCON leaders].” (1972)³⁶²

“Kirtanananda, he is a pure devotee.” (c. 1972)³⁶³

“If you want to please me, please serve Kirtanananda.” (1976)³⁶⁴

“Just do what Kirtanananda says.” (1976)³⁶⁵

Hayagriva served as the president of the New Vrindaban community from 1968 until 1972, after which he served no managerial functions. He wrote articles and poems for *Brijabasi Spirit*, edited Bhaktipada's books, and worked on his own books: *The Hare Krishna Explosion—The Birth of Krishna Consciousness in America* (1985), and *Vrindaban Days—Memories of an Indian Holy Town* (published posthumously in 1990). During the mid-1970s, Hayagriva also worked for the BBT editing Prabhupada's books. (His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada passed away in Vrindaban, India, on November 14, 1977.)

Hayagriva was notorious at New Vrindaban for not strictly following the regulative principals. When I was a new devotee, Atmabhu Swami, the president of the temple and brahmachari ashram at the Old Vrindaban Farm, warned me not to associate with him. Kirtanananda described his friend's lack of self-discipline, "Hayagriva, unfortunately, being an only child, was also a spoiled child and never very disciplined. He had great difficulty controlling his senses, and that included staying in New Vrindaban, staying in one place. He used to travel a great deal. He used to, as a matter of habit, spend the summer months in New Vrindaban when it was nice weather-wise, and then he would take off for Mexico or India or other places for the rest of the year."³⁶⁶

Hayagriva liked to party with the young, homosexual, dark-skinned Mexican men whom he recruited as cheap, illegal laborers for New Vrindaban. He even boasted to his friends about his homosexual adventures. Sometimes Hayagriva brought his Mexican lovers to Randall Gorby's home in Bethany, West Virginia, where they spent nights sporting and partying together in Gorby's backyard guest house. Hayagriva called a few of his Mexican boys his "Treasure of the Sierra Madre." Gorby spoke about his friend's escapades before the Grand Jury.

- Q. Did Mr. Wheeler state to you that he engaged in sex with any one or more of these Mexicans?

- A. Yes, he did. In fact, he was rather proud of it. He referred to a couple of them as his “Treasure of the Sierra Madre” when he brought them [to my guest house].³⁶⁷

On September 2, 1979, Prabhupada’s Palace of Gold—a memorial shrine for the Founder/Acharya of ISKCON featuring floors and walls made from fifty-two varieties of polished marble and onyx, hand-made stained-glass windows and chandeliers, and decorated with hundreds of square feet of 22-karat gold leaf—was dedicated, propelling New Vrindaban into a prominent position in the national and international media, and ushering in a seven-year “Golden Age” of New Vrindaban. Many ISKCON devotees, attracted by the big preaching, moved to the community. May 31, 1985 was the Sila-Ropana cornerstone-laying ceremony for the proposed great Temple of Understanding; it was attended by local mayors, police chiefs, West Virginia State Representatives and a United States Congressman from West Virginia, Alan B. Mollohan. New Vrindaban was finally, after nearly two decades, becoming accepted by mainstream society and media.

As a member of the murder conspiracy, Hayagriva continually expressed his concern that Sulochan should be “silenced once and for all.” He served as a spokesman for Bhaktipada (who refused to get personally involved) and he networked with Kuladri, Gorby and Tirtha to convince them of the importance of “doing the deed.” Hayagriva also hosted high-level management meetings at his house to discuss surveillance, to promote Tirtha as the hit man, and to brainstorm sources of funding for Tirtha’s traveling expenses.

TAPAHUNJA SWAMI

One of the founding members of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan was Tapahpunja Swami (Terry Ray Sheldon) (b. November 2, 1948). He was a lover of gardening, a former New Vrindaban men’s sankirtan leader, and (after he took sannyasa from Bhaktipada in 1983) the president of the

Cleveland ISKCON temple at 15720 Euclid Avenue in East Cleveland, Ohio. One of his noticeable physical characteristics was a deformed right foot; I thought it was a club foot. It caused him to limp when he walked.

Terry was the son of atheist labor-union organizers and he grew up in a “poor, working-class Detroit neighborhood.”³⁶⁸ Tapahpunja summarized his life before becoming a devotee:

As a young boy, I had no religious training. None whatsoever. By religious training, I mean no one dragged me from bed on Sunday morning, gagging me with a suit and tie, and forced me to go to church, as was the case with all my Catholic neighbors. . . . [My parents] poo-pooed religion as pie in the sky, “The opiate of the masses and brainwashing.” . . . So instead of hearing about Luke and Matthew, I was absorbed in hearing about revolutionaries, picket lines and layoffs. . . . I was encouraged to “think for yourself and be an individual.” . . .

After high school came college—fertile ground for the brewing anti-war movement, which I embraced wholeheartedly. I devoted full time to lecturing, writing and agitating in general. . . . By day there was speaking and rock throwing, and by night intoxication and women. . . . I naturally migrated to where this lifestyle was vigorously thriving, i.e., the Haight-Ashbury. . . . In such an environment I met Lord Krishna’s devotees. . . . We mostly ignored them. . . . I considered them charitable but pesky. . . . I signed off Krishna Consciousness as a cult of tricksters. . . .

We [the anti-Vietnam war agitators] wanted a quick revolution. Win and enjoy! We had our youthful passion, but they [the Establishment] had all the guns. A life of court cases and jail sentences seemed like a lot to pay for “the good of the people.” . . . I was miserably frustrated and paranoid. . . . So after a last stint in jail, I left the city armed with books on self-realization, mysticism, astrology and gardening. I headed for the hills to find out who I really was, and what was my goal in life. . . .³⁶⁹

Tapahpunja once told me that during this time in his life he dug out a tunnel in the ground in a secluded place in a Michigan National Forest and lived in the hole like a hippie hobbit. He continued:

In several years of roving around, and after some close calls with death and imprisonment, . . . I began to pray for some direction. . . . Krishna very kindly sent me a devotee who patiently sat with me by the fireside [at my hobbit hole in the Michigan National Forest] and explained Krishna Conscious philosophy. . . . His words bathed my tired mind. We lived together in the forest for several weeks and he induced me to chant. I felt so relaxed and satisfied in his company. . . . “You should go to New Vrindaban and grow vegetables for Krishna!” he exclaimed.⁵⁷⁰

Terry joined ISKCON at the Detroit temple, and after a few months, he moved to New Vrindaban. He was initiated in October 1974. He admired Kirtanananda Swami and developed a strong emotional attachment for his siksa guru. For a few years he served Bhaktipada in Buffalo, New York and Columbus, Ohio. (Both were New Vrindaban satellite centers). Tapahpunja exhibited his leadership abilities by becoming an expert sankirtan “picker” and party leader, renowned for his ability to avoid detection by the police. He also served as the men’s sankirtan leader (1979-1980). Some affectionately called him “Mr. Scam-Kirtan.”⁵⁷¹

Tapahpunja was dedicated to Bhaktipada’s mission and he believed New Vrindaban would become the saving grace of civilization when World War III, which Prabhupada predicted, would destroy human society as we know it. During such a nuclear winter, the government would break down and anarchy would prevail. In such a catastrophic scenario, he believed, hundreds of thousands of displaced people would take shelter at ISKCON farm communities, such as New Vrindaban, where the economy was (in theory, at least) based on land and cows.

I remember traveling with Tapahpunja in Louisville, Kentucky, on sankirtan. Every day Tapahpunja studied the Rand McNally road atlas to note our position in relation to the Ohio River. “In the event of a nuclear

war,” Tapahpunja told me, “the best way to get back to New Vrindaban would be to follow the Ohio River upstream to Moundsville, and then cut across country by foot.” Tapahpunja was intelligent and personable. Dharmatma remembered him, “He was very innovative. He was quite intelligent in regards to putting things together.”³⁷²

After Bhaktipada awarded him sannyasa in 1983, Tapahpunja was sent to Cleveland ISKCON to serve as the temple president. He established a Food For Life prasadam distribution program which was so successful that the Cleveland City Council awarded him grant money to fund the program. One devotee from the Cleveland suburb of Euclid, Mother Draupadi (Bernadette Hodas), remembered Tapahpunja, “He conducted the [temple] programs. He worked outside a lot. He was very busy. He was always busy. . . . [Regarding Tapahpunja’s character and honesty: it was] the highest. He was very, very good to us. He was very sincere. He treated us with a lot of respect.”³⁷³

Tapahpunja assisted in the murder by offering to help organize security meetings (October, November and December, 1985), networking with and attempting to recruit California ksatriyas to his cause (January 1986), as well as helping to coordinate the New Vrindaban surveillance teams in Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia (February). He also delivered funds to Tirtha for surveillance expenses. Later, after the murder in May, Tapahpunja helped secure several thousand dollars so that he, and Tirtha and his family, could purchase airline tickets, leave the United States, and hide from United States law enforcement agents in India.

KULADRI

Kuladri (Arthur John Villa, Jr.) (b. February 8, 1949) was an extremely important manager at New Vrindaban known as “Number Two,” as only Bhaktipada—“Number One”—outranked him. In 1970, Bhakta Arthur had come to New Vrindaban from a wealthy, “affluent Roman-Catholic family” in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.³⁷⁴ Arthur was intelligent, educated,

artistic, handsome, energetic, and persuasive with most people. He had a scholarship to major in mathematics at the University of Pittsburgh, but quit after two years to join the Krishnas. He explained, "I attended a private boys' school in Pittsburgh [Shady Side Academy] and went on to the University of Pittsburgh where I attended two full years of college."³⁷⁵

Arthur met the New Vrindaban devotees during his sophomore year of college. He explained, "I was attending the University of Pittsburgh and the [ISKCON] members who were from West Virginia were preaching and doing their chanting on campus, and I was approached and spoke to members and subsequently became involved. . . . In 1970 there were devotees from New Vrindaban, West Virginia, who had opened what they called a preaching center in Pittsburgh so that they could preach in the Pittsburgh area. I spent a short time there and then almost immediately moved to New Vrindaban, West Virginia. . . . In 1970 when I first became involved, Kirtanananda Swami was in India. . . . [He] was temporarily with Prabhupada [preaching] in India and would return soon."³⁷⁶ Arthur remembered his first days in ISKCON:

I joined [ISKCON] in Pittsburgh at the old Penn Avenue and Negley temple. New Vrindaban used to do sankirtan [Hari-Nam] at the University of Pittsburgh. At that time there were several devotees, and many alternated between Pittsburgh and New Vrindaban. . . . They brought me to New Vrindaban and I took care of cows and fences. I recall going with Bhagavananda [Joseph Cappelletti] to get hay from Mr. Schaffer [one of our non-devotee neighbors].

At that time [at the Old Vrindaban farm] there was Hayagriva's A-Frame and about four other cabins. . . . Kirtanananda Maharaja stayed in the attic, and when warm weather came he had me build a lean-to on the hillside for us to stay in. I got my clothes from the bin in the barn. I would fall into bed at 8:30 exhausted. There was no basement. We took a sponge bath in the cabin or froze in the barn. We used to eat heavy bread, milk and sweets. It was a big struggle getting up and down the road. The car would get stuck in the mud.³⁷⁷

Randall Gorby, who had been friends with Kirtanananda and Hayagriva since 1968, knew Arthur from the beginning, “I remember him when he first came [to New Vrindaban]. . . . He was an extremely bright, young man; well educated.”³⁷⁸

Arthur’s sudden conversion to Krishna consciousness was extremely difficult for his teenage live-in girlfriend and fiancée, Linda Stephens Ridall—the daughter of a wealthy Pittsburgh lawyer—who had studied painting at Washington University. Linda, about two-and-a-half years younger than Arthur, was not favorably inclined toward the Krishnas. She said, “I thought they were a bunch of weirdos. I used to walk on the other side of the street so they wouldn’t ask me for money.”³⁷⁹

A New Castle, Pennsylvania, newspaper reporter interviewed Linda and wrote about her initial rejection of Krishna consciousness, and her own rather sudden conversion eight months later: “She and Arthur were living together when ‘all of a sudden, he called me on the phone and told me to come to the temple. He was all shaved up. I didn’t even recognize him. Everything was all mixed up.’ In an attempt to forget about Arthur and the Krishnas, she took off for Mexico for eight months. She lived in ‘ideal circumstances’ next to a waterfall and spent the time painting. ‘But it stayed with me,’ Linda said. ‘Every time I ate meat or had sex, I heard a voice saying it was wrong. I drove for four straight days and ended up back here [at New Vrindaban].’”³⁸⁰

For a beautiful, educated, artistic, cultured and sensitive girl who had been accustomed to a life of comfort—hair shampoo and conditioner, skin lotion, a soft bed with pillows, clothes that fit, hot water from the tap, indoor flush toilets, air conditioners in summer, a reliable furnace in winter, medical and dental insurance, concrete sidewalks, private schools and country clubs—the life of poverty at New Vrindaban must have been very difficult to bear. Linda explained, “I had never seen anything like this [the poverty at New Vrindaban]. I’m from . . . [an upper]-class background.³⁸¹ I was used to country clubs.”³⁸²

But she tolerated the austerities, it seems, because she loved her fiancé, and also perhaps because she might have begun to develop a taste for Krishna consciousness. Amongst all the women at New Vrindaban, she was universally recognized by the Brijabasis as a model wife and mother. The young couple accepted Srila Prabhupada as their spiritual master. Arthur became Kuladri and Linda became Kutila during a fire sacrifice at New Vrindaban in 1971. ³⁸³

On Saturday, February 10, 1973, after about two years living as a renounced brahmachari and brahmacharini, Kuladri and Kutila were married in the chapel of the historic Shadyside Presbyterian Church (where Kutila's parents had been married twenty-six years earlier) ³⁸⁴ in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The church ceremony was followed by a reception in the Amberson Avenue home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Wainwright Ridall, Jr.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported on the gala event, "The bride [Kutila] wore an Ivory organza wedding gown, embroidered with Alençon lace and seed pearls. Her veil was attached to a wide band of rosepoint lace which had been worn by her mother. Kathryn Jane Ridall was her sister's maid of honor. Mr. Villa, the son of Mrs. Arthur J. Villa of Pittsburgh and the late Mr. Villa, asked David Thomas Villa to be best man. Edmund W. Ridall III and Dean Villa ushered. The bride was graduated from the Ellis School [an independent, all-girls, college-preparatory school located in the Shadyside neighborhood of Pittsburgh] and attended Washington University. Mr. Villa, a graduate of Shady Side Academy, attended the University of Pittsburgh." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article mentioned nothing about the Hare Krishnas or New Vrindaban. ³⁸⁵

This wedding was unusually extravagant for ISKCON devotees at that time. At New Vrindaban, most couples were married in a brief and simple ceremony conducted by a brahmin during which the bride and groom exchanged flowers. That was it. Five minutes maximum. Apparently, Mr. and Mrs. Ridall convinced their daughter and future son-in-law to come

to Pittsburgh for the church ceremony and reception for the pleasure of their parents and family members.

Kuladri had six children with his wife, plus at least one illegitimate offspring. During the summer of 1986, an attractive, unmarried, dark-skinned, teenage Indian girl with a slender waist, [S] from Bombay, less than half of Kuladri's age, visited New Vrindaban and fell for his charms. When she discovered she was pregnant, she was promptly shipped back to India.³⁸⁶ A few Brijabasis, such as Sulochan, who were knowledgeable of some of Kuladri's adulterous relationships, considered him a "playboy."

Despite his occasional dalliances with members of the opposite sex, Kuladri served notably as New Vrindaban's temple president from 1976 to 1986. He personally served Srila Prabhupada during his visits to New Vrindaban in 1972, 1974 and 1976, and also in India. During August 1974, Kuladri traveled to India to order a *sringasana* (throne) for the presiding deities of New Vrindaban, Radha-Vrindaban Chandra, and spent some time with his spiritual master. During this visit, Prabhupada became extremely ill, and Kuladri would "sleep at the foot of Prabhupada's bed every night," and "massage him for hours."³⁸⁷ Three years later, while Prabhupada was reading the latest issue (June 1977) of the New Vrindaban periodical, *Brijabasi Spirit*, he admired the cover photograph of Kuladri conducting a fire sacrifice at New Vrindaban, and remarked to his secretary, "Just see his face, how devotee he is, so expert in everything."³⁸⁸

Kuladri later explained how Srila Prabhupada encouraged him to serve Kirtanananda Maharaja, "When Prabhupada took me into his service, he encouraged me to serve Kirtanananda Swami. I used to spend literally every minute of the day with Maharaja. For the first three years I was in the movement I was constantly with him. I could see that he was always dedicated to serving Prabhupada. I never saw him spend any time, money or energy on himself, but he was always trying to do something for Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada always used to tell me that whatever Kirtanananda Maharaja does, I should try to assist him. He said, 'Please follow my instructions and go on

developing New Vrindaban to your heart's content. And whatever Kirtanananda Maharaja asks, please help him.”³⁸⁹

While it seemed to me most Brijabasis approved of Kuladri's leadership, some residents, on the other hand, derided him as “Cruel-adri” because of his tendency to take (for Krishna, allegedly) without giving back. Once in the early 1980s, I was hanging out in Kuladri's office at Bahulaban during a monthly three-day sankirtan festival, while he talked extensively with a California householder godbrother on the phone. The householder wanted to move to New Vrindaban with his family, and asked about accommodations. On the phone, Kuladri was extremely accommodating, I thought.

However, as soon as he hung up, he briskly rubbed his palms together and his face lit up with a mischievous grin. He laughed and told me, “That's the New Vrindaban Okey-Dokey: promise them everything; but when they get here, give them nothing!” I understood this to mean, “Promise them all facility, but when they finally arrive with the moving truck and wife and kids in tow; give them a leaky-roofed, cockroach-infested, ramshackle shack without heat or running water.” New Vrindaban was, after all, known throughout ISKCON for its austerity.

Kuladri's involvement in the conspiracy was mostly in administrative capacities. In January, he secured funding for Tapahpunja's trip to California; early in February Kuladri approached Sheriff Bordenkircher and worked in tandem with the Marshall County Sheriff Department; he helped organize the five-day 24-hour surveillance of Sulochan in St. Clairsville and Washington Lands; he met with Magistrate David Buzzard to secure a warrant for Sulochan's arrest; he met with Chief Deputy Hummel to examine Sulochan's diary and address book and requested Gaura-Shakti to go through Sulochan's archive and record important information with his Dictaphone; he worked with Garga-Rsi in writing the article—“Demon Discredited”—for the *New Vrindaban News*; he telephoned senior ISKCON officials in California and informed them of the two New Vrindaban hit men in their zone in an attempt to secure

their promises of cooperation for the protection of the ISKCON gurus and the greater good of the Society; he preached to Tirtha to continue his quest when Tirtha's determination began to falter; and he secured a payment of \$2,500 for Tirtha only a few hours after Bhaktipada had refused to authorize the payment.

RANDALL GORBY

Russell Clark "Randolph" Gorby (1922-1990) was a retired steel worker for the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Company. He lived in Bethany, West Virginia, a small town (population 1,200) in Brooke County about an hour's drive north from New Vrindaban. One source claimed, "Gorby worked for thirty-three years for Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel before retiring in 1982. A genuine blue-collar intellectual who had often lectured at Bethany College, a small liberal-arts school in his home town, Gorby was a socialist and a labor activist who reflexively sided with the underdog. He also had an abiding interest in Eastern religions, which dated from World War II, when he was stationed in India, Burma, and China for two and one-half years. In India, Gorby became friendly with several brahmins, who taught him the rudiments of Hinduism. He'd kept studying on his own." ³⁹⁰

Gorby had been friendly with Kirtanananda and Hayagriva since the summer of 1968. He honestly didn't think Ham and Wheeler and their handful of New York City urbanite friends would survive their first West Virginia winter. Randall Gorby remembered:

I started hearing that there was a group of yellow-robed hippies moved in on Limestone Ridge . . . and my curiosity was immediately aroused, and I went down on a weekend, stopped and introduced myself, and it so happened that I met one of the founders of that community, Howard Wheeler. We started talking, and I was intrigued by his background in literature, his background in theology, his total background at that time.

They were living under pretty rough West Virginia conditions, and I didn't think that they would survive the first winter. They were not native West Virginians, they come out of New York, the overwhelming majority of them, and I was positive when the first West Virginia winter was over the camp would not be there. But they started building and, low and behold, they did survive the first winter [1968-1969], and they increased their number probably from the original five or six that came in to approximately thirty up to the spring and fall [of 1969]. . . .

At that time they [said they] were going to develop an agricultural community and they would use no modern facilities. They would use no electricity, no motorized equipment. They were going to revert back to the [ancient] Indian, if you would, way of life; the structure of an Indian [rural village] community. They were going to use bullocks for plowing. They were going to raise their own food and subsist from the land.³⁹¹

Randall Gorby appeared to be a good judge of character, and accurately assessed the temperaments of the two co-founders of New Vrindaban. A Grand Jury interviewer noted, "Gorby described Wheeler as being on a self-gratification trip and Keith Ham as being on an ego trip."³⁹²

Gorby came to New Vrindaban's aid by negotiating with local farmers and purchasing land in his name and then secretly turning over the deeds to the community. Gorby said, "Around 1973, Hayagriva called me at home and asked if I would come down and talk to him and the Swami, and they were having trouble purchasing land from the local people, and they asked me if I would purchase a piece of land for them."³⁹³

Gorby wanted to help the devotees. He explained, "At that time, I felt . . . that they were being a little unjustly treated by the people around there. I knew the property was for sale and some of the people would not sell the property directly to them."³⁹⁴ Gorby explained in more detail:

They had a farm that they discovered was for sale, but Mr. Petit refused to sell directly to the Krishnas. At that time my relationship with the community was one of support, and I received a call at my home from I believe Howard Wheeler, asking me if I would come down and talk to the Swami and others on the Board of Directors, and at that time they asked me if I would purchase the farm for them, and I agreed to do that. Approximately 96 acres, between 96 and 106 acres. It was hilltop, West Virginia hilltop land, had a barn on it, one house structure, and not too much of it was tillable land. . . . the rest was fairly steep wooded areas going down into the hollows and so on.

I went to Mr. Petit and asked if the property was for sale, and he told me that it was, and I asked him the price that he was asking for it, and . . . he did mention ninety thousand dollars, and he went to a hundred and fifteen thousand, and I told him (they had said to go as high as one-fifty to two hundred thousand), and I told Mr. Petit that I would be more than willing to pay the top figure of a hundred and fifteen thousand, and he was perfectly agreeable with that, so I initiated an option to buy. Once the option to buy was recorded, then I turned over the purchase to the Krishnas themselves.³⁹⁵

When Tirtha was banished from living at New Vrindaban in 1983, Gorby let him live in his guest house for a time. The two had a “father and son” relationship. Unfortunately, in the mid-1980s, Gorby had a major fallout with New Vrindaban. He discovered that a high-ranking community manager had a scandalous sexual affair with his daughter-in-law, and he also felt he had been cheated out of \$1,500 in a business deal by Palace Press. It appears that late in 1985 or early in 1986 he began working with the West Virginia State Police as an informant. As a member of the murder conspiracy, Gorby preached that the devotees had to protect the Swami at any cost, and he offered, at times, advice on technical matters. He was also involved in the surveillance of Sulochan in Ohio, West Virginia, and Michigan. One of the New Vrindaban hit men noted, “Gorby was more fired up to destroy Sulochan than any of the devotees.”³⁹⁶

TIRTHA

Tirtha (Thomas A. Drescher) (b. November 10, 1948) was a tough guy and most people recognized that aspect of his character. He had a stubborn personality, and he liked to fight. He stood six feet tall and weighed 190 lbs.—mostly muscle acquired from vigorous daily weight-lifting and running. As a child, Tom was orphaned and adopted by a family in Buffalo, New York. His stepfather was abusive and sometimes beat the boy up, and his mentally-ill stepmother was unable to protect her adopted son; she died in an insane asylum when Tom was still young.

Tom's police record began at the tender age of eleven. Sergeant Thomas Westfall, a deputy in the Marshall County Sheriff Department, remembered, "I ran a criminal background check on him and was absolutely startled: he had an extensive criminal background and a lot of it was violent crime."³⁹⁷ Drescher had been arrested eleven times since 1959 and served time in prison for at least one offense.

1959, December 8: Trespassing and Malicious Mischief (Buffalo, New York)

1965, July 6: Robbery, First Degree, 3 Counts, Grand Larceny, First Degree, 1 Count (Amherst, New York)

1966, September 15: Petite Larceny (Amherst, New York)

1966, November 17: Public Intoxication (Amherst, New York)

1969, April 25: Assault, Third Degree (Buffalo, New York)

1969, July 22: Theft by False Pretext (Temple, Texas)

1971, November 18: Possession of Drugs (Pompano Beach, Florida)

1976, August 31: Unlawful Possession of Noxious Materials (Buffalo, New York)

1977, August 16: Unlawful use of Fireworks (Buffalo, New York)

1979, December 9: Manufacture and Conspiracy to Manufacture Methaqualone (Cincinnati, Ohio).

1979, December 10: Trafficking in Marijuana (Columbus, Ohio)³⁹⁸

After Tom graduated from high school, he was inducted at the age of nineteen into the United States Army on October 26, 1967.³⁹⁹ He fought

in Vietnam as a member of the 101st Airborne Division, where he participated in seven major campaigns. Tom's attorney, Robert H. McWilliams, noted his client's service for his country, "He received the United States Combat Infantry Badge award for sustained combat. He received the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Bronze Star and Oak Leaf Cluster. The Oak Leaf Cluster would indicate that the medals awarded were for two or more occasions. He received the United States Bronze Star for Bravery in combat. He received the United States Air Medal for repeated combat air assault. He received the U. S. Purple Heart for wounds sustained in combat. He received the National Defense Service medal as well as other commendations." 400

Tom received an honorable discharge on September 23, 1969, after serving for one year, ten months and 28 days. A few years later, he met the Hare Krishna devotees in Buffalo and felt attracted to them. He explained, "As I recall it was around 1972 when I first became aware of the Hare Krishnas. I'd see them chanting and swaying from side-to-side on the sidewalk in front of the big Grants store in downtown Buffalo, New York, while on my way to the main public library. At the time, I took them to be Buddhists, with whom I had become acquainted a few years earlier while in Vietnam. In looking back, I seemed to admire most anything nonconformist. Their colorful robes and rhythmic chanting and dancing were a far departure from the usual drab downtown scene. So when I saw them I couldn't help admiring their free, bold style." 401

Tom visited the Toronto temple when Prabhupada came to Canada in August 1975, and was recruited to be one of Prabhupada's bodyguards. He explained:

I had seen Srila Prabhupada for the first time in Toronto, Canada, at what was then the Gerard Street Temple. When I arrived there I was met by throngs of devotees and well-wishers, all gathered there to take darshan of Srila Prabhupada. Since there were so many people it was quite impossible to even get close to the temple room. So while I was standing outside near the front door of the temple

a group of devotees headed by Uttamasloka [Ronald Marinelli] approached me. After a quick visual check, Uttamasloka said, “This guy’s pretty beefy. Let’s get him.”

Without further ado that marked the formality of my being chosen as an usher, mainly to keep people from crushing in on Srila Prabhupada as he walked from his room and down the hall into the temple room to greet the Deities and give class. . . . Looking me dead in the eye, Uttamasloka told me, “Whatever you do, don’t let anyone block Prabhupada’s path. If someone tries to get in front of him just throw them out of the way.”⁴⁰²

Tom liked the Krishna devotees; he felt a bond with them. He came to visit New Vrindaban a few times (once he pedaled his bicycle from Buffalo to New Vrindaban—a 275-mile four-day trip). During a fire sacrifice in Columbus, Ohio, on Rama Navami (Sunday, April 16, 1978)—the Appearance Day of Lord Ramachandra—Tom received first initiation from Kirtanananda Swami and the name Tirtha dasa (“the servant of the Holy Place of Pilgrimage,” i.e., “the servant of New Vrindaban”).

Parambrahma (Paul Ferry; P. B.), who served in management at the Buffalo ISKCON temple, claimed he first met Tirtha in 1977. Parambrahma said that Tirtha had interest in martial arts, knives, guns and artillery. He read *Gun Magazine* and *Soldier of Fortune*. He bragged about killing in the course of duty. Parambrahma said he “came on as a pretty rough customer.”⁴⁰³ P. B. continued, “Murder met his personality.” He said Tirtha told him “that he had suffered psychological problems in Vietnam” and “that he couldn’t tell good killing from bad killing.” P. B. claimed that Tirtha “was always fighting with someone and had always been in trouble with the law.”⁴⁰⁴

Tirtha had a violent streak in him. Janmastami remembered, “Tirtha used to beat the shit out of Jayadeva [his stepson] for nothing at all. When he ran the [New Vrindaban general] store, before Ma Meg [mother Meghamala/Maureen Brose] got it, he built a cattle pen [play pen] for him in the middle of the store and I saw Tom knock that

poor boy across that space like it was a boxing ring. One of the many reasons Tom and I never got along.”⁴⁰⁵

Radhanath Swami recalled, “Tirtha was a fringie and was not well thought of at New Vrindaban.”⁴⁰⁶ Bhaktipada remembered, “Mr. Drescher came and left, but he was in the category of the persons who were attracted by the philosophy, but lacked the ability to follow the principles strictly.”⁴⁰⁷ Tirtha became known to some as a snitch. One Brijabasi claimed that Tirtha reported to Bhaktipada transgressions made by other members of the fringe community. Tapahpunja recalled:

Drescher’s most vehement enemies were the other fringe devotees at New Vrindaban, because he, more than anyone else, looked out for Bhaktipada’s interest. He had more love for Bhaktipada than they did. Also, he had a stronger desire to rectify his failings. He didn’t want to be part of the community of fringies. He never took it lightly that he wasn’t able to follow the vows with strictness. . . .

When a fringie goes into town and buys beer or dope, or goes to a movie, in the eyes of other citizens, he is a Hare Krishna. They don’t make distinctions. They see him as a Hare Krishna. The fringies were noticeable because they were not local hillbillies. Tirtha would get feedback on that, as in the case of Saint-Denis [Chakradhari, known as the “King of the Fringies”]. Saint-Denis was dealing large amounts of cocaine. He was a fringie but he was polluting other devotees. He could pollute other devotees who were weak. So, because Drescher lived in that community, he felt it was his duty to inform Bhaktipada of what was going on. And the fringies hated him for that because he was blowing their cover.”⁴⁰⁸

Others, however, liked Tirtha. Mahabuddhi dasa (Donald Ferry), Parambrahma’s brother, who once drove a truck with Tirtha to Mexico to pick up laborers whom Hayagriva had selected to come to New Vrindaban, remarked, “He was a funny guy.”⁴⁰⁹ Tapahpunja Swami also was friendly with Tirtha, and recalled:

I was a friend of his. We had a camaraderie. We were in Buffalo together. We were in Columbus together. . . . I was also from a working class, poor neighborhood, only in Detroit, not Buffalo. He kind of reminded me of someone who was from the school of hard knocks, to say the least.

One of our ways of worshiping was to go into public and chant. And Buffalo was a violent atmosphere. Drescher would perform the service of standing and protecting us while we chanted. It was necessary. Bikers and crazy fraternity guys, anyone looking for an outlet for their craziness would take it out on us. And he would protect us. His spiritual prowess wasn't polished, but we appreciated how he was protective and fatherly. . . .

I never saw him go out of his way to make trouble for other people. Sometimes he had a whimsical nature, like a practical joker, but never to hurt, never vindictive, just to have a little fun. ⁴¹⁰

TIRTHA INCARCERATED FOR MANUFACTURE OF METHAQUALONE

In 1979, in Columbus, Ohio, Tirtha set up a laboratory, with the help of a devotee chemist and New Vrindaban funding, ⁴¹¹ to manufacture methaqualone (a sedative and hypnotic agent commonly known as Quaalude). This was, however, not the first illegal recreational drug business established by New Vrindaban devotees. From approximately 1977 to 1980, Adwaitacharya dasa (Emil "Eddie" Sofsky/John Jenkins), a long-time New Vrindaban resident (who had also "introduced" my New Zealander godsister into Krishna consciousness at the 1980 West Virginia Rainbow Gathering), had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars (if not more) ⁴¹² in cash for Palace construction through his illegal recreational drug enterprise with headquarters in New York City.

Devotee "mules" traveled to India, Afghanistan and Thailand and returned with hashish oil and other drugs stashed in secret suitcase and golf club bag compartments. The business was highly-profitable for a few years, but when law enforcement agents got too close for comfort, Adwaita

shut down his operation and went into hiding. Perhaps, some thought, Tirtha could follow in the footsteps of Adwaita and continue providing New Vrindaban with much-needed funding for construction projects.

Tirtha confirmed, “Adwaita went to New York City with his [Kirtanananda’s] tacit approval to deal drugs, setting up a hash oil network that spanned from Afghanistan to New York City to Los Angeles. Over a period of a few years he gave K. hundreds of thousands of dollars in illicit drug money.”⁴¹³

However, before Tirtha’s laboratory had begun to manufacture meth-aqualone, he was arrested and convicted for “manufacturing and distributing” the illegal drug when his godbrother, the chemist, got cold feet and reported the operation to law enforcement authorities. In court, the chemist received a slap on the wrist, but Tirtha was sentenced to two years and eight months in a federal penitentiary in Ohio.⁴¹⁴ He served fifteen months and was released on probation. After the big bust in Columbus, Bhaktipada began promoting “picking”—panhandling at sporting events, concerts and shopping malls, sometimes known as “Scam-Kirtan”—as the next major source of income for the community.

Tirtha’s wife from Buffalo, Purvacitti (Patty) worked at the Columbus ISKCON “Simply Wonderful” vegetarian restaurant. Thrice a week, she visited her husband at the Ohio penitentiary and assisted him by serving as his secretary. In a letter to her friend Gadai dasa (David Sherk) in Buffalo (who had asked her to marry him), she explained some of the great difficulties Tirtha had in prison, her desire to serve him and go back to Godhead with him, her emotional attachment to her husband, her “No, but thanks,” rejection of Gadai’s marriage proposal, and Bhaktipada’s promise: “If Tirtha takes the whole thing and no other boys get caught, then he’ll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime.”

I work seven nights a week at Simply Wonderful from 5 p.m. until *mangala-aroti*, along with Mother Rasa-Lila [Rose Marie Rader, the wife of the Columbus temple president Narada-Muni], and a young boy

named Carlos. Our accountant Rsabhadeva dasa [Severino Pelino: the devotee chemist mentioned earlier] (new initiate of Bhaktipada's), has given me a monthly allowance covering rent, medical, meals (barely), local bus pass, and \$10 a month to chisel down my running debt with my father. . . .

As for Tirtha prabhu's diet, it's very important. He's facing *years*, not weeks in there. He's lost 25 lbs. already. He's sometimes incoherent. He fell and cut his mouth due to weakness. He ate nothing at all for a week, and as far as breakfast goes, he only gets cereal and milk twice weekly—the other days it's coffee and doughnuts or eggs. The guards are so very demoniac, especially on Tirtha's floor, for they are the felons (two of the men in his cellblock just got another 25 years apiece—armed robbery).

I've been doing my service [at the restaurant] by night and hustling around for Tirtha by day—[meeting with or writing to] the Federal Judge, U. S. Marshals, FBI, U. S. Attorney, Attorneys, Channel Ten News, ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], etc., etc. Then there's hearings, arraignments and trials. Medical releases, SS [Social Security] money. Threatening phone calls. Krishna help me.

Srila Bhaktipada said if Tirtha takes the whole thing and no other boys get caught, then he'll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime. Perhaps I can serve his feet and go back too.

Right now he needs my help in getting things squared away, plus my letters and visits. No one else goes, so I see him three times a week for fifteen minutes each time, through a little glass window. It's sickening, but it's just what he needed to sober up and behave like a Vaishnava. He has been reading a lot and preaching—there are three *Gitas* amongst the twelve men and now three more men are asking for them. . . . He writes me daily (21 letters to date) and he has become more and more aware of his real position and his relationship with his spiritual master.

There is a lot of talk of remarriage around here, as women are at a premium. Thanks, but no. I'm still way to emotionally absorbed in Tirtha to make some other commitment. My service keeps me busy,

too busy to even think of a grha [family] scene. Sure my mind is very lusty and flirtatious by nature, but simply due to exhaustion I'm kept under control. If it were possible to get six hours rest out of every 24, I'd do it.⁴¹⁵

Eventually Purvacitti left Tirtha; she moved to Philadelphia and married another devotee.⁴¹⁶ When Tirtha was released from prison, he came to live at New Vrindaban and married Suksmarupini devi dasi (Suzanne Bludeau) in 1981. She had a young son (Jayadeva) by another man, Jitendriya (Patrick Manning), who had served as New Vrindaban's treasurer from 1978 until he left the community around 1980. Tirtha had a son (Tapas) with Suksmarupini.

NEW VRINDABAN'S CHIEF ENFORCER

At New Vrindaban, Tirtha performed two services: during the day he served as the community's bus driver, but after hours he served as New Vrindaban's chief enforcer. Tirtha had earned Bhaktipada's trust; he had proven his loyalty by going to prison; taking the whole rap himself and protecting the other devotees (and the community) who helped him set up and provide funding for the Columbus methaqualone laboratory. Bhaktipada, like any Mafia Don or gang leader, appreciated and rewarded loyalty from his henchmen, but loyalty cannot be proven until a henchman goes to trial and prison, and refuses to snitch on his accomplices without implicating the gang (or community, in this case) in wrongdoing. Tirtha had demonstrated his allegiance; he honored the name given to him by Bhaktipada: Tirtha dasa—"the servant of the Holy Place of Pilgrimage." Now he could be trusted with greater responsibilities.

Tirtha admitted, "I was, among other things . . . a bus driver. We had a shuttle bus—because it's a big community; spans over a large area—and I drove the shuttle bus. I was also the night watchman, the policeman. Over a period of several years, I guess I kind of came to be Kirtanananda's bouncer in a way. He would always come to me if somebody was a

trouble-maker or something and had to be removed. He would ask me to take care of the problem. . . . I really don't like that term—'Kirtanananda's enforcer'—but I guess that's probably a fair statement.”⁴¹⁷

Sergeant Thomas Westfall recalled, “The devotees [at New Vrindaban] were telling me that if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you got a visit from Thomas Drescher.”⁴¹⁸ Kusumapida devi dasi (Cathy Olrech), who worked in the New Vrindaban sewing room, remembered her first impression of the man who one year later murdered her husband Chakradhari, “I remember the first time I saw Tirtha; it was like seeing a Wraith—a Ring Wraith from *Lord of the Rings*. He had just gotten out of prison, or so I was told. He came to see Chakradhari. I saw him at dusk, getting out of a van in front of our house. I got a bad feeling; cold, like prickly ice at my spine. I could not look into his eyes, they seemed so devoid of 'heart.’”⁴¹⁹

PROTECTOR OF THE BRIJABASIS

Although I didn't know Tirtha personally (at that time, I was mostly always out on the road, on the “pick”), I had seen him at New Vrindaban at festivals during my monthly three-day visits to the community. I remember, around 1982, that Tirtha served the New Vrindaban Community as the bus driver, driving back and forth all day between Bahulaban and the Palace. I noticed he would go out of his way to assist the mothers who might have had baskets of laundry and small children.

When New Vrindaban began expanding and buying single-family dwellings on McCreary's Ridge Road and its tributaries, some of the homes inexplicably burned to the ground. When Mother Kanka's home burned, as noted in Chapter 6, she suspected the fire had been set by her non-devotee neighbors. Other devotee homes also burned. In retribution, Tirtha began secretly setting fire to our neighbor's homes. After a few conflagrations, a hard-won peace was established between New Vrindaban and the local neighbors.

Tirtha explained, “During the five years prior [to Sulochan’s murder], I did lots of stuff for Kirtanananda and others in the community. . . . I always worked alone and no one ever knew how things were happening. Even K. didn’t know. He’d just say, ‘Take care of it. I don’t want to know.’ He always wanted plausible deniability. One aspect was arson. Back when the locals were burning down our properties, I conducted retaliatory strikes against them. K. liked the idea of an ‘eye for an eye.’ It didn’t take long until they understood. Their homes burned just like ours did. And when the cops came around to ask K., he could say with a straight face, ‘I don’t know what’s going on.’ He’d always point to our properties being damaged and ask, ‘Why don’t you come out when we are the victim?’ He had a point. He claimed Prabhupada told him to arm themselves and be prepared. So we did. And we were.”⁴²⁰

Should we accept Tirtha’s assertion that he only burned properties under Bhaktipada’s direction? Janmastami thinks not, and pointed out that wherever Tirtha lived—at the Buffalo ISKCON temple, at the Buffalo ISKCON farm, at the Columbus ISKCON temple, and at New Vrindaban—automobiles were mysteriously set on fire. Janmastami noted, “Tirtha doesn’t say that Kirtanananda Swami authorized his arsons, but he tries to force you to imply it. It’s just not true, but it shows the character of the person that Tirtha really is. Tirtha was doing car fires in Buffalo, and at the Buffalo ISKCON farm in Fillmore, New York, before the three or four that he did in Columbus, Ohio. None of that was “with K. S. authorization,” nor were the three fires Tirtha set out on Tom Bock’s Ridge, at the Rice Boys’ trailer. In many cases, Tirtha tries to paint himself as more than he truly was, methinks.”^{421 422}

New Vrindaban devotees were harassed in other ways, besides arson. Sometimes rowdy neighbors who had too much alcohol to drink intimidated devotees walking along the road. I heard stories about Tirtha protecting New Vrindaban residents from drunken trigger-happy rednecks who frequented the bar (Sky Vue Inn) on McCreary’s Ridge Road between Bahulaban and Prabhupada’s Palace. (Later, New Vrindaban purchased

the property and it became a stained glass studio and a general store.) Tirtha recalled the drive-by harassment and the meanest and baddest redneck on McCreary's Ridge: Jerry Williams. Tirtha related:

New Vrindaban could also be a dangerous place to live. Where hate crimes were frequently committed against the Krishnas, sometimes on a daily basis. Like drive-by shootings. Rednecks craving a bit of crude entertainment would cruise past the roadside homes of Krishnas and take pot shots into their homes. Or purposefully steer their pickup trucks directly at pedestrian Krishnas walking along the shoulder of the road. Not a few devotees were forced to scramble for their lives, diving into adjacent roadside drainage ditches to escape being hit. No Krishna was immune. Even pregnant Krishna women with small children had to dive headfirst for their lives. . .

It didn't help that a sleazy redneck bar named Sky Vue Inn was strategically located in the middle of the Krishna community. It was a favorite haunt for locals looking to get their alcohol buzz on. Designated drivers weren't waiting. The only way to leave was through Krishna territory. In their drunken, twisted state, devotees became fair game.

Directly across from the Sky Vue was the Williams' property. Several acres of mostly steep, hard scabble hillside land with a small swatch of flat, roadside frontage. Upon which stood an assortment of funky trailers and unfurnished houses. All cobbled together Appalachian style. Where the infamous Jerry Williams lived with his parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, dogs, chickens, pigs and jacked-up pickup truck. He being the world's meanest, most dangerous driver and the number one culprit for driving pedestrian Krishnas into roadside ditches. . .

A few miles down the . . . [ridge]⁴²³ from the Krishna compound was the village of Elm Grove. Home to a Laundromat, a few small shops and an A&P grocery store where many of the area locals shopped. And there, on one gloomy, overcast day, in the A&P parking lot, I spotted Jerry Williams' unmistakable, jacked up, pickup truck. A fortuitous encounter, indeed.

Parked on the street a half block away, I retrieved my tried and true Louisville Slugger from the trunk of my car. A beautiful, battle worn 34-inch Roger Maris special. Then a short stroll across the parking lot near Jerry's truck. Taking care to stay out of view, keeping between parked cars. Minutes later Jerry exited the store, his skinny arms full of grocery bags. As he neared his truck I casually approached him from the side, head down, baseball cap pulled low. Jerry's arms aching from the weight of his groceries. The Louisville lumber itching for a home run.

"Here, let me help you with that," I said in a neighborly tone. And swung my wood around, sharply striking his leg just below the knee. The sudden shock and pain making Jerry gasp, his right leg giving out, causing him to fall on his side. His groceries scattering on the ground. Another quick strike to the knee and Jerry screamed out. Then two more quick strikes to his shin as Jerry felt a pain like an electric white light coursing through his leg. He suddenly knew an agony so intense it took away his breath, and left him unable to speak or cry out.

"If I were you," I said softly, "I'd crawl under my truck. You'll be safer there." Jerry forgot if it was day or night. A slight whimper escaped his lips as he began inching his way under the truck. Three more well placed whacks were delivered for good measure. "Think about this the next time you play games with your truck, Jerry. There's more coming if you don't wise up." ⁴²⁴

After that encounter, I heard the drive-by harassment and most other violent incidents at New Vrindaban dropped off significantly. I wish I could say that Tirtha didn't glorify in his toughness like a bully and only used his fighting abilities to protect the saintly devotees and rid the community of undesirable influences. Unfortunately sometimes his temper got the best of him; he could instill terror in the hearts of devotees who crossed him.

In 1983, for reasons which will be explained in Chapter 13, New Vrindaban management banned Tirtha from living at the community.

For a time, he lived in Randall Gorby's guest house in Bethany, West Virginia. Then, he and his wife went out "picking" on the road to support themselves as well as to contribute funds to the New Vrindaban guru-kula. In the spring of 1985, Tirtha moved his family into an apartment about two miles from the Cleveland temple. Although Tirtha rendered some service to the temple, ultimately the temple president, Tapahpunja Swami, had to forbid him from coming to the temple, as he had become a disturbance.

A private investigator noted, "Drescher expressed to Sheldon his desire to help the temple financially and to improve upon his spiritual practices as well. Mr. Sheldon said that rather than be of help, Drescher proved to be a disruptive influence, especially upon the weaker members of the seventy-member [Cleveland ISKCON] congregation. At one point, Sheldon told Drescher to stay away from the temple property and for all practical purposes their relationship was severed. Drescher did, however, continue to attend the Sunday services at the temple and did provide a valuable service. Sheldon states that the temple was located in a black ghetto neighborhood and Drescher would stand guard over the congregation's parked cars during the services. Sheldon said that Drescher was able to deter vandalism of the visitors' vehicles."⁴²⁵

Later, after Radhanath Swami established a New Vrindaban preaching center in Kent, Ohio, Tirtha rented a mobile home in a trailer park in Ravenna, about five miles east from Kent. Tirtha served as the principal hit man in the murder plot.

JANMASTAMI

Janmastami dasa (John Anthony Sinkowski) (b. July 22, 1947) had a gruff exterior, but his heart was full of love/fanaticism for his "spiritual master." He was a tough no-nonsense fellow, but could also be kind. I first met him in 1979 when I briefly taught at the Nandagram gurukula. I remember he was hauling wood for the school's furnace.

Seeing me—and perhaps thinking I was a greenhorn unfamiliar with the intricacies of country living—he stopped his labor and gave me some advice. He showed me some poison ivy growing near the building. “See that?” he said. “In the spring, if you pick one of the young leaves and eat it, and continue to do so every day, your body will gradually build up a tolerance for the poison and you’ll be immune for the rest of the summer.”

Years later, I once worked for Janmastami in Washington D. C. helping to sell flowers at sidewalk tables during a Mother’s Day marathon. His shop, in a poor and run-down neighborhood where carjackings and drive-by shootings were not unknown, catered not to physical comforts, but existed only to maximize service to guru and Krishna. He lived very simply. I don’t even think he and his wife had a bed. I remember seeing his kid in a playpen practically buried by enormous stacks of boxes of roses; it was so cramped and crowded and filthy. The place had no material amenities, but the rent was cheap, and he willingly performed those austerities to increase profits for New Vrindaban.

John Sinkowski grew up in Long Island and got a scholarship to play football at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. His college career ended after less than a year, as he discovered he was not “Ivy League” material. He admitted, “We all agreed, after one year of horrible grades, social and disciplinary probations (I never understood the exact difference: one incident involved hitting a graduate student and a freshman quad resident monitor with water balloons, the other was when my roommate jammed a guy’s lock with a toothpick, and they needed to get a locksmith on Christmas weekend), and three concussions from football, thus ending that career and scholarship, we all agreed that, ‘I was not Ivy League material!’ and that experience [at the University of Pennsylvania] ended.”⁴²⁶

However, John’s minor infractions and three concussions were not the main reason he was expelled from the University of Pennsylvania: he had participated in a riot on campus. He explained:

My roommate and I were pro-war, right-wing retards, and the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society known for activism against the war in Vietnam] were leading an anti-war march outside the Student Union, and my roommate and I got involved after some punches were thrown. I only hit back, after I was first hit, but a lot of people were throwing punches, on both sides of the issue.

My brother was a Cobra [an attack helicopter] pilot, and he had been shot down once or twice (Purple Heart for windshield glass wounds, one hard landing among hostiles), and my poor fund of knowledge did not include any history of Southeast Asia, so I believed as I had been brought up thinking, “My country, right or wrong!” and I certainly have come to see the futility of such nationalism. At that time, however, I was a Pro-War Fascist, without even knowing it.

I went to hit one long hair, and as I spun him around, it turned out to be a female student who had come on to me in Spanish class and she was pretty hot, so I just apologized and went back to my dorm room, but apparently they had camera footage, even back then. That was April 1966. I was pretty much an atheist at that point. Roman Catholic upbringing failing to answer the most important questions of life. ⁴²⁷

After leaving college, John was drafted into the military in July 1968 and sent to Vietnam in the Army’s 25th Infantry Division (11B20 Combat Infantry). Attaining the rank of Private E1, he fought in dozens of missions, and received commendations and awards, including the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Air Medal—Purple Heart, and the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, ⁴²⁸ and was ultimately wounded in action. To this day, some suspect that he still has shrapnel in his body. After receiving an honorable discharge on April 29, 1970, he lived in Hawaii for a few years.

John explained how he met Srila Prabhupada in Hawaii, “When I returned from Vietnam, I became a victim of Lord Chaitanya’s mercy, in the form of nightly Hari-Nam, in front of the International

Marketplace in Waikiki for eight months, six nights a week, with Sunday feasts on banana leaves in Kapiolani Park. I first saw Srila Prabhupada in Hawaii in 1971, and my wife and I got his remnants, in the form of maha-milk sweets, and each day I better understand the importance of such good fortune. Our atheistic tendencies were challenged and defeated by His Divine Grace, although I am rarely thoughtful enough to be aware of it.”⁴²⁹

John came back to New York for a short time and then moved back to Hawaii. He returned again to New York and became an ISKCON Life Member. He also served as president of the Krishna Yoga Society at the State University of New York in Stony Brook. He explained, “After high school, I attended, either as ‘a student,’ or in some cases, the ‘1960s-ish’ fashion of ‘non-student,’ no less than six colleges or universities for no other reason than to see if any real knowledge could be found there. In New York I attended two semesters at Nassau Community College, and three at SUNY Stony Brook on the G. I. Bill.”⁴³⁰

Looking for direction in his life, John prayed to the Radha-Govinda deities at New York ISKCON on Henry Street in Brooklyn, and ended up at New Vrindaban in 1972. After a few months, he moved to the Buffalo ISKCON temple where he helped manage Krishna yoga clubs at Buffalo State University and the University of Buffalo. He returned to New Vrindaban, and on Krishna’s birthday (August 26, 1978) he received diksa—and the name Janmastami dasa (“Servant of Krishna’s Appearance Day”)—from the ISKCON-approved “spiritual master,” Kirtanananda Swami.⁴³¹

Gaura-Shakti (Gregory Carlson), an electrician who served in the community’s construction department and who later became a member of the surveillance team which tracked Sulochan’s movements, thought Janmastami was “basically a good person.” He remembered, “I thought his personality was a little bit rough, but basically he was a good person. He would rise very early in the morning and always came to our morning religious services and he would work hard all day long. He would not take anything for himself. He never asked for any money for his

labor. . . . Although his personality was a little rough and sometimes he was a little overly-critical and hard to get along with . . . basically he was a good person.”⁴³²

According to some, Janmastami was a humble and austere brahmachari. The gurukula boy, Hari-Venu (Geraldo Altamirano) remembered, “Janmastami worked for Jayamurari in plumbing. He maintained the boilers in the community. He worked very hard and never asked anything for himself. When he lived at Old Nandagram, he fed himself by eating the remnants from the gurukula boys. When we were done eating, we’d empty the leftovers from our plates into a bucket outside. It looked like slop. Janmastami got his food from that bucket. He accepted the remnants of the gurukula boys in the mood of honoring maha-prasadam remnants from great devotees. He was a humble and austere brahmachari. He never kept anything for himself. Yes, sometimes he could be a scary guy, but I liked him.”⁴³³

Some others, however, experienced an intolerant and cruel side of his personality. Another gurukula boy recalled, “When I first got to Nandagram, Janmastami was the older boys’ ashram monitor and he used to do unnecessarily cruel things to us. When he would wake us in the morning he would flip kids out of their sleeping bags. Grab the bottom and flop a kid out. The older boys in the room would make the younger boys sleep closer to the door. After one or two boys would shout out startled from being tossed, the rest of us would jump up and fold our beds before he could toss us too. Then he would wait in his truck to leave. He would leave at exactly when he said he would. Just start driving away, even if a kid was only half in the vehicle. If we weren’t in the truck we had to walk to Bahulaban. Very boot camp military style. But inappropriate for 10-year-old kids. As far as I recall, he never beat us.”⁴³⁴

Janmastami remained at New Vrindaban until 1994, when Kirtanananda asked him to leave.⁴³⁵ Janmastami served as a hit man; as Tirtha’s partner in crime. The two traveled together in California hunting for Sulochan.

RADHANATH SWAMI

Richard Slavin (b. December 7, 1950) grew up in a Jewish family in Highland Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. His father, Gerald, lost all his money after investing it in a Ford Edsel dealership which tanked. Consequently he could not afford to send his son to Hebrew school; “Little Richie” went to public school. At Deerfield High School, Richie competed on the varsity wrestling team. He studied psychology and the humanities for one year at Miami Dade College in Florida. At the age of nineteen he embarked on a spiritual quest, hitchhiking across Europe, into Asia, and into India. He met the Hare Krishna devotees in India and heard Prabhupada lecture.^{4,36}

In 1972, Richard returned to America, due to visa difficulties. He settled in New Vrindaban and received diksa and the name Radhanath in February 1973. He served as the head pujari at the isolated and rustic Old Vrindaban Farm, worshiped the brass deities Radha-Vrindaban Nath, cooked for the deities and milked cows. After the dedication of Prabhupada’s Palace in September 1979, Radhanath became a traveling preacher and established vegetarian cooking classes and preaching centers near several West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio universities. In 1982 he accepted sannyasa from Kirtanananda Swami.

In the conspiracy, Radhanath served as a brahminical adviser and preached that devotees should “do whatever is necessary” to protect their spiritual master. He traveled to Los Angeles in January 1986, allegedly to inform Ramesvara Maharaja about the New Vrindaban hit men in California and to secure the cooperation of Ramesvara and his California ksatriyas. Three days after the murder, Radhanath went with Bhaktipada to Dharmatma’s sankirtan house to get \$6,000 to deliver to Tirtha so that Tirtha could purchase plane tickets to India for him and his family and leave the U. S. Four days later, Radhanath delivered money to the Cleveland temple for Tapahpunja’s bail. After Tirtha was arrested, Radhanath was the first devotee to visit him in jail, and also corresponded with him by letter (snail mail).

DHARMATMA

Dharmatma (Dennis Frederick Gorrick) (b. November 5, 1943) hailed from Vancouver, British Columbia. During his senior year at Vancouver College Catholic Boys High School he competed as a member of the school's boxing team.⁴³⁷ He was a powerful man with a solid, hard body; he also had a confidence and a sexual magnetism which many women found irresistible. After high school, he worked as a bouncer in a bar. One of his wives recalled his strong and authoritative style which attracted her (and many other women) to him:

It was in Vancouver in Canada, he [Dennis] had been a bouncer in a bar, and [he was] pretty wild. He had a lot of women, usually three or four girlfriends at a time. . . . When I met Dharmatma, he was attractive to me in the way that he took care of me. He was real strong, very authoritative. He controlled every aspect of our lives . . . even to what we ate, how much we ate, when we ate. We weren't allowed to purchase anything, even the smallest thing we got, without his permission.

I sort of liked him, and I don't even remember how it started, but I had sexual relations with him before we were married, and I knew of a few other women, maybe a couple other women at that time that he was having relations with. Later on I found out it was a whole lot more than what I thought.⁴³⁸

Dennis became Dharmatma at an initiation ceremony in Vancouver in June 1972 and soon became known as a superb book distributor. In May 1973, he brought a bus full of Canadian brahmacharis to Louisville, Kentucky to distribute books and collect for Vancouver ISKCON. During their stay, one of his brahmacharis had a romance with an under-age Louisville girl. Her father owned a nearby tavern and also worked as an electrician for a tobacco company. When the sankirtan party left for New Vrindaban, the girl disappeared. Some say she came to New Vrindaban. Dharmatma brought his brahmacharis to New Vrindaban to attend the big cornerstone-laying festival for the proposed Govindaji temple up on a hill behind Bahulaban where a pit was dug and a deity of Ananta-Sesa was buried.

The girl's father, Kenneth W. Elmore, came to the community with a friend looking for his runaway daughter. The two held the devotees hostage in the temple room with a shotgun, then the father marched Kirtanananda Swami and Dharmatma up the hill, allegedly to dig their own graves. When Elmore's accomplice, Joseph Clemons, knocked over the solid marble deities in the temple, Radha-Vrindaban Chandra, Radharani made an incredibly loud sound, like a gunshot, when she hit the marble floor. The father on the hill heard the sound, became fearful, ran back down the hill in anxiety, grabbed his accomplice and fled in their vehicle (a gold Cadillac) back to Kentucky. This became known as the New Vrindaban "Motorcycle Gang Attack."

After this traumatic event, Dharmatma was so impressed with Kirtanananda Swami and New Vrindaban that he joined the community and became a Brijabasi. He explained, "After the attack I decided to stay at New Vrindaban because I loved the atmosphere and K. Swami was very inspirational at that time, and I looked forward to the adventure." ⁴³⁹

Within a year, Dharmatma began leading New Vrindaban traveling sankirtan parties to area malls and shopping centers, rock concerts and sporting events, to raise funds for the community. His operation expanded, and in a decade his international (U. S. and Canada) panhandling enterprise grossed \$3,173,000 in 1985, which was nearly 60% of the community's total revenue of \$5,472,000. ⁴⁴⁰ Between 1980 and 1986 his "pickers" collected twelve-and-a-half million dollars. He served as my sankirtan leader for about six or seven years (1980-1986), as I recall. I never had a problem with him.

In the beginning, during the mid-1970s, the traveling sankirtan devotees distributed Prabhupada's books, but they soon discovered they could make more money by distributing items like buttons, flowers, record albums, bumper stickers and sports caps illegally emblazoned with copyrighted logos. Traveling "pickers" worked in disguises; the traditional Hare Krishna garb of dhotis and kurtas for the men and saris for the

women was disregarded in favor of western clothes. Most of the men wore wigs to disguise their shaved heads.

Fraudulent charity scams were created to collect more money from people who were increasingly becoming more and more suspicious of the Hare Krishnas. One sankirtan “picker” remembered: “When I first started [going on sankirtan] we would go up to people and pin flowers on them . . . and we would tell people we were ‘collecting donations to spread the love of God.’ ‘Can you please help?’ and, ‘Everyone is giving a dollar or two,’ or whatever. . . . [In time] it got more devious. [We wouldn’t let] the people know where their money was really going. . . . There were a lot of different things we would tell people, even to the point if they would ask, ‘Are you Hare Krishna?’ we would say ‘No.’”⁴⁴¹

The single, unmarried women were the biggest collectors; they were young, attractive, energetic, and they had no demanding and time-consuming responsibilities to take care of husbands and children. Marriage was discouraged because once a woman got married her collections would drastically decrease. However, the single women out on the road still had emotional and physical needs and many needed regular and intimate masculine association.

The solution to this problem was to have the male sankirtan leader act as “husband” to all the single women who needed intimacy. The female devotees took shelter from their male sankirtan leader and considered him their “husband”—even, in one instance, a girl as young as fifteen. The sankirtan leader accepted this arrangement as his sacred duty to satisfy the women’s ardent emotional and carnal desires, and keep them out collecting big to generate money for New Vrindaban and help spread Krishna consciousness. The women who served under Dharmatma’s personal care and supervision were nicknamed “Dharmattes,” derived from the Sanskrit word “mata” (mother).

Bhaktipada encouraged Dharmatma to have sexual relations with the single women to keep them “fired up” and “collecting big” on the

road. The New Vrindaban sankirtan leader had three “official” wives, and many more “unofficial” wives. Dharmatma claimed, “Kirtanananda authorized me to have three [official] wives.”⁴⁴² Regarding his “unofficial” wives, Dharmatma noted: “Regarding sex with the sankirtan women, Bhaktipada gave me facility and encouraged me to do whatever necessary to look after these girls. The fifteen-year-old girl was very mature, like an eighteen-year-old. It was voluntary [not coerced, on her part].”⁴⁴³

Many devotees at New Vrindaban were aware of the “arrangement” between the sankirtan leader and the women collectors at the sankirtan house. This was accepted at New Vrindaban because polygamy had been a widespread and socially accepted form of marriage during the Vedic era, and was, in fact, perfectly legal in India for thousands of years until the early 20th century, when the social order had been “contaminated” by modern, irreligious, anti-Vedic ideas. Devotees at New Vrindaban believed they were transplanting the noble sanatana-dharma (eternal cosmic order) of ancient India to modern America. This included other ancient Indian social customs, such as arranging marriages and marrying very young teenage girls to men sometimes twice their age.

Sulochan recalled: “Kusala [a former New Vrindaban woman] told my wife that if some of the [sankirtan] women went out and didn’t meet their quota, he’d [Dharmatma] slap her around a little. But if you got your score, then you got the privilege to sack out with the sankirtan leader. One [other male] devotee told me that he went over there [to the sankirtan house] one night to fix some electrical problem and heard some women arguing, ‘I collected more than you, I should sleep with him tonight.’ Back and forth. Like that.”⁴⁴⁴

Sulochan, in his comment above, indicated that if a woman didn’t make her quota, the sankirtan leader might “slap her around a little.” Wife beating was not uncommon at New Vrindaban. Bhaktipada liked to preach, “Three things improve with a good beating: your drum, your wife, and your dog.” Dharmatma admitted: “The mood at the community . . . was that women could be struck. On many occasions, Bhaktipada

told husbands to beat their wives. He personally told me to beat my wives, to keep them in order. . . . I was encouraged by Bhaktipada to hit the sankirtan women if they did not surrender. . . . Prior to that time, I had never struck a woman in my life, but the mood was to get them to surrender, to do the things that the husband or leader wanted, that it was okay to do that.”⁴⁴⁵

In the murder conspiracy, Dharmatma gave \$2,500 to Tirtha to fly to California and silence Sulochan, and he also gave \$6,000 in escape money to Radhanath Swami and Bhaktipada so Tirtha and Tapahpunja could purchase air tickets and leave the country. Tirtha claimed Dharmatma was also involved in the secret November 1985 meetings, along with Kuladri and Gorby, when the murder plot was hatched.

RAMESVARA SWAMI

Robert Grant (b. July 10, 1951) was raised in a wealthy Jewish family in the affluent village of Roslyn Estates in Nassau County, New York, on the North Shore of Long Island. How wealthy was his family? One of his Jewish godbrothers noted, “We used to kid each other about [both of us] being Jewish from Long Island, but he was from a wealthier family so they didn’t have a black maid—his family had a Swedish maid/house cleaner. He went to college in Portland, Oregon, and I think he joined that temple, but shortly after came to Los Angeles. Karandhar [a senior ISKCON GBC representative initiated in Los Angeles in 1969] trained him to take up his responsibilities with BBT and that’s how he got his position in ISKCON.”⁴⁴⁶

According to the Srila Prabhupada Disciple Database, Robert became Ramesvara dasa at an initiation ceremony in Los Angeles in April 1971. Prabhupada recognized his leadership qualities and appointed him as the manager of his North American Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT). Ramesvara was responsible for organizing the printing and distribution of Srila Prabhupada’s books in North America. One contemporary noted,

“Prabhupada gave more direct personal instructions to Ramesvara on book production and distribution than any other devotee.”⁴⁴⁷ In 1976 Ramesvara was elected to the GBC; around the same time he accepted sannyasa. In 1977, he served as Prabhupada’s personal secretary in India.

In 1978 Ramesvara became one of the original eleven ISKCON zonal acharyas, overseeing temples in Los Angeles, San Diego, Laguna Beach, and Denver. In 1985, Ramesvara was very friendly to me when I visited Los Angeles ISKCON as a representative of New Vrindaban’s traveling sankirtan department. I helped train up his “pickers” in the use of the “Citation Line,” which I had helped invent and perfect a few years earlier. When Sulochan tried to enter Govinda’s restaurant near Los Angeles ISKCON with a hand gun while Ramesvara was inside, security guards prohibited him from entering. Ramesvara then ominously and prophetically suggested, “Sulochan needs a new body.”

Ramesvara subsequently ordered his ksatriya disciple, Jeffrey Allen Breier (Krishna-Katha), the head of security for ISKCON Los Angeles (who carried a hand gun) to cooperate with the New Vrindaban hit men. Krishna-Katha served as Tirtha’s personal sidekick by helping spy on Sulochan and keeping track of his movements in Los Angeles. When Sulochan was seen in Los Angeles in mid-May 1986 after a long absence, Krishna-Katha telephoned the New Vrindaban ksatriyas to inform them that their target was back in the area. He was with Tirtha until just before the murder. One source claimed he witnessed the murder (see Chapter 10).

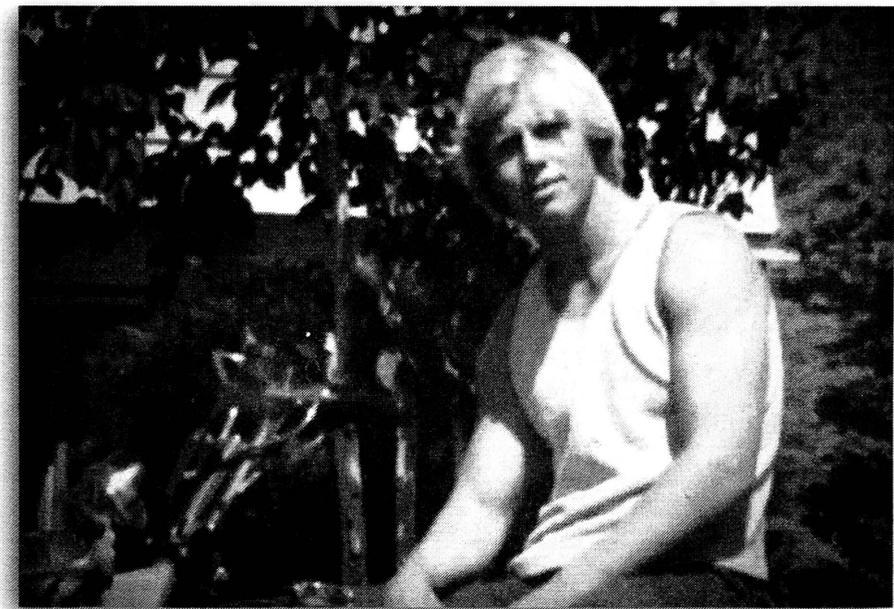
A few others played supporting roles in the murder conspiracy, such as Devamrita Swami (Jay Matsya), who helped impede the police investigation by admonishing Brijabasis not to talk to the media or police; New Vrindaban head of security Sthayibhava (Robert Hamilton), an African-American devotee from Cleveland, and Gaura-Shakti (Gregory Carlson), an electrician, who assisted in the surveillance of Sulochan in Ohio and West Virginia; New Vrindaban temple commander Devananda (Daniel Van Pelt) from Greenville, Ohio, who preached to Tirtha on the phone

when Tirtha and Janmastami were networking in California; Mrgendra (Harvey Mechanic), a legal counsel for the community who forged a loan agreement between New Vrindaban and ISKCON Cleveland; and Kumar (Craig Thompson), Bhaktipada's servant who counted out a portion of the escape money from Bhaktipada's personal safe.

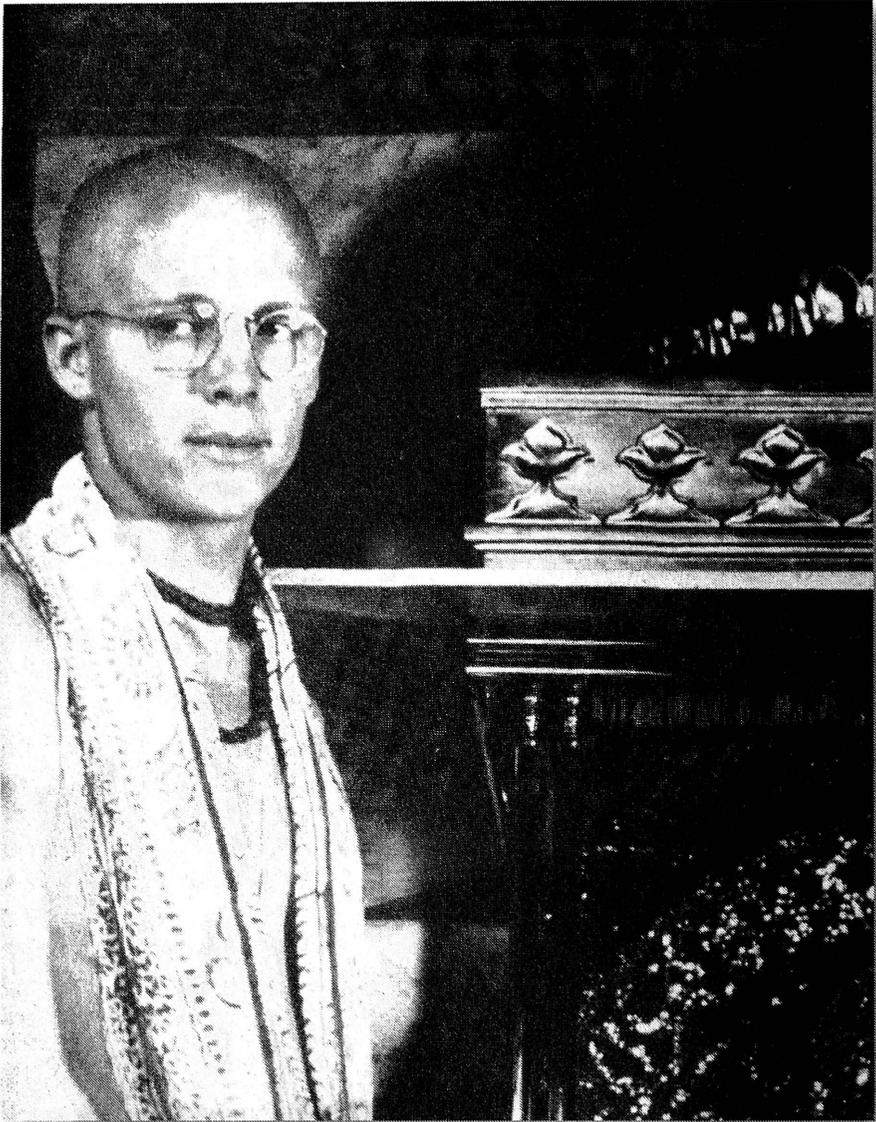
California devotees who played assisting roles in the murder conspiracy were Yudhisthira (Jeffrey Michael Cornia), who told Tapahpunja he would give Sulochan a heroin overdose for \$5,000; and Mahamantra (David Fuller), a Los Angeles ISKCON assistant security guard, who helped Krishna-Katha search for Sulochan's van and also guided Tirtha, Janmastami and Krishna-Katha to abandoned mine shafts in the Mojave Desert where the hit men thought they might dispose of Sulochan's body.



“These rogues [so-called acharyas] are the most dangerous elements in human society. . . . These pseudo-religionists are heading toward the most obnoxious place in the universe [hell] after completion of their spiritual master business, which they conduct simply for sense gratification.”—His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977), the Founder/Acharya of ISKCON. Photo taken during his fourth and final visit to New Vrindaban (June 1976).



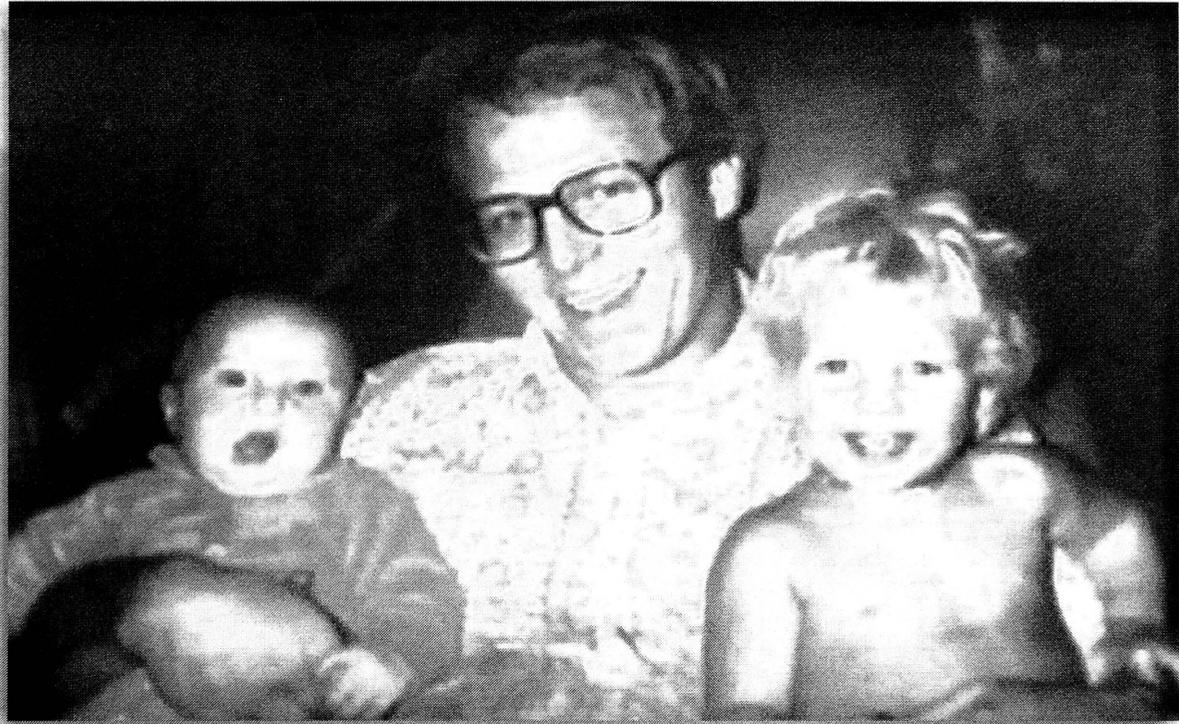
Steven Bryant as a young man in Royal Oak, Michigan (early 1970s).



“Since I was approaching Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s topmost representative, Srila Prabhupada, for guidance and inspiration, I knew the outcome would be auspicious, whatever it was.”—Sulochan dasa Brahmachari (Steven Bryant) on the altar offering *aroti*, perhaps at Detroit ISKCON (late 1970s).



“We just became friends. Everybody liked him [Sulochan]. He was just a very affable kind of guy.”—Puranjana (Tim Lee), long-time critic of the zonal acharyas and Sulochan’s life-long best friend (passport photo, early 1980s).



“Look at me now. My heart is devoid of life, and I’m simply the servant of my tongue, belly and genitals—literally a dead body flapping.”—Sulochan dasa Adhikari with his two sons, Nimai and Sarva (c. 1983).



“We [Sulochan and I] were ill matched. Definitely no attraction on my side of the equation. I had no idea what a fiasco it [our marriage] would turn into.”—Sulochan’s divorced wife, Jamuna dasi (Jane Seward), holding her first child by her new husband, Raghunath (Ralph Seward) (c. 1988).



THE GURUBUSINESS

How the Leaders of the Hare Krishna movement deviated from the pure path as taught and exemplified by its founder:

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder/acarya ISKCON

BY SULOCANA DAS



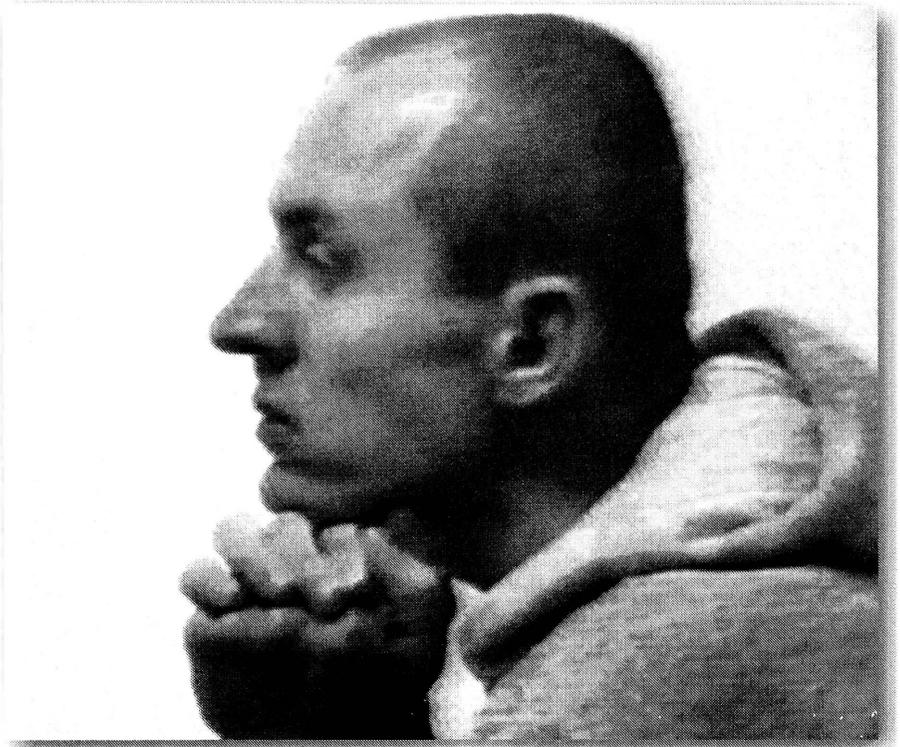
Cover of Sulochan's book, *The Guru Business*. Notice the three images on the cover representing: money bag, official ISKCON guru rubber-stamp, dhoti-clad ksatriya bearing an automatic weapon. Sulochan selected the title *The Guru Business* from a passage by Prabhupada: "*Sri Isopanisad* confirms that these pseudo-religionists [so-called acharyas] are heading toward the most obnoxious place in the universe after completion of their spiritual master business."—*Sri Isopanisad* (12)



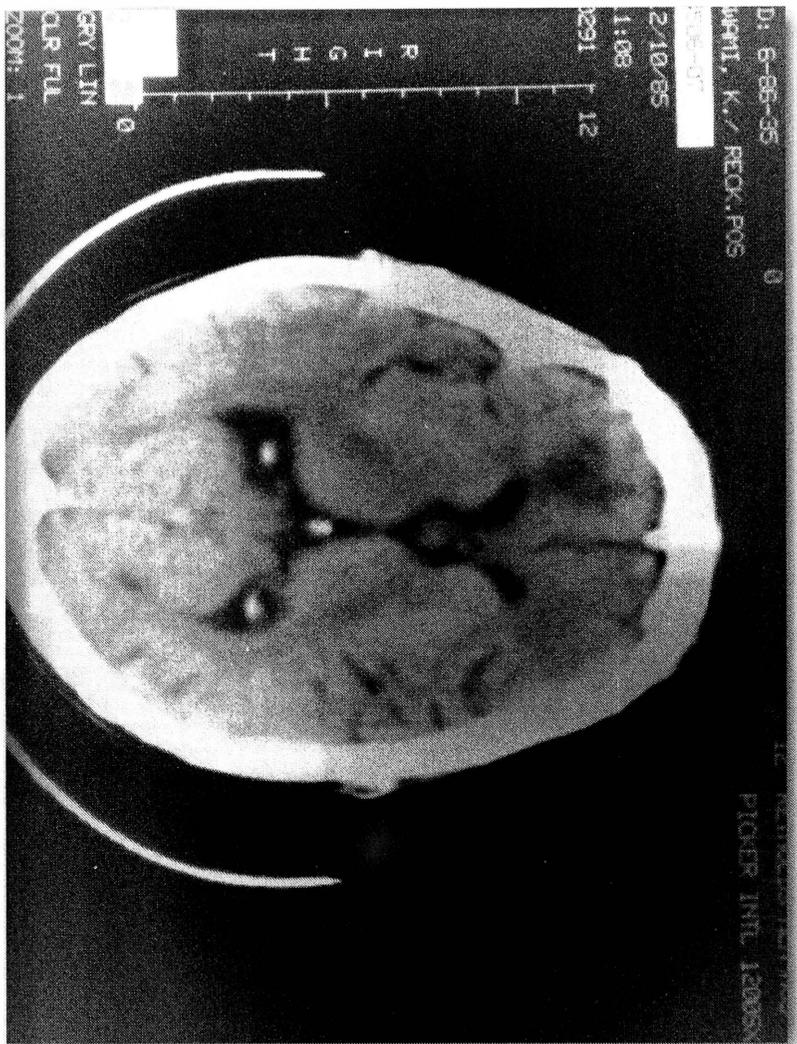
“If Tirtha [Thomas Drescher] takes the whole thing, and no other boys get caught, then he’ll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime.”—“His Divine Grace” Kirtanananda Swami “Bhaktipada” (Keith Gordon Ham), the ISKCON zonal acharya at New Vrindaban, known as “Number One.” Here on his vyasasana (throne) at the newly-dedicated RVC temple at New Vrindaban. Publicity photo (1983).



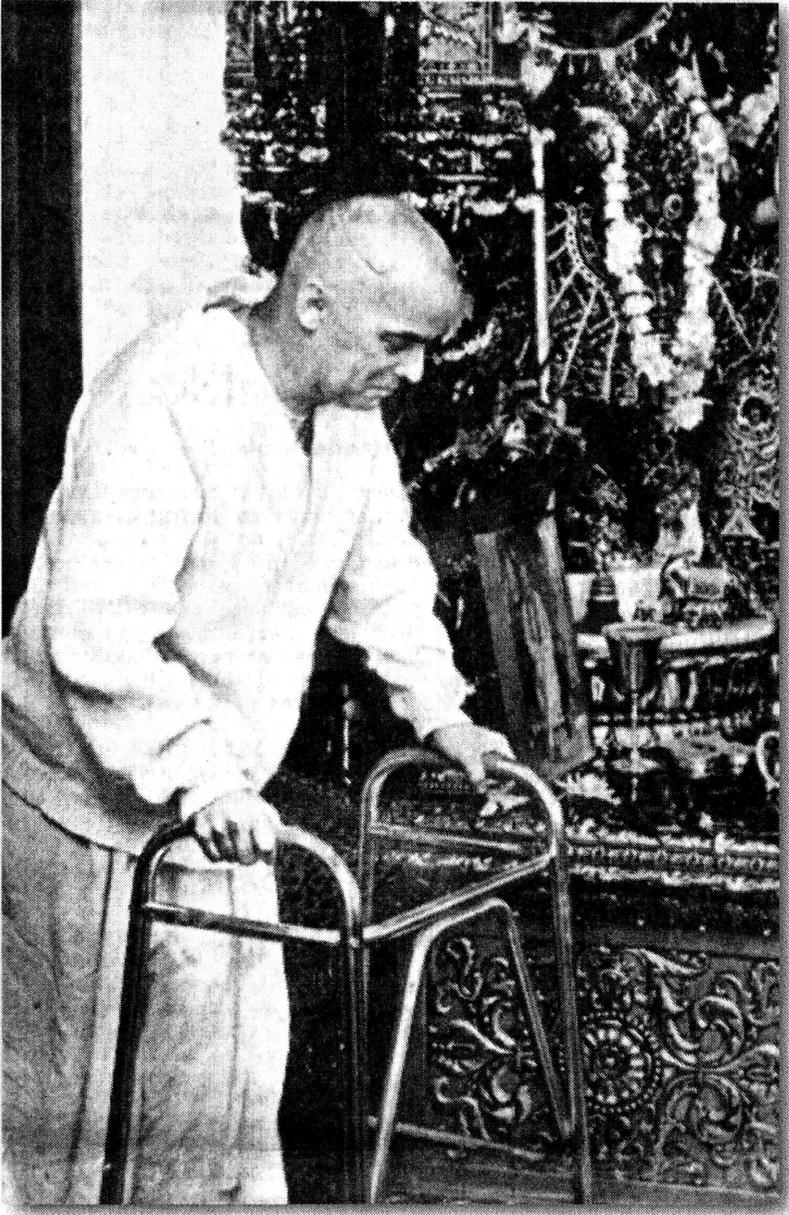
Bhaktipada (center) supervises a road-building brick-laying marathon near the RVC temple complex (summer 1985).



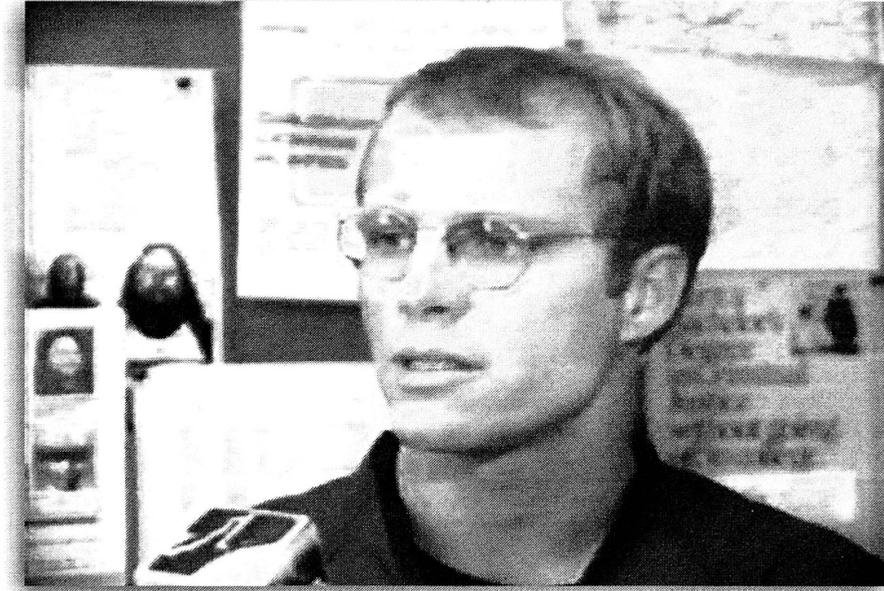
“I felt I had to either kill myself, kill Bhaktipada, or leave.”—Triyogi (Michael Shockman), the mentally disturbed visiting devotee who tried to kill Bhaktipada by smashing his skull with a three-foot-long steel rod reported to weigh twenty pounds. Here at the Marshall County Jail (undated).



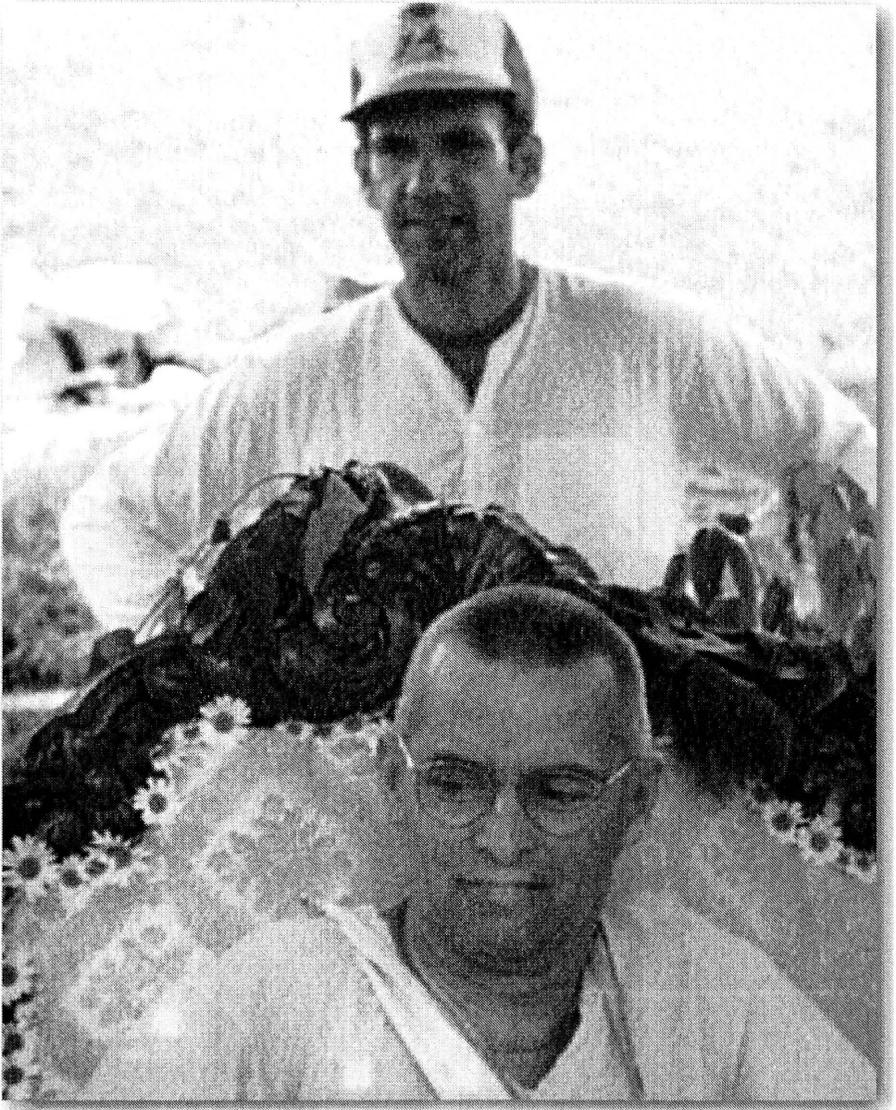
“Every doctor that I talked to said it [the blow on my head] was enough to kill a hundred men. When I was attacked, Krishna absolutely incarnated to protect me. The brain scan, the X-ray, taken just after the accident, showed an unmistakable image of [the half-man/half-lion avatar] Lord Nrsimhadeva [the Great Protector of the devotees]. Krishna incarnated to protect me from the blows of that man.”—Swami Bhaktipada, speaking of the MRI image of a cross section of his brain, which, when turned upside down, resembles a ghastly face.



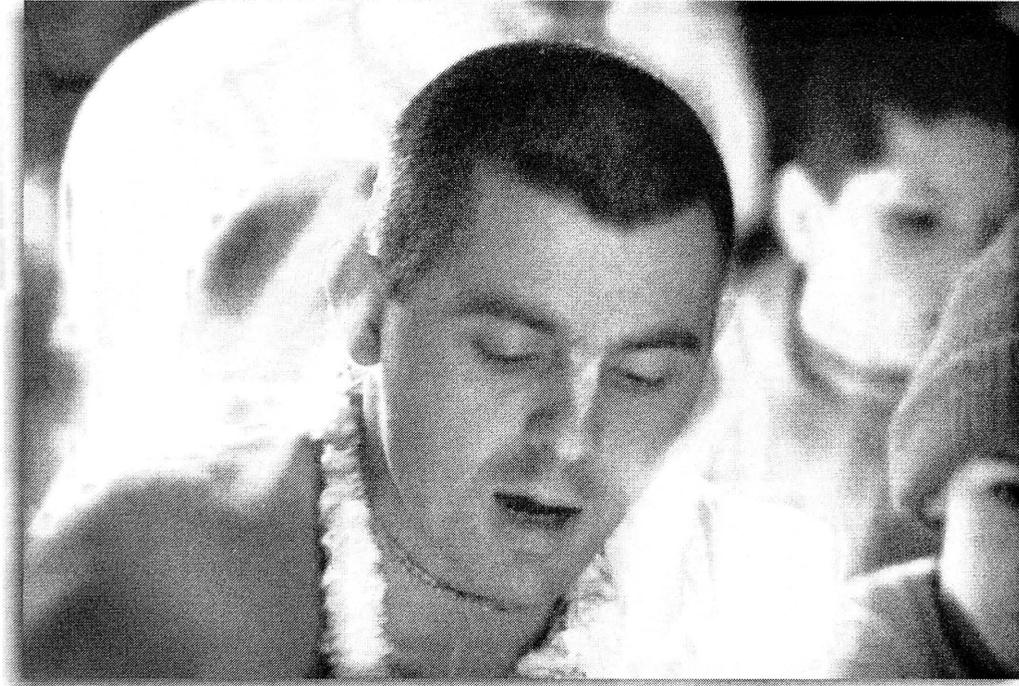
“The assailant [Triyogi] was a crazy madman . . . who had been influenced by Sulochan.”—Bhaktipada, ambulating with great difficulty using a walker, in the temple room at his home (December 4, 1985). He had been ten days in a coma, three weeks on the critical list, and 26 days in the hospital.



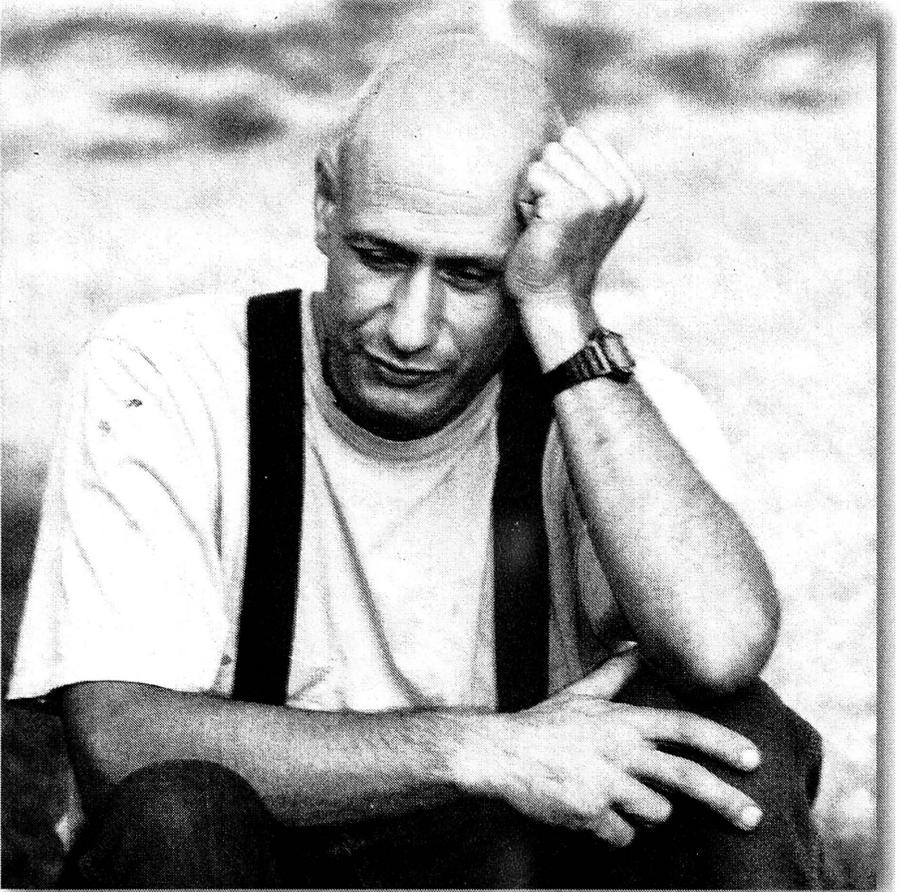
“Mark my words! I’m going to ruin Ham’s reputation. And if that doesn’t work, I’ll use a high-powered rifle! And I wouldn’t mind going to prison for it.”—Steven Bryant (Sulochan). Photo taken during a television interview with WTRF Channel 7 (Wheeling, West Virginia) at the Marshall County Jail in Moundsville, West Virginia (September 1985).



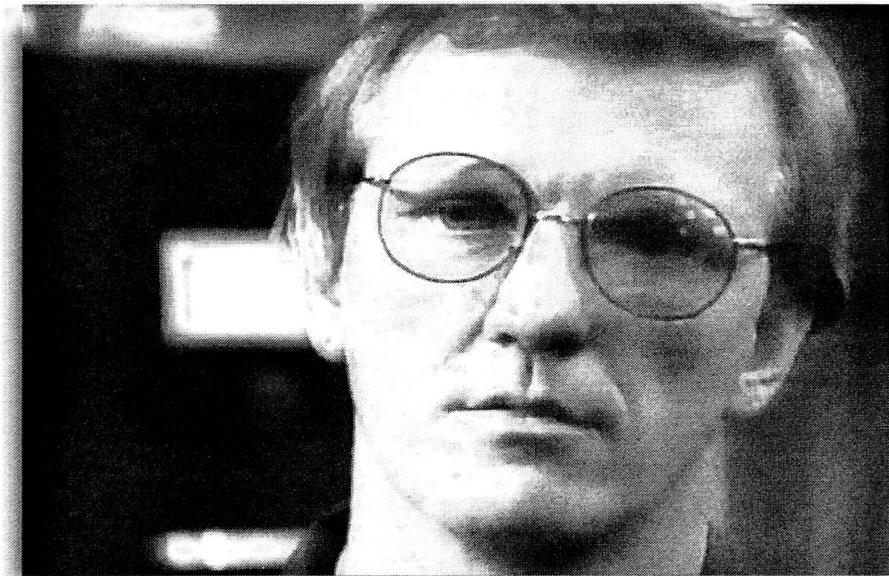
“This guy [Sulochan] is getting out of control. It would be nice if someone would silence him once and for all.”—Hayagriva (Howard Wheeler), Keith Ham’s college roommate, lover, best friend, and co-founder of New Vrindaban. Here with his life-long buddy at a Labor Day Festival at New Vrindaban (September 1984).



“We have to finish this thing. As long as that guy [Sulochan] is walking around, he’s a threat to Bhaktipada. In time the whole thing will blow over. If everything runs smoothly, they won’t be able to prove anything.”—Kuladri (Arthur Villa), New Vrindaban’s temple president, known as “Number Two.” Here officiating as a priest at a New Vrindaban fire sacrifice (1984).



When asked if he had been “involved with the killing of Sulochan,” Tapahpunja Swami boasted, “I engineered it. It was completely Vedic. He offended Bhaktipada.”—His Holiness Tapahpunja Swami (Terry Sheldon), the president of Cleveland ISKCON, at New Vrindaban (undated).



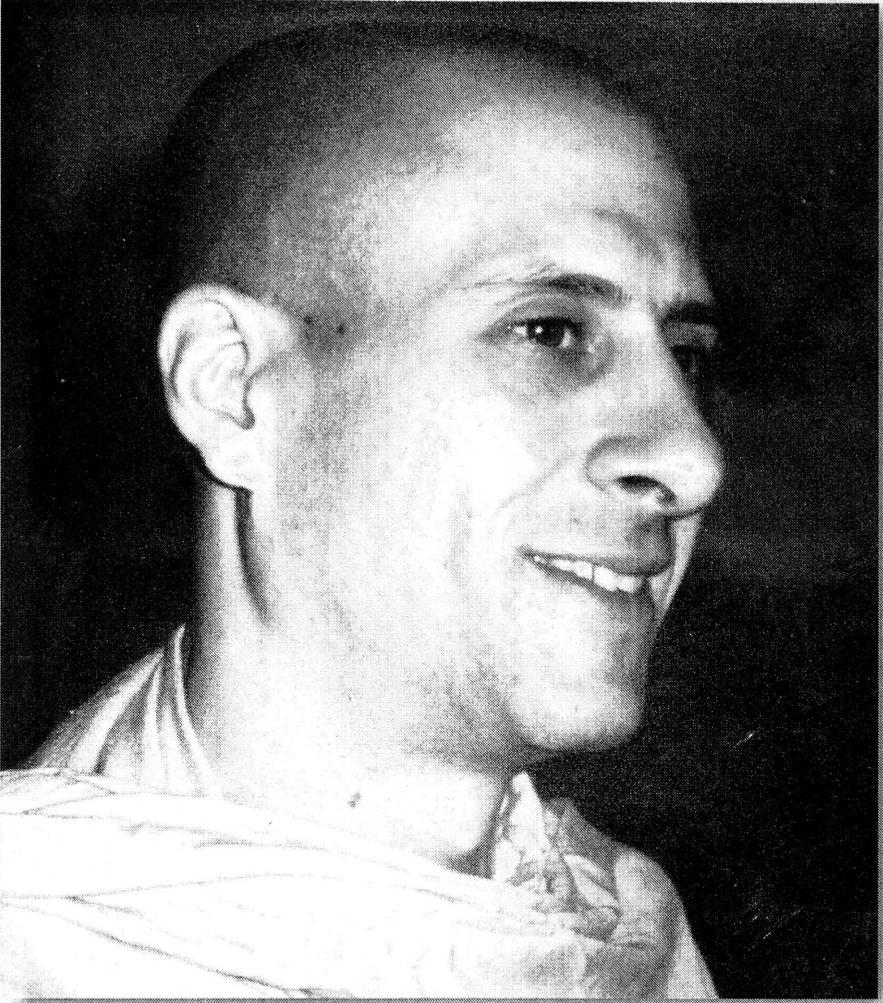
“That son of a bitch [Sulochan] is going to have to be killed, and I am the one that is going to do it.”—Tirtha (Thomas A. Drescher), New Vrindaban’s chief enforcer and hit man, in court (undated).



“Even if Kirtanananda Swami had full sex with ten thousand children, he’s still the guru of the universe, and if you don’t accept that, you’re going to hell.”—Janmastami (John Sinkowski), Tirtha’s partner in crime, chanting japa on the sidewalk in the front of the RVC temple (September 1991).



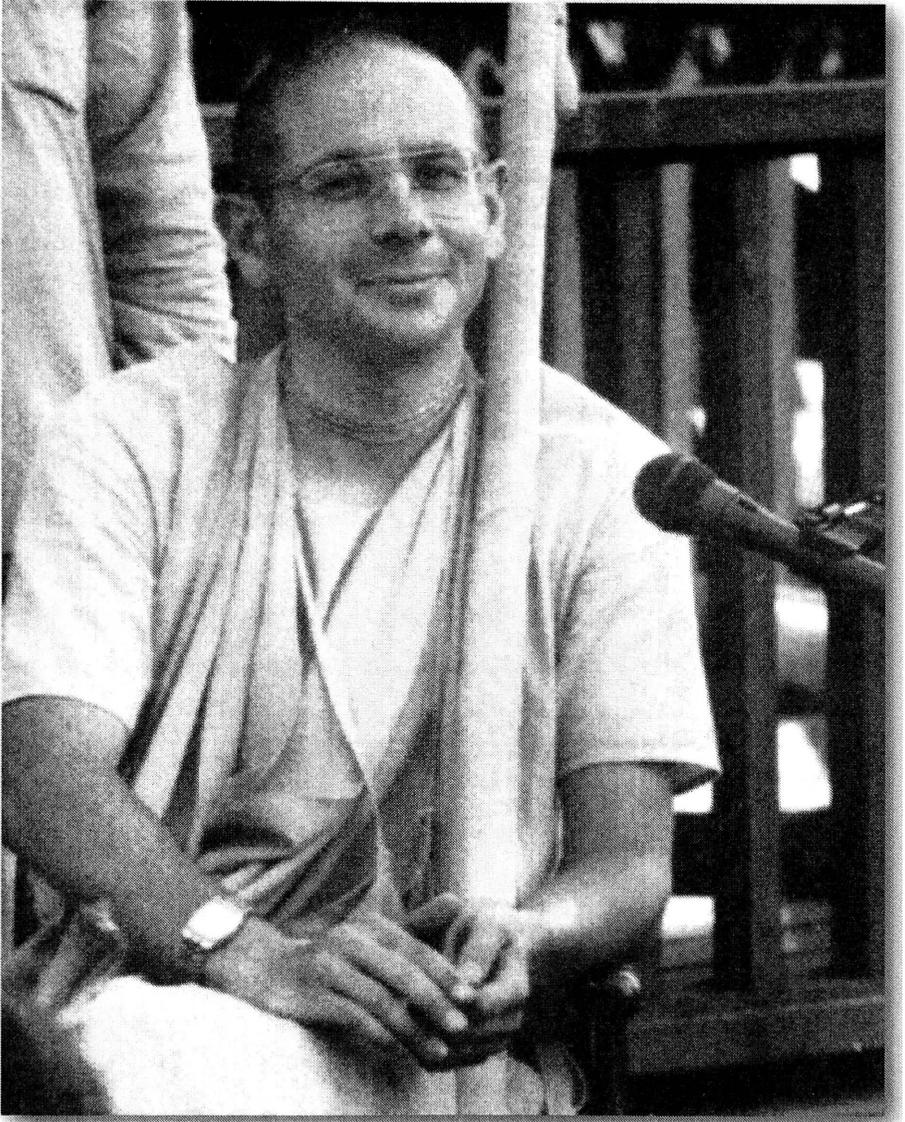
“Gorby was more fired up to destroy Sulochan than any of the devotees.” Russell “Randall” Clark Gorby, retired steel worker, longtime “friend” of New Vrindaban, vocal advocate for the murder of Sulochan, and government informant (undated).



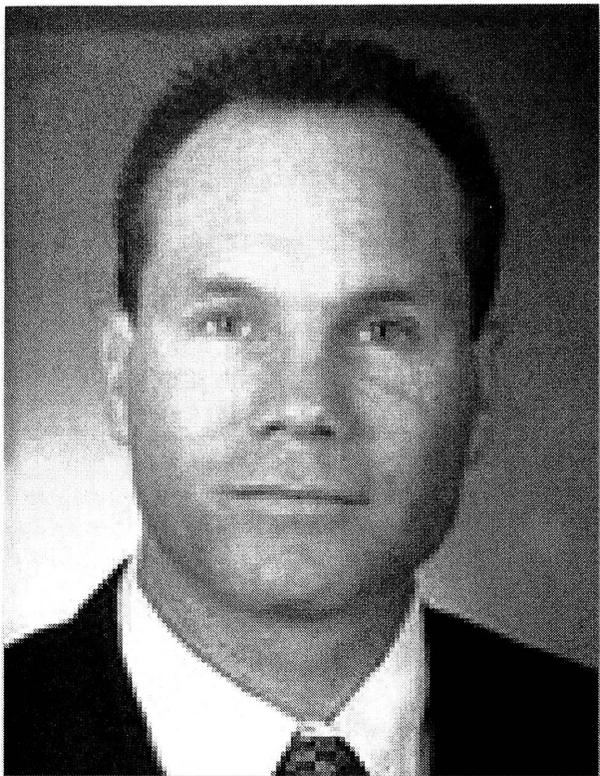
“What was I supposed to do under those circumstances? We were convinced that Bhaktipada was a pure devotee and that Sulochan was determined to murder him, so we thought we were obligated to stop some demon from killing a pure devotee by any means possible.”—His Holiness Radhanath Swami (Richard Slavin), “gentle and humble” sannyasi dearly loved by the Brijabasis (undated).



“Radhanath Swami won’t like all this coming out. Too bad. I had to be responsible for my transgressions [and go to prison]. He should do the same.”—Dharmatma (Dennis Gorrick), Director of New Vrindaban’s multi-million dollar “Scam-Kirtan” panhandling operation. Image from *Brijabasi Spirit* (January-February 1977).



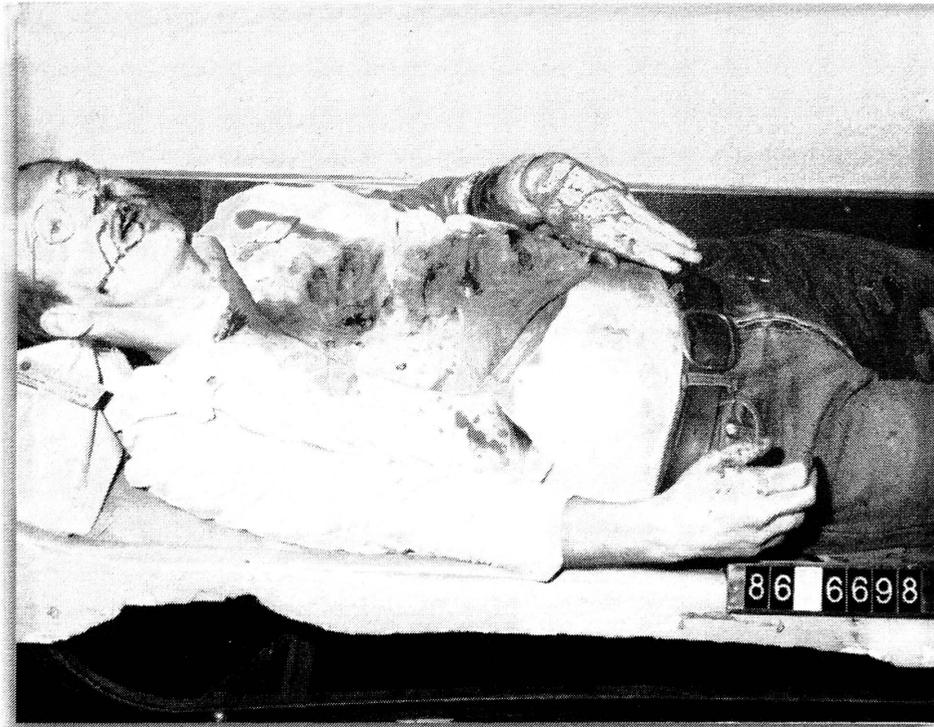
“He [Sulochan] should be transmigrated to his next body.”—“His Divine Grace” Ramesvara Maharaja (Robert Grant), the ISKCON zonal acharya for Southern California and head of the North American BBT, during a rare visit to New Vrindaban. Photo from *Brijabasi Spirit* (summer 1985).



“My guru, Ramesvara, said: ‘K. K., if you ever see Sulochan, call New Vrindaban.’ And because I heard that Sulochan may frequent the area, I kept an eye out for his vehicle.”—Krishna-Katha (Jeffrey Breier), head of security at Los Angeles ISKCON and Tirtha’s assistant. He helped hunt down Sulochan and was with Tirtha until moments before the murder. (Undated LinkedIn photo, c. 2010)



“They are constantly watching me. I know some morning I will go to sleep and not wake up.”—Sulochan (undated).



“Upon my death, that’s when everything will unfold. When I die, then everyone will see.” Government Exhibit 433: a photograph of Sulochan’s lifeless body at the Los Angeles morgue (May 22, 1986).

CHAPTER 8

Murder Conspiracy

TRIYOGI'S NEARLY-FATAL ATTACK ON BHAKTIPADA escalated the tension at New Vrindaban. Sulochan's war of words had escalated to physical violence; and that changed everything. A devoted disciple or follower would not wait any longer to take action. Tirtha recalled, "A key point was when Kirtanananda was attacked by Triyogi. That changed everything. It was no longer a war of words; it injected an element of violence. Naturally, as a good disciple, I couldn't sit by idly and wait for the job to be finished."⁴⁴⁸

Even some of the children at New Vrindaban recognized that the mood at the community had changed after Triyogi's assault on Bhaktipada. The gurukula boy, Bhima-Karma, remembered: "From that moment on [when Bhaktipada was assaulted], New Vrindaban was never the same: there was a feeling of fear and danger and passion, almost like a war was going on, which later on became like a cold fist. We got a sheriff, bullet proof jackets, guard dogs. New Vrindaban was never the same after that."⁴⁴⁹

Soon after Triyogi's assault on Bhaktipada, Sthayibhava dasa (Robert Hamilton), the head of New Vrindaban Security, held an open meeting and participants suggested various methods to help protect Bhaktipada, such as: "screening devotees through the police computers for criminal records and running checks to ascertain those who may have an unstable mental history, or disturbed records from previous temples. . . Two bodyguards are proposed to accompany Srila Bhaktipada at all times. One will act as a driver for Srila Bhaktipada."⁴⁵⁰

Sthayibhava also drafted men in the community to do compulsory night-guard duty. For a few months I served as a night watchman at Bahulaban during a four-hour shift about once a week, along with Madhu-Mangala (James Phillips). For a time Tapomurti dasa (Todd Schenker) and others served as Bhaktipada's ever-present bodyguards, but Bhaktipada found their presence stifling. He said he liked his privacy. This was unusual, as a saintly person, according to sastra, does not need or demand privacy: his life is an open book.

During a lecture in New York, Prabhupada explained, "Sadhu, those who are saintly person, for them there is no secret. There is no secret. There is no privacy. A sadhu has no privacy. Just now in our ordinary social affairs, there is difference between private life and his public life. Now, if somebody is teacher... Now, he is very good teacher. He can very good... He can explain very nicely a subject matter, but his private life is not very good. Then he is not a teacher. He is not a sadhu. That is Vedic conception."⁴⁵¹

Bhaktipada insisted that he didn't want bodyguards; he preferred guard dogs. He explained: "Someone suggested that I should have bodyguards. I had them for a week and I wouldn't tolerate it. I told them: 'If you want to do something, get me a dog. I think I can live with a dog.'"⁴⁵²

In March 1986, Bhaktipada acquired two guard dogs: a German shepherd which he named Gudakesh ("one who never sleeps") and a schnauzer which he named Gurudasa ("servant of the guru"). Kuladri explained: "Bhaktipada said he didn't want people [bodyguards] hanging around him. He wanted his privacy, and he spent ten or fifteen thousand dollars on police dogs instead."⁴⁵³

Years later, we discovered one important reason why Bhaktipada had insisted on having his privacy: so he could more easily enjoy performing night-time fellatio on the teenage boys who lived in their own private ashram in his house, just a few dozen steps from his bedroom. All other ashrams for New Vrindaban youth had an adult (or sometimes a teenage) moderator to keep track of the gurukula residents and maintain the standard, but the

older boys who lived at Bhaktipada's house had no adult supervision, except for Bhaktipada himself. Bhaktipada designed it that way.

SULOCHAN PRAISES TRIYOGI'S ASSAULT

After hearing about Triyogi's attack on Bhaktipada, Sulochan "wrote to Triyogi and congratulated him for his violent act."⁴⁵⁴ In addition, Sulochan couldn't resist writing his own commentary about Triyogi's assault: a fifteen-page essay—"Violence In ISKCON: Caution"—in which he claimed that Bhaktipada lived by violence and that, if Triyogi recognized the offenses Bhaktipada was committing against Prabhupada, it would have been a noble motivation for killing him.

In his essay, Sulochan noted that Narada-Muni, in *Srimad-bhagavatam*, claimed that even if one renders service unknowingly to a pure devotee, one makes spiritual advancement. He therefore postulated that, if one killed an offender to the pure devotee, one would also make spiritual advancement. Killing for Krishna, Sulochan believed, was authorized by *Srimad-bhagavatam*.

"Violence in ISKCON" also warned the ISKCON gurus that they had more or less declared open season on themselves, and they had no one else to blame. Sulochan predicted it was only a matter of time before each guru was dead or wished they were. Sulochan wrote:

Regarding the recent attack on Kirtanananda, many devotees simply don't know what to think. Whatever Triyogi's immediate motivation may have been, personal or otherwise, we know that the remote or original cause was the false platform of these "gurus." Had they been honest and sincere from the beginning, then this, and all the other acts of violence over the years, would not have been possible. . . .

Kirtanananda lived by violence. He personally authorized so much physical violence against his godbrothers and godsisters that it was no surprise to us that his punishment also came by violence. . . . By failing to rectify themselves at [the North American GBC and Temple Presidents

meeting at] New Vrindaban on September 16th, these “gurus” more or less declared open season on themselves and they have no one else to blame. It is only a matter of time before each “guru” is dead or wishes he were. This is just a fact of life. Their fate is sealed by their own actions.

Regarding the guilt or innocence of Triyogi dasa, that can be looked at in several ways. Kirtanananda certainly deserved to be executed but whether or not Triyogi had the right to do it is the question. . . . Triyogi is also a disciple of Srila Prabhupada and if he had recognized the offenses Kirtanananda was committing to Prabhupada, that would have been a noble motivation for killing him. . . .

He [Triyogi] can also expect a reward for performing a deed that will save others from spiritual ruin at the hands of Kirtanananda. It is said in the story of Narada-Muni that even if one unknowingly serves a pure devotee he gets the same benefit. So it makes logical sense that if one unknowingly kills an offender to a pure devotee, then he will also get the benefit.⁴⁵⁵

In December 1985, Tapahpunja received a telephone call from someone in Laguna Beach who claimed to be a former New Vrindaban resident to warn him that Sulochan might attempt to murder Bhaktipada. Tapahpunja remembered, “About six weeks after Shockman’s attack, as Bhaktipada made his recovery, I received an anonymous phone call from Laguna Beach, California, from a person who claimed to be a former resident of New Vrindaban. The caller said he didn’t want to take sides, but was worried about Bhaktipada’s safety. The caller informed me that he had seen Bryant in the Laguna Beach Hare Krishna restaurant and that Bryant was boasting that ‘he was going to finish what Shockman had started,’ and that ‘Bhaktipada got what he deserved.’”⁴⁵⁶

THE ALLEGED COLLABORATION BETWEEN SULOCHAN AND TRIYOGI

New Vrindaban authorities suspected that Triyogi had been influenced by Sulochan, although no evidence existed to prove their assumption. Bhaktipada later claimed that Triyogi and Sulochan had plotted together.

He said, “They held the same opinions. They were in the same temple [Detroit], they were from the same places. Who wouldn’t conclude that they were working in concert?”⁴⁵⁷

Tirtha explained: “Sulochan foolishly intimidated that he had a hand in coaching Triyogi’s attack. That was akin to signing his own death warrant. Sulochan was already greatly disliked at New Vrindaban due to his rambling exposé, *The Guru Business*. Plus he openly advocated the use of violence against all of the ISKCON gurus. Quite naturally, Sulochan became a prime target for New Vrindaban’s frustration and anger.”⁴⁵⁸

On December 4th, Bhaktipada held a press conference in his home during which he called Triyogi a “crazy fanatic” who had been “influenced” by Sulochan.⁴⁵⁹ Bhaktipada said that he was not surprised by the October 27th attack: “A person who is a servant of God has to live with these things. I think whenever you have a spiritual force, you have a counter force. The assailant was a crazy madman.”⁴⁶⁰

In a December 6th letter to United Press International, Sulochan wrote: “These . . . gurus are ruthless men and would not hesitate to kill anyone who threatens them. . . . There is nothing wrong with the religion, only leaders who have become absolutely corrupt.”⁴⁶¹

Sheriff Bordenkircher, on the other hand, said investigators had dismissed any likelihood that Triyogi’s attack on Bhaktipada involved a conspiracy with Sulochan. He said: “There’s no evidence of that. In the beginning, there was a concern [of a conspiracy]—and I think the concern was reasonable, but we found nothing to indicate that.”⁴⁶² Bordenkircher continued: “When it comes down to the act of one person—being Shockman—assaulting the Swami. . . the crime itself; it is clear to us after a thorough investigation that there was no conspiracy. It appears to be that Shockman may well share some of the philosophical differences that Bryant has with the nation of Krishna.”⁴⁶³

Tapahpunja admitted that Triyogi acted independently, but that he had nonetheless been influenced by hearing Sulochan’s blasphemy.

Tapahpunja said, “Shockman acted independently, but his decision to take action was based on hearing this anti-Bhaktipada blasphemy for months from Bryant.”⁴⁶⁴

Tapahpunja continued, “Shockman had been reading Bryant’s writing. He was a nut who fell under the influence of Bryant’s writing. Bryant triggered that psychosis. It wasn’t just Shockman. He came to the decision to kill Bhaktipada because other ISKCON leaders were criticizing Bhaktipada endlessly for years. New Vrindaban is the most successful Hare Krishna temple but it is criticized like crazy. Even while the Palace was being built we were criticized for not selling books. They (ISKCON) always complained. A real devotee of God, when he sees another devotee is successful, glorifies that person and takes advice from that person.”⁴⁶⁵

Sulochan’s best friend, Puranjana, explained why Sulochan and Triyogi could not possibly have been cohorts:

So the rumor was started that Sulochan was good friends with Triyogi and that they had planned the attack. This made no sense to the intelligent observer however. Triyogi wanted to get “voted in as a guru” and Sulochan, well, he hated the idea that a guru could be rubber stamped. Sulochan also said that if a person got a guru rubber stamp from Kirtanananda he would be “a certified faggot,” not just a “regular faggot.” And Sulochan also thought that Triyogi was “a jerk” and not a person who was qualified to be voted in as a guru. Similarly, Triyogi disagreed with our idea that guru voting is foolish and bogus.

Also, if the attack had been “planned,” why did Triyogi attack in the open in front of eyewitnesses, and especially when there were a number of Kirtanananda’s followers nearby—who could have killed him in retaliation? This was not a planned attack, this was a spontaneous outburst of extreme anger.⁴⁶⁶

Although many investigated the alleged collaboration between Sulochan and Triyogi and found no collusion, one devotee in Los Angeles years later provided some information which suggests that Sulochan might possibly

have planted the idea of delivering a severe blow to Bhaktipada's head in Triyogi's mind. One of Sulochan's friends remembered:

I was alarmed when Sulochan was staying at my place in Los Angeles, and would wave his gun around, saying that he was going to go to New Vrindaban and kill K. Swami. I did not want him to do this, as Sulochan was my very good friend. Disingenuously, I suggested that if K. Swami were killed by an assassin, he would be sainted and seen as a "holy martyr." I suggested (to get him away from his idea of shooting K. Swami) that it would be much more to the point if he were to arrange for K. Swami to suffer a debilitating blow to the head, leaving him alive, but drooling and retarded-sounding.

Sulochan did not sound convinced, but I had put that possibility on the table, and I hoped that he would give up the "shooting" idea. You can imagine my astonishment [after hearing about Triyogi's attack on Kirtanananda] when I found out that Sulochan had apparently suggested to Triyogi dasa what I had suggested to Sulochan! ⁴⁶⁷

Tirtha also heard that Sulochan had coached Triyogi. "After the attack on Kirtanananda it became readily apparent that Sulochan was the main culprit behind everything. He'd promised a 'blood bath,' making repeated threats of violence against Kirtanananda and other members of the New Vrindaban community. Not fully comprehending the gravity of his own words and the volatile situation at hand, Sulochan proudly took credit for the attack on Kirtanananda. He boasted of giving Triyogi encouragement, saying he wouldn't hesitate to encourage others to kill Kirtanananda. He called for a jihad, asking others to take up the cause of cleansing the Krishna movement of the usurpers. After the attempt on Kirtanananda's life, Sulochan's threats were taken seriously." ⁴⁶⁸

High-ranking New Vrindaban leaders—after enduring the unbearable agony of waiting to see if their beloved spiritual father would wake from his coma and recover, and then reading Sulochan's brazen fifteen-page document praising Triyogi's devastating assault on Bhaktipada—met secretly to formulate a more radical course of action to protect their

master. Simply providing bodyguards and guard dogs would not do. An aggressive and proactive campaign would have to be implemented immediately. They would not allow Bhaktipada to be attacked again.

SECRET MEETINGS

In November 1986, after visiting his unconscious master at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, Tapahpunja was emotionally distraught by Bhaktipada's close brush with death, and resolved that "should Bhaktipada wake from his coma, I would protect him with my life." Tapahpunja described his realizations during an interview with a private investigator, who reported, "Sheldon said that Bhaktipada's near death had a very dramatic emotional impact on his life. He said his earlier fears about Bhaktipada's safety [from hearing threats from Sulochan] were brought to life. He said that he felt helpless and paralyzed with indecision about his future if Bhaktipada should die. Sheldon said that he stood over Bhaktipada's bed for days watching him struggle for life, realizing that his life, without Bhaktipada's guidance, was meaningless. Sheldon resolved that should Bhaktipada wake from his coma that he would protect him with his life."⁴⁶⁹

Tapahpunja Swami chastised Kuladri for not protecting Bhaktipada from Triyogi's attack, for not having an organized security program in place to protect their spiritual master. Kuladri explained: "Tapahpunja had expressed his concern that I . . . the president [of New Vrindaban], and the Board [of Directors] were not doing what we should or could to see that Bhaktipada was protected. And that he offered, if any opportunity arose, that he would like to come down [from Cleveland], and help assist or take some project that would help insure the safety of Bhaktipada. He indicated that I had not done enough to protect Bhaktipada from getting hit on the head."⁴⁷⁰

After visiting Bhaktipada in the Pittsburgh hospital, it seems that Tapahpunja came to New Vrindaban and discussed the formation of

a security team with New Vrindaban management. Considering his decision to “protect Bhaktipada with his life,” and his chastisement of Kuladri and offer to come to New Vrindaban and “take some project that would help insure the safety of Bhaktipada,” we consider it highly probable.

We know for certain that there were high-level-clearance security meetings at New Vrindaban, and that the attendees at these meetings concluded that Sulochan posed a clear danger to Bhaktipada. None thought that the community could continue without Bhaktipada’s leadership; they believed their lives depended on him. The top men concluded that, if push came to shove, it would be better for Sulochan to leave his body rather than Bhaktipada. During secret, high-level management meetings in November and December 1985, New Vrindaban leaders unanimously decided that Sulochan must be “eliminated” for good. In a letter to the author, Tirtha explained:

At several high-level management meetings, I was invited to attend. It was jointly agreed that Sulochan posed a clear and present danger to Kirtanananda (others also). The top men concluded that it was preferable to deal with the fallout of Sulochan’s death than Kirtanananda’s. No one thought they could continue on without Kirtanananda. He was that important to them. It was as if their lives depended on him. To a man they agreed they couldn’t imagine going on—as a community or as devotees—if Kirtanananda was killed. The only solution presented was that Sulochan be eliminated.

And if somehow he [Sulochan] slipped through [and killed Kirtanananda] because no one had the *cajones* [balls] or faith in Krishna to do the needful—well you’ll have to live with being a coward for the rest of your life.⁴⁷¹

At another time, Tirtha claimed that, during the meetings with the murder conspirators (he specifically named Kuladri, Radhanath, Gorby and Dharmatma), they attempted to get him “psyched up” to do the deed.

“There was a number of meetings,” Tirtha claimed, “with Villa and . . . Radhanath . . . and . . . Gorby . . . and Gorrick. . . . There was a lot of discussion on the Bryant thing . . . before the fact. . . . I had more discussions with Villa on it in preparation than anyone else. . . . Mostly, it was them . . . looking back . . . pumping me up. . . . Trying to get me . . . psyched up to do it.”⁴⁷²

Not all of the top New Vrindaban managers, however, supported the conspiracy to murder Sulochan; some thought that assassinating a godbrother was not the best solution to the problem. Those devotees, however, who recognized that the New Vrindaban community—from the highest sannyasis and top managers to the lowest pot washers—had become a personality cult, were in the minority. Fearing the fanaticism of the “Cult of Kirtanananda,” those who were more sober and less emotionally invested decided to leave the community for good rather than betray their better judgment and get involved in or witness the murder of a godbrother.

Narada-Muni dasa (Lenny Rader), who had served under Bhaktipada as president of the Columbus ISKCON temple in the late 1970s and as director of New Vrindaban Village Estates in the early 1980s, left the community with his family when he saw that “complete fanaticism” had taken over. During a telephone conversation with the author, Narada-Muni remembered: “I left in December 1985, soon after Kirtanananda returned to New Vrindaban from the hospital after his attack. The community had become a personality cult, not an authorized religion. I could see what was down the road: complete fanaticism.”⁴⁷³

TIRTHA RECRUITED AS HIT MAN

Randall Gorby suggested to Hayagriva that Tirtha should eliminate Sulochan. Gorby insisted: “Let Tirtha take care of him. Tirtha’s the best man for the job.” Hayagriva, in turn, spoke to Bhaktipada, and later told

Tirtha that Bhaktipada wanted Sulochan to “disappear.” Tirtha recalled, “After Triyogi attacked Kirtanananda, Hayagriva again spoke to me about Sulochan. I asked him whether Kirtanananda himself wanted it done. He [Hayagriva] said that . . . he talked to him about it, and he’d like to see the man disappear, but he [Bhaktipada] reiterated he didn’t want to have any personal involvement.”⁴⁷⁴

Hayagriva also spoke to Kuladri and, on Gorby’s instigation, recommended that Tirtha should “deal with Sulochan.” Kuladri remembered: “This was outside the temple area in a parking lot. Hayagriva drove up in a pickup truck with Gorby. . . He was very concerned . . . very concerned about the safety of Bhaktipada, and therefore said that we had to do whatever was necessary to protect Bhaktipada. And he said that he had spoken with Randall Gorby, and Gorby had suggested to him, and he agreed, that Tirtha should be asked to deal with Sulochan. And that for eight or ten thousand dollars [to pay for surveillance expenses] he could be [engaged] to deal with Sulochan.”^{475 476}

Gaura-Shakti also confirmed Gorby’s passion to get rid of the former New Vrindaban resident. Gaura-Shakti explained, “Randall Gorby . . . suggested putting nails under the tires [of Sulochan’s vehicle], breaking into it, sabotaging it so that it would break down, and follow behind him and pick him up in a van and take him for a long ride out in the country, beat him up. . . . Randall Gorby had suggested things like this on several different occasions.”⁴⁷⁷

Bhaktipada recalled, “Randall Gorby was of the opinion, and he expressed it on a number of times, that the only way to stop this guy, Sulochan, was to silence him permanently.”⁴⁷⁸ In an interview with the author, Tirtha fingered Gorby as one of the main instigators in the conspiracy to murder Sulochan:

One of the main figures involved in promoting the idea for a need to kill Sulochan was Randall Gorby. He was a local figure who befriended Kirtanananda and the devotees in 1973 when New Vrindaban was

attacked by thugs from a biker gang. Later Kirtanananda used him as a straw man to purchase properties for the community. He was also a friend of Hayagriva and myself. . . .

Gorby actively recruited me in the beginning, saying that the New Vrindaban devotees were sitting on their hands while Kirtanananda was in grave danger. He seemed to have a direct line to the police, which I found to be odd. Later I would learn he was a police informant for many years. He made some convincing arguments, which at the time seemed plausible, though we didn't need a lot of convincing. . . .

An assessment was made for the worst case scenario. Which was worse, losing Kirtanananda, having him murdered by a lunatic "fringe," or the fallout from having Sulochan killed? That's why the decision was made to kill Sulochan somewhere away from New Vrindaban. It seemed to be an either/or situation. Gorby certainly fed into the situation, helped plan things, etc. He provided some technical advice, things of that sort. ⁴⁷⁹

GORBY: GOVERNMENT INFORMANT

Some months later, after the murder, New Vrindaban leaders discovered that Gorby was in league with law enforcement; he had close contact with the West Virginia State Police and allowed them to record his phone calls. But until then, only a few devotees suspected that Gorby might have had "friends in the government." Hayagriva's wife at the time, Purnamasi dasi (Susan Joseph), recalled, "A few days later [after Triyogi smashed Bhaktipada on the head] we [my husband and I] were at Gorby's house and he told me, 'Ya know, New Vrindaban is going to go down, and Bhaktipada with it. My friends in the government have a plan, and they will make sure. You'll see!'" ⁴⁸⁰

Purnamasi found this odd, and she spoke about it to others. Another source corroborated, "Shortly before Christmas (1985), Randall mentioned to Purnamasi that soon 'Bhaktipada will come tumbling down, and the whole community with him.'" ⁴⁸¹

For nearly twenty years, since Kirtanananda Swami and Hayagriva first came to live at Richard Rose's run-down 19th-century farmhouse which became New Vrindaban, Gorby had been friendly to the devotees. When local neighbors refused to sell their property to New Vrindaban, Gorby assisted by purchasing the properties for them, then turning over the deeds to the community. Hayagriva used to bring his young homosexual Mexican lovers for overnight "sporting activities" at Gorby's guest house, adjacent to his home, in Bethany, West Virginia, and when Tirtha was exiled from New Vrindaban in 1983 for the murder of Chakradhari, he lived with Gorby for a time. Tirtha claimed that Gorby "was like a father to me." ⁴⁸²

Why would Randall Gorby turn against New Vrindaban? Some said he had grievances against certain members of the community. Gorby was allegedly angry at Parambrahma—a former President of the Old Vrindaban Farm, an important manager in the New Vrindaban planning department, and a married man—for having a sexual affair with Gorby's daughter-in-law. Attorney Robert H. McWilliams claimed, "Mr. Ferry was sleeping with Mr. Gorby's daughter-in-law and Mr. Gorby essentially was going to get him if it was the last thing he did." ⁴⁸³ Parambrahma admitted that he had been "sleeping around with Mr. Gorby's daughter-in-law." ⁴⁸⁴

When questioned however, Gorby indicated that Parambrahma's affair with his son's wife didn't cause him too much trouble and, in fact, he claimed he continued his friendship with P. B. When asked if the adultery caused "any great consternation" on his part, Gorby explained, "Not on my part. My wife and the rest of the family objected to it. I talked to my son who was directly involved, and he and his wife were having trouble with their marriage prior to this happening. No, I don't think it caused too much trouble." ⁴⁸⁵

Another source indicated that Randall claimed that New Vrindaban cheated him out of \$1,500 and then he began plotting against the community. "Through the retrospective, Randall had been

plotting against the community for some time. He had told Hayagriva that he was going to sue because he felt that he . . . had gotten a 'raw deal' from Sundarakar and the Palace Press over some brochures they had printed for their planned ski resort in Elkins, West Virginia (or thereabouts). Randall felt that he had been cheated out of \$1,500 because he received the printing matter late, and the quality had not been what he expected." ⁴⁸⁶

What is known for certain is that after Sulochan was murdered, Gorby kept in close contact with law enforcement authorities and some of his phone conversations were recorded by the State Police. Whether he served as a government informant prior to this time is not known, although based on his statement to Paurnamasi late in 1985, the probability is likely that he could have been.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATES THE CULTS

At a press conference at the Pittsburgh International Airport in June 1987, Bhaktipada claimed that the U. S. federal government was trying to destroy New Vrindaban. He said:

We can see that actually the whole thing [the criminal charges against New Vrindaban] is a matter of religious persecution. Actually this is being called the "A. R. M."—the "Anti-Religious Movement." . . . There was a decision made on the federal level about eighteen months ago to get rid of the cults. . . .

Actually, it's a good sign. Jesus Christ says in the fifteenth chapter of St. John that "If you were of the world, the world would love you. But because you're not of the world, because I've called you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." He said, "Be of good cheer. Before they persecuted you, they persecuted me." So to be persecuted for one's beliefs is not a bad thing. It puts us in very good company. After all, Socrates was made to drink the hemlock cup, reportedly on a charge of child molestation. ⁴⁸⁷

Janmastami claimed that the government had infiltrated the biggest cults in America; Gorby was not alone: other professional “snitches” spied on ISKCON and other new religious and political movements, and were paid for their services. He suspected that some of these informants, after gaining the trust of cult leaders, encouraged cult leadership to commit illegal activities, simply so they could be prosecuted, found guilty and made to pay heavy penalties. Tirtha and Tapahpunja also came to believe that Gorby intentionally helped incite the murder of Sulochan to give the federal government a good reason to come down hard on the New Vrindaban Community. Was it possible, as Bhaktipada and his associates claimed, that the federal government was trying to destroy New Vrindaban?

Janmastami met a man at the Philadelphia ISKCON Sunday feast program, whom he hired to help with his business selling flowers on the street. Later, after the two became friendly, the man admitted that he worked on the side as a government agent. Janmastami explained:

A fellow who regularly visited the Philadelphia temple, a person who came to work for me for the entire time I was in Philly, came to me from the Sunday feast . . . and after working for me for some time eventually told me he was an operative for the government. He was a “snitch”—a paid informant—and nothing more, and they [the government] couldn’t care less if he was killed or not. The informant’s name was Joshua Kunkle, a low-life street urchin from Philly who used to sell drugs to then-up-to seven members of the devotee community in the Philly area.

Kunkle testified against us—the New Vrindaban Community and I—in the data collection for the [1991] trial, but his testimony (and my involvement in these events) was never entered into the court record because it took the blame away from Kirtanananda Swami, where they wanted it placed, and put it at the feet of his subordinates who actually did the planning of events that occurred.⁴⁸⁸

I know these things because [Kunkle told me] the FBI had a list of “subversive organizations” that they were after. ISKCON New

Vrindaban was number four on this list, after Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Lyndon LaRouche, and Reverend Sun Myung Moon. ⁴⁸⁹

In fact, this is where the plan to infiltrate “moved to the next level,” that is to say, this is a second point (Randall being one of the others that we know of) where the FBI started to try to steer the direction of the actions that New Vrindaban “was capable of” into the point where it was actions that New Vrindaban had “perpetrated” and was therefore “responsible for.” ⁴⁹⁰

Was this government infiltration of New Vrindaban, alleged by Janmastami, Tapahpunja and Tirtha, fact or fantasy? We may never know the actual extent of the infiltration, but we do know for a fact that after the November 1978 murder of California Congressman Leo Joseph Ryan, Jr. by a member of the Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ—a cult from California founded by Reverend Jim Jones—and the cyanide poisoning deaths of 909 members at the cult’s “Jonestown” farm in northwestern Guyana, the United States federal government began investigating the nation’s largest cults. ⁴⁹¹

* Joint House-Senate hearings on “The Cult Phenomenon in the United States” were conducted during February 1979 at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington D. C. and chaired by Senator Bob Dole from Kansas. One speaker indicated that ISKCON was high on the government’s cult list. Jim Siegelman, a recipient of the Leo J. Ryan Award and a Fiske Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and author of the anti-cult books *Snapping*, *Holy Terror*, and *Dark Hero of the Information Age*, testified: “We focused our investigations on the five largest cults: the Hare Krishna, Scientology, Divine Light Mission, Unification Church, the Way International and to smaller groups.” ⁴⁹²

Another speaker at the joint House-Senate hearings, the attorney for the murdered Congressman Leo Ryan, specifically mentioned the New Vrindaban Community and petitioned Congress to “exercise leadership in the manner of cults and mind control.”

Some religious cults with federal tax-exempt status as religious organizations are apparently stockpiling weapons according to reports in the *Washington Post* and other newspapers. One such report stated the West Virginia headquarters of the Hare Krishna organization has a vast arsenal of weaponry stockpiled. . . . Such hoarding of weapons must be questioned when it appears such collection goes beyond the scope of an individual's Constitutional right to self-defense. . . . The Congress has a responsibility to the American people Equally, the Congress must exercise leadership in the manner of cults and mind control. ⁴⁹³

TIRTHA BEGINS SEARCHING FOR SULOCHAN

Tirtha became involved in surveillance sometime in October, probably only a few days after Triyogi's attack, while Bhaktipada was still in a coma in the hospital. Tirtha's early involvement in the surveillance was confirmed by Daruka dasa (Daniel Reid) in Los Angeles (a former New Vrindaban accountant, bookkeeper, and Tirtha's accomplice in the murder of Chakradhari two years earlier), who remembered: "During October 1985, Tirtha called me and told me about Triyogi's attack and said that he suspected that Sulochan was involved with that somehow. And he wanted to know whether if I had seen Sulochan anywhere around Los Angeles or anything. I said I had seen him around, yes. He wanted to know where he might be. And he also said, if he was involved, we should get him. My interpretation was he wanted to kill him if he was involved in the beating of Swami. I asked another friend if he had seen Sulochan, and he told me he moved up to . . . Visalia, which is another farm outside of Los Angeles that belongs to the Krishna organization. I relayed this information to Tirtha by telephone." ⁴⁹⁴

Bhaktipada was unaware of the surveillance and murder conspiracy, at least in the beginning. Although he had been asked about surveillance, he dismissed the idea. Bhaktipada remembered, "During these months [after I returned from the hospital], I played no part in the management

of anything. I do recall that the question of surveillance came up and I laughed at it. I said, ‘Why do you want to do that?’”⁴⁹⁵

One Brijabasi confirmed Bhaktipada’s reluctance to retaliate against Sulochan, “After Bhaktipada got hit in the head, the devotees became really angry; like if you kicked a nest of hornets. I was sitting in Bhaktipada’s house, or maybe it was in the temple room, but I remember some senior devotees came up to him and said, ‘Something has to be done,’ about Sulochan. Bhaktipada responded, ‘Leave it alone. We don’t have to retaliate.’”⁴⁹⁶

JANMASTAMI RECRUITED AS HIT MAN

Janmastami explained how he was recruited to assist in the assassination of Sulochan: “In January of 1986, on my return to New Vrindaban [after the Christmas marathon], I was ordered by Radhanath . . . not by Kirtanananda Swami, to terminate Sulochan. This happened with Tapahpunja Swami and Tirtha in November and December of 1985. I was on traveling sankirtan until Christmas and didn’t get back to the farm until New Years. Immediately on our arrival at New Vrindaban, Radhanath sought me out and made arrangements for us to meet in his van, where he went through a prepared speech that he had delivered to Tirtha, Tapahpunja Swami and Kuladri many times before. Later talks with Tirtha confirmed this.”⁴⁹⁷

Janmastami claimed that Radhanath flattered him, “You are one of those rare few that Krishna has endowed with the ksatriya spirit and the courage enough to do what has to be done.”⁴⁹⁸ Janmastami remembered his conversation with Radhanath Swami in more detail:

Radhanath was saying to those he was giving marching orders to: “Sulochan poses a life threat to both Kuladri and to Kirtanananda Swami. . . . For that reason alone, this guy must be transmigrated to his next body.” Radhanath was clear in his meaning beyond any shadow of a doubt. “Now that Srila Prabhupada has left us, the entire fate of this movement—*our* movement, Lord Chaitanya’s movement—rests in

Kirtanananda Swami's hands, and according to our nature, it is up to us to do whatever we can to help the movement in that regard." . . .

Radhanath had made his pitch to at least a half a dozen sets of sympathetic ears before someone raised these *Gita* related questions: "How have these impurities come upon you? They are not at all befitting a man who knows the progressive values of life." "The words existent and non-existent refer only to spirit and matter. Why worry?" "How can a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, unborn, eternal, and immutable, kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?"

Tough questions, but from a submissive audience. Radhanath was undaunted. He quoted Krishna in his response to a potentially explosive volley of inquiry: "Everything has its proper utility, and a man situated in complete knowledge knows how and where to apply a thing, so there is no possibility of sinful reaction. Also, considering your specific duty as a ksatriya. . . ."

That settled it. The order was there from your bona-fide spiritual authority and it was based on scripture, directly from Krishna. Either you followed those instructions or you were going to hell! ⁴⁹⁹

Janmastami's story was collaborated by others. Bhaktipada's chauffeur claimed: "I was privy to much behind-the-scenes action, and I was there when Radhanath told Janmastami to 'destroy the demon.'" ⁵⁰⁰ A teenage boy, who worked closely under Janmastami's supervision for about a decade, claimed Radhanath Swami said to Janmastami, "He's a demon, and demons have to die." ⁵⁰¹

Another devotee remembered in more detail, "It was January 1986, soon after the Christmas marathon, as I recall. I happened to enter the temple from the back door by the pujari room with Janmastami. It was japa time, maybe a half hour before mangal-aroti. Devotees were chanting japa, many pacing back and forth while chanting. I noticed Radhanath was talking to Kuladri; they were both walking side by side in the temple room. Janmastami joined them and I stood alongside Janmastami. There was some conversation and I overheard Radhanath tell Janmastami, "The demon must die." It sounded

like Radhanath was quoting sastra; he spoke with authority and conviction. I did not know at the time what was going on, but in retrospect, it seems perfectly clear to me now that they were speaking of Sulochan.”⁵⁰²

Others also incriminated Radhanath Swami in the murder plot. Kuladri indirectly implicated Radhanath when he said: “I know Tapahpunja, along with other swamis, were saying that the community had to do whatever is necessary to protect the Swami [Kirtanananda].”⁵⁰³ At this time there were only three swamis at New Vrindaban: Kirtanananda, Tapahpunja and Radhanath.

Dharmatma, the Director of Sankirtan, claimed that Kuladri told him: “Radhanath, Hayagriva and Tapahpunja were pushing like crazy for this [murder] to happen.”⁵⁰⁴ Dharmatma wrote later: “With all due respect, as I do like him [Radhanath] as a person, and he is a sweet devotee, but still he was involved to some degree or had knowledge of Sulochan’s murder. I know this for a fact.”⁵⁰⁵

During an interview with investigators in 1989, Kuladri directly implicated Radhanath Swami in the murder conspiracy and also indicated that Radhanath had probably spoken about it to Bhaktipada.

Q. Let’s go back now to Richard Slavin talking and making these preachings [to do whatever is necessary to protect the Swami]. Is there any question in your mind . . . whether Kirtanananda knew that Slavin was preaching . . . [that] the devotees had to do whatever it took to protect their Swami, who was a representative of God? Did Kirtanananda know that Slavin was making these preachings?

A. You know, I would say yes, because Radhanath Swami, Richard Slavin, was always talking with Kirtanananda because he represented Kirtanananda. He would invite people to take initiation from Kirtanananda. He was opening temples for Kirtanananda, so he was always in communication with Kirtanananda, and his preaching would always reflect Kirtanananda’s desire.⁵⁰⁶

TIRTHA NAMES SEVEN CONSPIRATORS

Around 1994, law enforcement officials recorded a conversation of Tirtha in prison speaking with a close friend. The friend is unnamed in the transcript. We do not know if the conversation was a telephone conversation, or a face-to-face conversation in the visiting room at the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville. During the conversation Tirtha named seven conspirators in three New Vrindaban murder plots:

- (1) In the conspiracy to murder Richard Rose, Tirtha named Bhaktipada and Kuladri.
- (2) In the conspiracy to murder Chakradhari, Tirtha named Bhaktipada, Kuladri and Radhanath Swami.
- (3) In the conspiracy to murder Sulochan, Tirtha named Bhaktipada, Kuladri, Radhanath Swami, Randall Gorby, Janmastami, Dharmatma and Gaura-Shakti.

Tirtha also claimed that the members of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan, especially Kuladri, preached to him to get him “pumped up,” or “psyched up” to do the deed. Tirtha spoke with great deliberation when he named his accomplices during a recorded conversation with a friend. Is it possible that Tirtha was talking to Tapahpunja, as his name was not mentioned as a conspirator during the conversation? (Tapahpunja denied this.) Tirtha also neglected to mention Hayagriva, but that can be expected, because Hayagriva had died some five years earlier. In the recorded conversation, Tirtha said to his friend:

Okay, for a, Bhaktipada, just tell him, [pause] there were three [pause] murder conspiracies that I know of. That I can think of, just off the top of my head. [pause] One was the Saint-Denis, that, that he [Bhaktipada] was involved in, right, that I could provide information about, detailed information about, all right. The first one is the Saint-Denis, the second one is the Bryant, and the third one is [pause] for Richard Rose.

Richard Rose, he wasn't, you know, it was never carried out, but it was a, it was a, you know, a lot of preparation and planning went into, into it.

Then there's Richard Slavin. [pause] There would be the same thing [involvement] would hold true for the Saint-Denis and Bryant [murders].

Villa. He would have some involvement in Richard Rose. More involvement in Saint-Denis. And a great deal of involvement in Bryant. Carlson. It would be Bryant. Gorrick would be Bryant. And Sinkowski would be Bryant. . . .

Nothing third party. All this is first, first party information. In other words, I actually spoke to these people about these things [pause]. I have first hand knowledge of all these events, you know? In, in detail, with all the, with all these different players.⁵⁰⁷

If Tirtha's memory was accurate during this recorded conversation, and if he wasn't lying (that is a definite possibility, as his versions of historical events sometimes changed with the passage of time), we can assume that there were at least ten conspirators from New Vrindaban (in addition to the California conspirators) in the plot to murder Sulochan: Bhaktipada, Radhanath, Hayagriva, Kuladri, Gorby, Dharmatma, Gaura-Shakti, Tirtha, and Janmastami, plus Tapahpunja, who is conspicuous by his absence in Tirtha's list of conspirators.⁵⁰⁸

As an aside, this book would have been much easier to research and write (and more accurate) if only Tirtha would have told the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth. During my decade-long correspondence with him (2002-2013 and again in 2017), by his own admission he only shared with me information that he wanted me to know. In a January 2008 letter, he explained to me:

I'd like to make something clear for your book or whatever information you are preparing for general consumption. Don't try to marginalize or minimize what I know and may or may not reveal in terms of

events of past. It isn't that I don't know what happened with whom and when. More than anyone else, I know the complete picture, since I was privy to personal information coming from a very wide array of players. Rather, I simply choose not to speak of certain aspects of these things, since to do so serves no progressive purpose. Moreover, persons in your state of consciousness, lack of Krishna consciousness, would not be capable of understanding their actual import. This is simply a frank assessment of fact. And please do not quote my statement in this letter. ⁵⁰⁹

SCRIPTURAL JUSTIFICATION FOR MURDER

The New Vrindaban brahmins who advised the New Vrindaban ksatriyas knew their scripture. They understood that killing a human being was sometimes sanctioned by sastra. For example, the *Manu-sambhita* states that six types of aggressors may be killed with no punishment awarded to the executioner: (1) a poison giver, (2) one who sets fire to the house, (3) one who attacks with deadly weapons, (4) one who plunders wealth, (5) one who occupies another's land, and (6) one who kidnaps a wife. Bhaktipada had actually quoted this particular verse two years earlier to encourage Tirtha to assist Daruka in murdering Chakradhari.

Prabhupada wrote: "If a person comes with an intent to kill, one can immediately take action and kill in self-defense. It is also stated that one can be killed if he comes to set fire to the home or to pollute or kidnap one's wife. Lord Ramachandra killed the entire family of Ravana because Ravana kidnapped his wife, Sitadevi." ⁵¹⁰

In addition, killing is not a sin when directly ordered by Krishna. In fact, the principle scripture of the Vaishnavas, *Bhagavad-gita*, was spoken by Krishna to his warrior disciple Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra, not only to enlighten Arjuna with transcendental knowledge but also to incite Arjuna to kill his enemies: cousins, uncles,

teachers and grandfather, who happened to be fighting for the army which opposed Krishna.

**“IF THE MAN WHO BLASPHEMED . . .
IS KILLED, HIS SINFUL ACTION MAY BE ATONED”**

One scripture advocates killing not only violent attackers, but also those who blaspheme the Lord or the pure devotees of the Lord. *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Madhya 15.186-299) relates the story of one great devotee, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, a 15th-century pandit from Kamrup, who once invited Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to his home for lunch. His wife, Sathira Mata, prepared enormous quantities of food. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was amazed by the “unlimited quantities” and marveled: “Even a hundred men cooking on a hundred ovens could not possibly finish all these preparations within so short a time.”

However, Bhattacharya’s son-in-law, Amogha, was a great faultfinder and criticized the Lord: “This much food is sufficient to satisfy ten or twelve men, but this sannyasi alone is eating so much!” Bhattacharya ran after Amogha with a stick to beat him, but Amogha escaped. Bhattacharya condemned himself for being inattentive and allowing his son-in-law to blaspheme Lord Chaitanya; he declared to his wife: “If the man who blasphemed Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is killed, his sinful action may be atoned.”⁵¹¹

**“ONE SHOULD BY FORCE CUT OUT THE BLASPHEMER’S
TONGUE AND KILL THE OFFENDER”**

In *Srimad-bhagavatam* (4.4.17), Lord Siva’s wife, Sati, advocates what most of us today would consider a cruel and severe punishment for a blasphemer: “If one hears an irresponsible person blaspheme the master and controller of religion, he should block his ears and go away if unable to punish him. But if one is able to kill, then one should by force cut out the blasphemer’s tongue and kill the offender, and after that he should give up his own life.”

EVEN A “MEEK AND HUMBLE” DEVOTEE SHOULD “BE AS ANGRY AS FIRE”

Even the most humble devotee, Prabhupada claimed, “should be as angry as fire” “if there is blasphemy against one’s guru.” In *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi 7.50), Prabhupada wrote:

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not tolerate the misbehavior of Jagai and Madhai [two drunken brothers]. When they harmed Lord Nityananda Prabhu [an expansion of Lord Krishna’s brother Balarama and a friend and disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu], Chaitanya immediately became angry and wanted to kill them, and it was only by the mercy of Lord Nityananda Prabhu that they were saved. One should be very meek and humble in his personal transactions, and if insulted, a Vaishnava should be tolerant and not angry. But if there is blasphemy against one’s guru or another Vaishnava, one should be as angry as fire. This was exhibited by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

**“SAINTLY PERSONS . . . TAKE PLEASURE IN THE KILLING
OF ENVIOUS LIVING ENTITIES”**

Hiranyakasipu was a great and powerful demon of the ancient world who, after a long reign of terror, was finally killed (disemboweled) by the fierce half-man and half-lion incarnation of Godhead, Lord Nrsimhadeva. Hiranyakasipu’s death created joy for all living entities, even gentle and humble saintly devotees who were non-violent by nature. When a great demon, snake or scorpion, is destroyed, everyone becomes happy. Prabhupada explained in *Srimad-bhagavatam* (7.9.14):

Translation: [Hiranyakasipu’s son, Prahlada, speaking] My Lord Nrsimhadeva, please, therefore, cease Your anger now that my father, the great demon Hiranyakasipu, has been killed. Since even saintly persons take pleasure in the killing of a scorpion or a snake, all the worlds have achieved great satisfaction because of the death of this demon. Now they are confident of their happiness, and they will always remember Your auspicious incarnation in order to be free from fear.

Purport: The most important point in this verse is that although saintly persons never desire the killing of any living entity, they take pleasure in the killing of envious living entities like snakes and scorpions. Hiranyakasipu was killed because he was worse than a snake or a scorpion, and therefore everyone was happy.

In a lecture Prabhupada said, “Such demon [as Hiranyakasipu], who simply troubles the devotees, such demon, a very dangerous demon. So when such demon is killed, even saintly persons are satisfied.”

A sadhu, a saintly person never approves that one should be killed. Never. Even an animal. A sadhu does not approve. Why animal should be killed? That is sadhu’s business. But Prahlada Maharaja says: *modeta sadhur api*. A sadhu, a saintly person, is also pleased... When? When a scorpion or a snake is killed. They’re also living entity. A sadhu is never satisfied seeing another living entity being killed, but Prahlada Maharaja says, “Even a sadhu is pleased when a snake is killed or a scorpion is killed. So my father is just like snake and scorpion. So he’s killed. Therefore everyone is happy.” Everyone was [happy] . . . Such demon, who simply troubles the devotees, such demon, a very dangerous demon. So when such demon is killed, even saintly persons are satisfied. Although saintly persons, they do not want anyone should be killed.⁵¹²

During another lecture Prabhupada said, “So there are these snake-like persons. They are envious about our movement, and they are opposing. That is the nature.”

A sadhu, a saintly person, never likes killing of any living being. They are not happy. . . . Even a small ant is killed, they are not happy: “Why ant should be killed?” What to speak of others, even a small ant. *Para-duhkha-duhkhi*. It may be an ant, insignificant, but at the time of death he has suffered. A Vaishnava is unhappy: “Why an ant should be killed?” This is *para duhkha-duhkhi*.

But such Vaishnava is happy when a snake and a scorpion is killed. *Modeta sadhur api vrschika-sarpa-hatya*. So everyone is happy

when a snake or scorpion is killed because they are very, very dangerous. Without any fault they bite and create havoc. So there are these snake-like persons. They are envious about our movement, and they are opposing. That is the nature. ⁵¹³

Prabhupada did not advocate non-violence even to protect himself. Once he told his disciples, “If somebody comes to kill me, I will kill him!” Kirtanananda Swami recalled, “I remember in 1966, the question of non-violence came up. Prabhupada was very strong. He said, ‘If somebody comes to kill me, I will kill him!’ So everyone was very shocked, ‘You don’t believe in non-violence?’ ‘No!’ [Prabhupada answered.] ‘Some rascal, he is enemy of Krishna, and he wants to kill Krishna’s devotee, why should I let him?’” ⁵¹⁴ Bhaktipada was not afraid to also use violence to protect himself. He threatened, “If there is a need for violence, we can become violent.” ⁵¹⁵

KSATRIYAS CONFIDENT

Even if the New Vrindaban ksatriyas failed in their attempt to assassinate Sulochan, they believed that their lives would still be successful, for if somehow they were to die performing their prescribed duty, or if they were to be executed by the state after being convicted in a murder trial, their souls would ascend to the heavenly planets. Krishna promised Arjuna in *Bhagavad-gita* (2.32): “O Partha, happy are the ksatriyas to whom such fighting opportunities come unsought, opening for them the doors of the heavenly planets.” Prabhupada elaborated in the purport: “If he [Arjuna] should conquer his enemies, he would enjoy the kingdom; and if he should die in the battle, he would be elevated to the heavenly planets, whose doors were wide open to him. Fighting would be for his benefit in either case.”

Clearly, Sulochan was one “who blasphemed the devotees of the Lord” and carried a “deadly weapon” “with an intent to kill.” He deserved to have his “tongue cut out” and be “killed in self-defense” “with no punishment awarded to the executioner.” Even a “very meek and humble”

devotee should become “angry like fire, wanting to kill” the offender, “when there is blasphemy committed against superiors.” “When such demon is killed, even saintly persons are satisfied.”

Those involved in the plot to destroy the “demon” Sulochan were confident that their actions were authorized by guru: Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada (and Ramesvara Maharaja, as we shall see later); sadhu: Radhanath Swami and Tapahpunja Swami; and sastra: *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-bhagavatam* and *Caitanya-caritamrita*. Ravindra-Svarupa confirmed, “When Sulochan was killed, everybody in ISKCON knew that Kirtanananda was behind it. Because we had New Vrindaban devotees [who were based in Philadelphia and often visited the Philadelphia ISKCON temple to shower, attend *mangala-aroti*, and take breakfast prasadam] come and tell us, ‘What’s the matter? It was authorized.’ Everybody knew it. No devotee would kill another devotee unless it was authorized (laughter).”⁵¹⁶

The New Vrindaban and California devotees believed that because the conspiracy was authorized, it would be pleasing to Prabhupada and Krishna. Even a normally kind and humble devotee, such as a gentle sanyasi who would never harm an ant (or a groundhog), could take part in this noble mission with enthusiasm. Some may have even felt special honor to be called to perform such a glorious task: to render valuable service by protecting the saintly pure devotees of the Lord. What sincere disciple could ask for more? Killing for Krishna, they believed, would help them, and others (including the “demon” Sulochan himself) to advance in Krishna consciousness. It was completely “Vedic.” The entire world would benefit from their “devotional service.”

CHAPTER 9

The Keystone Cops Surveillance Team

AS MENTIONED IN CHAPTER FIVE, the January 1986 issue of *Back To Godhead* magazine contained an editorial by Satsvarupa dasa Goswami titled “A Tribute to a Pure Devotee,” in which he compared Bhaktipada to Haridasa Thakur, Prahlada Maharaja, the five Pandava brothers and Jesus Christ. When Sulochan and Puranjana read the article, they recognized the implied connection: by criticizing a Jesus-like devotee, they were inviting their own destruction. Puranjana wrote:

The January 1986 *Back To Godhead* magazine contained the article “A Tribute To A Pure Devotee” which glorified Kirtanananda’s “pipe on the head attack” as something similar to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The article said that Kirtanananda was attacked just like Jesus Christ, Haridasa Thakur and Prahlada had been. For me and Sulochan this article looked like a method of getting us attacked, perhaps even killed. We were both saying that Kirtanananda is a homosexual, he is a deviant, and he is certainly not a guru.

Meanwhile, the GBC was saying: here is a person like Jesus? That was easily interpreted as: me and Sulochan are envious blasphemers of Jesus, or someone equal to Jesus? Sulochan said, “Puranjana, did you see this? This article by Satsvarupa, it paints a big bull’s eye target on my back. He is making it look like I am criticizing Jesus, Haridasa Thakur and Prahlada.” So we discussed this and began to call this article, “Our Death Certificate.” It was the GBC’s way of fanning fanatical action against us, and it could be severe.⁵¹⁷

JANMASTAMI DISPATCHED TO CALIFORNIA

In January 1986, after being recruited by Radhanath Swami, Janmastami drove out to California in his new sankirtan van, accompanied by Jai Sri Krishna dasa (Joseph Collins—a New Vrindaban artist and Tai chi instructor), who traveled with him as far as Oklahoma. Janmastami first went to Berkeley where Sulochan had a mailing address; it turned out to be a post office box. Janmastami parked his van on the street where he could observe the comings and goings of the customers in the hopes of finding Sulochan, but he still had to sleep six hours each night. If his quarry came late at night to pick up his mail while Janmastami was resting, the surveillance would come to naught.⁵¹⁸

Janmastami contacted a friend in Berkeley and asked him to help him watch the post office, but after about ten days with no success, Janmastami headed south to Los Angeles, where he thought he might have better prospects of finding his quarry.

SULOCHAN VISITS OLD HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS IN MICHIGAN

Janmastami was, however, unable to find his quarry, because Sulochan had flown to Michigan, leaving his van in California, to stay with his parents in Royal Oak (a suburb of Detroit), where he continued his campaign by writing press releases and articles for newspapers. While in Michigan, Sulochan met with an old buddy over a beer. One of Sulochan's high school friends, Bob Zubeck of Royal Oak, kidded Steve about the paradox of a Krishna devotee, who allegedly never enjoys intoxicating beverages, drinking beer. *The Detroit Free Press* reported:

Bob Zubeck of Royal Oak, a non-Krishna, high school friend who said Bryant went out for a beer with old friends in January, said he “wasn't an oddball, or anything like that. . . He knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted to see his kids.”

Zubeck said he kidded Bryant about his drinking, forbidden by the Krishna faith. “I said to him, ‘You've certainly mellowed over the years,’” said Zubeck. “He [Bryant] said, ‘Yeah, over the years you make some concessions.’”⁵¹⁹

TAPAHUNJA ATTEMPTS TO SUB-CONTRACT THE HIT

Around the same time, early in January, Tapahpunja flew to San Diego to meet with a Ramesvara disciple who was known as a thug, a ksatriya hit man—Yudhisthira dasa (Jeffrey Michael Cornia)—and attempted to enlist him in the effort to spy on and murder Sulochan. Yudhisthira was known as a “tough guy” and he protected the San Diego devotees from harassment, just like Tirtha protected the devotees at New Vrindaban.

Yudhisthira recalled, “Someone was fire-bombing the [San Diego] temple and the devotees, . . . and I would go there and sleep in the back and guard the temple at night, or if someone was hurting the devotees I would stop them, or guard them, because a lot of time people harass the Hare Krishnas, especially out there, because we are a beach community and there is a lot of young people, and they are getting intoxicated and things, and they tend to be violent towards the devotees, towards the Hare Krishnas. . . . We have a little trouble sometimes from the bums on the beach and things. They would come and start trouble so, you know, I would have to throw people out of the temple and things.”⁵²⁰

Tapahpunja remembered his trip to California and his meeting with Yudhisthira:

I called Kuladri (Arthur Villa) describing that phone conversation [with the former New Vrindaban devotee in Laguna Beach who heard Sulochan threaten to murder Bhaktipada]. We discussed who in California might assist Bryant and the possibility of polarizing the California devotees, i.e., to activate some devotees to openly repudiate Bryant’s smear campaign or to act as an early warning alarm against another attempt on Bhaktipada’s life. . . .

The only California devotee I knew to be openly sympathetic to New Vrindaban was Cornia (Yudhisthira). [Yudhisthira liked New Vrindaban, and had spent considerable time with Radhanath Swami just a few months earlier in October 1985 during a trip to New Vrindaban]. I suggested to Villa (Kuladri) that I make an exploratory trip to feel out the situation. I also informed him that I would require plane fare and travel expenses in case I had to stay a few days. Villa agreed to secure \$300 cash.

I attempted a half dozen times to contact Cornia through the San Diego ISKCON temple. At first, I called collect [to save money] and later out of frustration called directly, leaving my name and number for Cornia to call back. I got the impression by the tone of my conversations with the devotees answering my calls that Cornia was not in very good standing with the temple. [Actually at that time Cornia was serving sixty-six months of probation for conspiracy to distribute heroin.]⁵²¹

Finally in early January, 1986, Cornia returned a call. I informed him I was immediately flying out to discuss Bhaktipada's security and he agreed to pick me up the next morning. Quite honestly, part of my motivation for the trip was just to "get-the-hell-out-of-dreary-snow-bound Cleveland" if only for a few days of California sun. . . .

As promised, Cornia intercepted me at the San Diego airport, and drove me to another devotee's apartment. We briefly discussed Bhaktipada's health and my ideas about keeping Bryant under surveillance. I specifically asked about other devotees we might count on for help and we speculated about who might have called from Laguna Beach.

Without giving any definite reason, Cornia excused himself and left me in a strange apartment for about two hours. When he returned, I understood why. His eyes were dilated and his behavior was super-talkative and hyperactive. Having lived for two years in the Berkeley and Haight-Ashbury late-sixties hippie communities, believe me when I say I know the symptoms [of cocaine use].

Originally I had hoped to meet with some other devotees and persuade them to boycott Bryant's actions thus making him feel isolated and unsupported, but upon realizing that my escort was a hard-core junkie, I lost hope for the plan.

Cornia was fired-up to drive to Los Angeles and insisted that I come. He stated he wanted to see an ISKCON devotee named Krishna-Katha [Jeffrey Breier] whom he said might have some inside information about Bryant's movements. . . .

Once in Los Angeles, Cornia dropped me off at a park about a half mile from the Los Angeles ISKCON center. He returned about ninety minutes later with a description of the kind of van Bryant was driving and the names of his friends in Los Angeles. We drove back uninterrupted to the San Diego airport where I immediately booked a flight back to snow-bound Cleveland. . . .

On the way back to San Diego . . . he promised to keep his eyes and ears open concerning Bryant, especially if he made a move east to New Vrindaban. On that note we parted and I landed in a blizzard at Cleveland airport, about sixteen hours after I had left.⁵²²

Other sources, however, claimed that while in California, Tapahpunja Swami attempted to hire Yudhishthira to murder Sulochan. A type-written document in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive indicated that Yudhishthira told Tapahpunja that he would kill Sulochan for \$5,000.

According to Yudhishthira dasa, a blooped devotee dealing cocaine, bringing it back and forth from Arizona, “a lot of people” want to do away with Bryant. Yudhishthira himself wants \$5,000 to do it. He mentioned this to Tapahpunja. Punja tells him that Mr. X [Janmastami] is running around California looking for Bryant to get rid of him. . . .

Krishna-Katha dasa, Ramesvara disciple, head of security [at the] Los Angeles temple, and his roommate, “Prem,” who is Ramesvara’s personal secretary, confirm that Yudhishthira is a drug dealer, has murdered and will murder, and they are trying to jew him down for Ramesvara on price of hitting Bryant. They want to get price down because Ramesvara instructed them to kill Bryant, and they personally don’t want to do it. Yudhishthira was to shoot him “a hot load,” that is, a heroin overdose.⁵²³

A devotee at the San Diego temple claimed that Yudhishthira told him that Tapahpunja asked him to assassinate Sulochan. Mahatma dasa (Martin Hausner), recalled, “[Early in July 1986], the first thing he [Yudhishthira] told me was he had received a phone call [six months

earlier] from Tapahpunja, who is Terry Sheldon, and that he was interested in killing Steven Bryant and he was asking Yudhisthira if he would do it. . . . He [Tapahpunja] said basically that it would be easier if he [Yudhisthira] did it, more or less, that he was on the west coast. . . . When he [Yudhisthira] initially told me about Sheldon, he had also mentioned the name Radhanath Swami, but I can't say for certain that he spoke to them at the same time.”⁵²⁴

That Yudhisthira should mention the name “Radhanath Swami” to Mahatma while relating the story of his meeting with Tapahpunja is not surprising, because Radhanath was, indeed, in California around the same time as Tapahpunja. One Los Angeles ISKCON devotee, during a telephone conversation with the author, said that he saw Radhanath at the Los Angeles temple in January, 1986. He assumed Radhanath's presence there had something to do with Sulochan, although he did not know for sure. While in Los Angeles, did Radhanath Swami speak privately with Ramesvara Maharaja about cooperation between the two zones to assassinate Sulochan?

Mahatma concluded, “I know that Terry Sheldon definitely asked Yudhisthira to kill Bryant but he declined. Yudhisthira was upset with me because of my talking to the police [after the murder] about the Bryant case. He told me that if he was talked to regarding Bryant, he would deny everything.”⁵²⁵ A few years later at the Federal Grand Jury in Elkins, West Virginia, Yudhisthira, under oath, honored his promise to Mahatma, for he claimed that Tapahpunja did not speak to him about murdering Sulochan.⁵²⁶

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 26TH: SULOCHAN DRIVES FROM
MICHIGAN TO THE OHIO VALLEY**

According to Sulochan's diary, on January 25th, he met with a reporter from the *Detroit Free Press*. The following day, he left his parents' home in Royal Oak and headed for the New Vrindaban environs, driving a

recently-purchased used automobile. He carried a handgun, an Interarms ‘Star SA’ 45 caliber ACP,⁵²⁷ which he told friends was “for his own protection.” After an all-day drive through a blinding snowstorm, he rented a room at the Scott Motel near the Ohio Valley Mall in Richland Township near Saint Clairsville, Ohio, about ten miles west of Wheeling on Route 40. Sulochan noted in his diary:

[Sunday,] January 26: Drove to West Virginia. Snowed all the way. 9 mph. Bad rear end or bearings. Scott’s [Motel]—\$68 per week. . . .

[Friday,] January 31: Drove to Pittsburgh to meet Jack Salvatore at *Channel Four News*—spent one hour. He turned me on to the FBI. I set up an all-day appointment with them for Monday.

[Saturday,] February 1: Did a lot more editing [on my press releases and articles for newspapers].

[Sunday,] February 2: Ready to meet FBI tomorrow. I’m ecstatic.⁵²⁸

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31ST: SULOCHAN THREATENS TO DESTROY KIRTANANANDA AND NEW VRINDABAN

While staying at the Scott Motel, Sulochan telephoned Kuladri (most likely on Friday, January 31st) to say he was coming to Moundsville to destroy Kirtanananda and the New Vrindaban Community; “to finish the job” that Triyogi had started. He also said, in passing, that he was going to the FBI office in Wheeling. Kuladri said: “I received a telephone call from Sulochan and he told me that he was coming to Moundsville to destroy Kirtanananda and the New Vrindaban Community.”⁵²⁹

Kuladri claimed that Sulochan told him: “The mistake Triyogi made was that he should have used a high-powered rifle with a scope. . . and that he should have laid in the woods and blown his brains out. . . from five hundred yards away. He could have done a better job and gotten away easier.”⁵³⁰ Sulochan’s statement caused the Brijabasis great emotional angst. Did Sulochan actually say in his telephone conversation with Kuladri that he was going to hide out in the New Vrindaban woods and

personally kill Bhaktipada with a sniper's rifle? Probably not. But that is how the New Vrindaban devotees heard it.

Gaura-Shakti explained that the reason he became part of the surveillance team was to protect the spiritual master he loved. Gaura-Shakti recalled, "If you love someone, and someone else [Sulochan] says that the person you love should be killed, and openly advocates violence—the use of rifles with high-power scopes—and then that person calls [on the phone] and says, 'Well, I'm in the area.' . . . I was very concerned and I wanted to make sure that if I saw him [Sulochan], I could notify people in the community ahead of time." ⁵³¹

Tirtha explained: "Sulochan began telephoning New Vrindaban, threatening to kill Kuladri and his children from a sniper's position in the woods. He threatened to kill his ex-wife Jamuna and her new husband. He declared war on New Vrindaban. His threats were taken very seriously." ⁵³²

Tapahpunja collaborated, "Villa informed me that Steve Bryant was making threatening phone calls to him and promising retaliation unless his wife (Bryant's wife) was returned to him immediately." ⁵³³ Dharmatma recalled, "There was a real fear within the New Vrindaban community that Bryant would somehow sneak in and kill Bhaktipada." ⁵³⁴

SULOCHAN'S THREATS GREATLY EXAGGERATED

Years later, when Kuladri was asked, "Did Steven Bryant ever personally threaten you or your family?" Kuladri replied under oath: "I took his threats on the community as possible threats to my family, but his threats were only in connection to my support of Kirtanananda. He expressed to me that he had nothing against me or my family, but as a manager under Kirtanananda, he had disagreements with me." ⁵³⁵

Sulochan's mother denied that her son threatened to "kill everybody like some wild man." She said, "He was preparing an exposé stating all

the things that he had uncovered. . . . And he was going to publish that. . . . His mission was to destroy the community with his exposé. And he said he didn't want to go and kill everybody like some wild man, but he wanted to destroy it by publishing all of these bad things he found out. And his thinking was that by doing this he would arouse everybody to leave the community or do something.”⁵³⁶ In a letter to the Marshall County Tax Assessor, Alfred W. “Pinky” Clark, Sulochan claimed, “I am on a legal mission, and not a killing one.”⁵³⁷

It appears, from the testimony of Kuladri and Mrs. Bryant, that Sulochan's alleged threats to do bodily harm to members of New Vrindaban may have been greatly exaggerated. Years later, even Tirtha admitted, in a 2006 letter to the author: “The entire community was duped into thinking that Sulochan was a huge threat to the community. Bhaktipada could have defused everything at one point, but instead he chose to let it escalate, perhaps thinking it was a rallying point or the catalyst for something greater.”⁵³⁸

KULADRI REQUESTS ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

However, now that Sulochan was coming to West Virginia to continue his campaign, Kuladri had second thoughts about the murder conspiracy; perhaps they were getting in way over their heads. He began to realize that their plot to murder Sulochan might have, in the future, incredibly adverse effects to the community, and to those who were involved in the plot. He began to understand the seriousness of the consequences which would ultimately descend upon the conspirators and the community.

If Sulochan was murdered 2,400 miles away in California, law enforcement agents might place the blame on Ramesvara and the Los Angeles devotees, but if he was assassinated in their own back yard in Marshall County, authorities would certainly suspect that New Vrindaban had a hand in the murder and begin a thorough investigation. Kuladri tried to defuse the situation by inviting law enforcement authorities to become

involved. Perhaps if the New Vrindaban “surveillance” team worked in tandem with the Marshall County Sheriff’s Department, they would be less likely to murder Sulochan outright near home.

Five years later, during the trial in Martinsburg, West Virginia, Kuladri testified: “I know Tapahpunja, along with other swamis, were saying that the community had to do whatever is necessary to protect Bhaktipada. I felt that the type of preaching that should be done in the community was one to calm people, not incite people. And I think the language of doing whatever is necessary to protect the Swami would incite people to . . . go to extremes.”⁵³⁹

Kuladri telephoned Sheriff Bordenkircher who agreed to help protect Bhaktipada and the community. Kuladri said: “I called the local sheriff, Sheriff Bordenkircher, and told him what Sulochan had told me on the phone, that he was coming to Moundsville to destroy Kirtanananda and the New Vrindaban Community. The sheriff at that time said that, ‘If he is coming into this area, can your people find him and let me know when he comes into the community so we can put him, if he is threatening you people, we can put him in jail?’ So then I contacted Tapahpunja.”⁵⁴⁰

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2ND: TAPAHPUNJA AND TIRTHA DRIVE TO MICHIGAN

After speaking with Kuladri and hearing that Sulochan had threatened to come to Moundsville to destroy Kirtanananda and the New Vrindaban Community, Tapahpunja reflected on what should be the best course of action. Shortly after his phone call with Kuladri, Tapahpunja received a call from Tirtha, who said he had a hunch that Sulochan was hiding out at his parents’ home in Michigan. Tirtha suggested that they drive to Michigan and spy on him. Tapahpunja considered Tirtha’s suggestion, but asked him to wait until he first contacted Yudhisthira—Tapahpunja’s “eyes and ears” in San Diego—to ask him if he had heard of any sightings of Sulochan in California. Tapahpunja, however, was unable to reach Yudhisthira. Only then,

Tapahpunja agreed to drive up to Michigan with Tirtha. Neither knew where Mr. and Mrs. Bryant lived, but they figured they would find out after arriving in Detroit.

Tirtha's idea made sense to Tapahpunja; instead of passively waiting for Sulochan to come to Marshall County, where they thought he would secretly hide out in the wooded hills surrounding New Vrindaban with a high-powered rifle, they would drive up to Sulochan's parents' house in Michigan, spy on him, and then simply follow him back to West Virginia, if that's where he was headed. (They did not know that Sulochan had been in the Ohio Valley vicinity for a week already.)

Tapahpunja met Tirtha at his apartment near the Cleveland ISKCON temple, and the two drove in separate vehicles to Michigan. With the help of a devotee at Detroit ISKCON and a telephone directory, they discovered Mr. and Mrs. Bryant's address. They did not, however, find their quarry, because, as explained earlier, Sulochan had departed for the Ohio Valley, some 350 miles distant, a week earlier. Tirtha said, "We went to Michigan. . . . We drove to Detroit looking for Sulochan, but we did not find him there." ⁵⁴¹

Tapahpunja recalled in more detail his journey with Tirtha to Detroit in a 12-page handwritten article in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive titled "The Bryant Surveillance Episode." (In the "Cast of Characters" section, Tapahpunja reveals his humility by referring to himself as "The Hero" and Sulochan as "The Villain.") In "The Bryant Surveillance Episode," Tapahpunja explained:

Every day [when I lived in Cleveland] I would call the New Vrindaban community . . . to ask about Bhaktipada's recovery. Bhaktipada couldn't talk himself because one vocal cord was inoperative, so generally I would contact Arthur Villa (Kuladri) for a report. On one such occasion, Villa informed me that Steve Bryant was making threatening phone calls to him and promising retaliation unless his wife (Bryant's wife) was returned to him immediately.

Bryant had made numerous harassing calls, according to Villa. I asked, "Has anybody actually spotted him near or in New Vrindaban?" "No," Villa replied, but he assured me that there was a twenty-four hour bodyguard standing at the doorway of Bhaktipada's recovery room [his bedroom]. Villa also mentioned that Bryant had informed him of his plan to approach the FBI in Wheeling, so it seemed reasonable to assume that Bryant was somewhere near Wheeling.

A few hours after I called Villa, Thomas Drescher called me from his apartment about two miles from the Cleveland temple. Drescher had also called about Bhaktipada's health and had been informed about the likelihood of Bryant's menacing presence in or near New Vrindaban. Drescher hypothesized that possibly Bryant was making his threats from his parents' home in suburban Detroit. Drescher also suggested that I accompany him in his Isuzu wagon to Detroit to determine whether or not Bryant was either at his parents' home or at the Detroit ISKCON temple. I reneged on the suggestion and told Drescher to wait until I called Yudhisthira (Jeff Cornia) in San Diego. . . .

For the next three hours, I made half-a-dozen collect calls to the San Diego temple, hoping that Cornia could be reached. I was perturbed that my "eyes and ears" in California had failed to notify me about Bryant's movements. Finally, I phoned Drescher and agreed to accompany him to Detroit. . . . Neither Drescher, nor I, even knew where Bryant's parents lived. We planned to go to the Detroit temple and ask if they had seen him, or knew where he lived.

Drescher drove his Isuzu and I followed him in an old beat-up Chevy van. We arrived on the outskirts of Detroit at about 8:00 p.m. . . . I called the Detroit ISKCON temple and asked the following questions: (1) "Do you know a devotee named Sulochan who is from Detroit originally?" The devotee who answered said, "Yes." (2) "Is he staying at the temple or have you seen him in the restaurant?" The answerer said, "No." (3) "Do you know where his parents live?" The answerer said, "Yes. I think in Birmingham or Royal Oak." (Two northern suburbs of Detroit.)

Again, in two separate vehicles we made our way towards the northern suburbs, stopping finally at a drug store on Fifteen Mile Road and Woodward Avenue. I ran inside the store, thumbed through the phone directory, and found Bryant's parents' address [3112 Ferncliff Avenue]. I climbed into Drescher's vehicle and we drove around for about twenty minutes until we positively located the Bryant's residence on a quiet suburban side street. Lights were on, but there was no signs of anybody being home, nor could we see a vehicle. We sat like that for about two hours until about 10:00 p.m. No signs of life. . . .⁵⁴²

TAPAHUNJA TRICKS MRS. BRYANT INTO REVEALING HER SON'S LOCATION

While the two waited in Tirtha's vehicle, Tapahpunja had a sudden inspiration; an idea how he might discover Sulochan's location. He telephoned the Bryant residence and, with characteristic expertise, pretended to be Sulochan's Berkeley buddy, Puranjana (Tim Lee). He tricked Mrs. Bryant into revealing her son's location. Tapahpunja remembered:

Suddenly, it occurred to me that if I just called the Bryants' residence and directly asked if Steve was there, they might tell me. My conversation with Bryant's mother went like this:

Me: "Hello, Mrs. Bryant? This is a friend of Steve's in California named Puranjana." (The name Cornia had given me when I visited him).

"I haven't heard from him in a few days, and I'm a little worried. Do you know where he is?"

Mrs. Bryant: "Oh, yes. Steve is in a motel somewhere near Wheeling. He's driving some old jalopy he brought from California. I have a phone number if you want to reach him."

Me: "Yes, please. What's the name and number of the motel where he's staying?" (She volunteered that info. I jotted it down.) "Is he okay?"

Mrs. Bryant: "Yes, he's okay. I think he's talking to the newspaper people and the FBI."

Me: "Does Steve have a way to protect himself? Is he armed?"

Mrs. Bryant: "Yes. As far as I know, he does have a gun or something."

Me: "Thank you Mrs. Bryant. I'll call back again."⁵⁴³

Helga Bryant also remembered the phone conversation with Tapahpunja, but by the end of the conversation she knew that the caller was not her son's friend, Puranjana; he was an enemy. Mrs. Bryant related:

My son left here [Michigan]. . . and went to West Virginia. He called me when he arrived and told me where he was and his phone number. He was at a motel in St. Clairsville, Ohio. He told me he registered under the name of Tim Lee. Tim Lee was a good friend of my son's and his Krishna name was Puranjana. Not long after, I received a phone call from a caller who identified himself as Puranjana. I had met Puranjana about three years before and I didn't remember what the voice sounded like. It was only a brief meeting that we had.

The caller wanted to know where Steven was. He heard he had gone east and I guess he wanted to get in contact with him. And so he basically asked whether he had driven the van. I said, "No. He flew from California." And then I guess I told him maybe that he picked up a used car that he drove down. My son's van was in California.

I gave the caller some information. I told him the telephone number [of the motel], and I also told him that Steven—well, this was a fellow dissident, I might add—so I figured he would be interested in the fact that Steven had told me that he was going to the FBI on Monday with all of his evidence. I also told the caller the name Steven was registered under: Tim Lee—Puranjana's Christian name. I thought at the time he would get a kick out of that, that he was using his name, but nothing was said and I got kind of suspicious.

After I hung up, I tried to contact Puranjana, but I couldn't get hold of him right away. The next day Puranjana called us and said, "I never called you." And this was very upsetting to me, because I knew they are pursuing Steven. "So you better warn him that they have found out about him and warn him."

We knew Steven was going to be at the FBI that day, so we called the FBI in Wheeling, so we were able to tell him. He knew he was going to move. That was the point, he knew when they found him he better get out of there.⁵⁴⁴

After hearing from Mrs. Bryant that Sulochan carried a gun, Tapahpunja was “seized with fear for Bhaktipada’s safety.” In an interview with a private investigator, Tapahpunja recalled, “Hearing of Bryant’s location [at the Scott Motel in Saint Clairsville] at that point was the same as hearing that an assassin hell-bent on killing Bhaktipada was hanging around the vicinity of New Vrindaban. . . . It was only a matter of time until he (Bryant) would get loaded or drunk and make his strike. And Bhaktipada would have been an easy target.”

⁵⁴⁵ Tapahpunja continued his story:

I hung up [the phone after talking to Mrs. Bryant]. My mind was seized with fear for Bhaktipada’s safety. I recalled Bryant’s threat, “I’m going to kill Bhaktipada, just by ruining his reputation, and if that doesn’t work, I’ll do it with a high-powered rifle.” I could easily envision Bryant making a night assault on Bhaktipada’s residence or waiting in ambush on the road near his home. . . . Immediately I called Arthur Villa to alert him of the possible danger. The call woke him up (it was about 10:30 p.m.). I suggested that he alert the night time guard and Bhaktipada’s body guard. . . .

I dashed back to Drescher sitting in his Isuzu. He was elated to hear the news and suggested that we make the six-hour drive to Bryant’s hideout. He also decided to call his buddy, Randall Gorby, instructing Gorby to rendezvous with us for the sake of keeping tabs on Bryant. After Drescher called the motel where Bryant was staying (to identify the exact location), he called Gorby. . . .

I . . . mentally prepared myself for the six-hour drive from Detroit to Saint Clairsville, Ohio, where Bryant was hiding. At about 11:30 p.m., he [Tirtha] in his Isuzu, and I in my Chevy van, started for our rendezvous with Randall Gorby. ⁵⁴⁶

Tapahpunja and Tirtha drove straight through the night and arrived in Saint Clairsville, Ohio, around dawn. Gorby took them to the Scott Motel, about twenty-five miles from New Vrindaban. Tapahpunja continued his story of the discovery of Sulochan’s hiding place:

Arriving at [Saint Clairsville] about six a.m., we found Gorby in the front seat of his pickup truck, parked about one mile from the Scott Motel. Drescher and I abandoned our vehicles and climbed into Gorby's front seat. Gorby and Drescher had a kind of father and son relationship. They joked with each other briefly and agreed to drive to the Scott Motel for a closer look.

We parked across the street (highway) from the motel and as the sun rose we spotted the old jalopy Bryant was driving, in the parking lot. As you can well imagine, we were pretty bushed from being up all night. Gorby had brought with him a set of high-powered binoculars. The three of us passed them between us, making light talk about what to do if Bryant suddenly appeared from his room and left the motel. I was struggling like anything just to stay awake and mentioned that Bryant's mother said he was headed to the newspapers and Wheeling FBI.

Suddenly, out of the blue and with no prior reference to violence, Gorby said, "Are we gonna kill him, Tom?" He repeated that statement two or three times, adding, "It's a perfect chance. Early morning, no one was awake, a quiet country road, etc." Drescher made light of the remark, saying, "I'm so tired I couldn't kill a fly right now!" Gorby kept pushing the point and said, "I know someone who is expert with explosives, if we want to go that route." All together, we sat there for about two-and-a-half hours, passing the binoculars, dozing off, and I listening to Gorby's macho rap.⁵⁴⁷

GORBY'S STORY DIFFERENT FROM TAPAHUNJA'S STORY

According to Gorby, Tirtha telephoned Randall Gorby from Michigan, and asked him to call the phone number which Mrs. Bryant had given Tapahpunja, and find out where and what it was. It turned out to be the Scott Motel in St. Clairsville, Ohio, and Gorby found a vehicle with a Michigan license plate in the parking lot and a "Tim Lee" listed in the motel's registry book. Gorby explained how the surveillance team found Sulochan at the Scott Motel. Gorby said:

I received a call from Tirtha. He said, “Randall, I have a telephone number in your area that I would like for you to check out for me and see what it is or where it is,” and I told him I could do that. So, I checked and discovered that the telephone number was of a motel across the [Ohio] river in St. Clairsville, the Scott Motel, a short way [about twenty-five miles] from my home. I went there myself. Tirtha asked me to check the name of Tim Lee and I checked and there was a Tim Lee registered there. . . . I told him that I had checked the motel and that Tim Lee was registered there and that there was a car in the parking area from Michigan.⁵⁴⁸

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD: SULOCHAN MEETS WITH THE FBI

Gorby related how the surveillance team met him at the Scott Motel during the early morning hours of February 3rd. Gorby explained:

[Before dawn] Tirtha called [again] and said that he and Tapahpunja were either in East Liverpool or Steubenville, Ohio [on their way back from Michigan], and would I mind meeting them outside the motel and show them where it was located. They explained to me that they thought it was Sulochan that they were following, and they had been trailing him. He explained he had been following this individual that was in the motel room and that they were apprehensive that he was going to harm the Swami at the temple. That they were keeping him under surveillance at that time. We remained outside the motel up until probably 10:30 in the morning. At that time the individual who was in the motel came out and Tapahpunja had his binoculars. We were across the street. They identified him as Sulochan rather than Tim Lee.⁵⁴⁹

Tirtha recalled, “It was getting toward daybreak so we watched the room and then he [Sulochan] got up, came out, went to the motel office rather nonchalantly. Then I guess when he went there . . . the motel manager called his mother and [Mrs. Bryant] said, ‘Oh, I might have screwed up, some guys called up last night and I told them where you were.’ So he

dashed out of the motel office, came out of his room wearing a fake beard and a wig, some glasses, loaded up his car real quick and took off.”⁵⁵⁰

Sulochan left the Scott Motel and drove to the Wheeling Federal Building for his appointment at the FBI office. Gorby explained how the surveillance team followed Sulochan into Wheeling:

Sulochan loaded some equipment into the car that was sitting out on the parking area and got into the car and started driving out of the motel complex. From there Tirtha asked me to follow him because he thought that he might be recognized; Sulochan would probably recognize Tirtha or Tapahpunja. So I followed him into the city of Wheeling, West Virginia. I stayed in contact with the car and followed him right up to where he parked outside of the Federal Court Building in Wheeling.

Tirtha and Tapahpunja were following behind me in their vehicles, and Sulochan did get out of his vehicle, and taking some papers, and went inside the Federal Building. Tirtha pulled up, parked behind me and got out of his car and walked up to me. Tirtha said, “That son of a bitch is going to the police and he is going to have to be killed, and I am the one that is going to do it.”⁵⁵¹

TAPAHPUNJA’S STORY DIFFERENT

On the other hand, Tapahpunja told a very different story of how the surveillance team followed Sulochan into Wheeling. He claimed that only he followed Sulochan into Wheeling, while Gorby and Tirtha went home to sleep. Tapahpunja explained:

At about 9:00 a.m., Bryant emerged from his motel room and headed for his car. I volunteered to follow him in my Chevy van (anticipating that he was headed into Wheeling) and Gorby and Drescher headed for Gorby’s home in [Bethany]. . . .⁵⁵²

Keeping about twenty car-lengths back, I followed Bryant into Wheeling. He parked outside the Federal Building and walked inside. I parked close enough to keep an eye on his car should he leave again. I

wondered how long I could stay awake, and finally decided to call New Vrindaban in hopes that they would send someone in another vehicle to relieve me and bring some food. I spoke with Kuladri and another devotee named Gaura-Shakti.

Within an hour, Gaura-Shakti arrived, delivered my food, and took over my parking spot, allowing me to leave for a much-needed rest. I awoke in my van (I parked on a side street in Wheeling) at about 3 p.m. in the afternoon. I immediately phoned Gorby's residence and was told by Gorby that Drescher had given up the whole idea and had driven back to Cleveland.⁵⁵³

GAURA-SHAKTI PROTECTS HIMSELF

Gaura-Shakti, amongst all the members of the surveillance team, was especially careful not to implicate himself in illegal activity. It appears that he knew the surveillance was simply a prelude to murder, and although he probably would not have murdered Sulochan outright, he wanted to assist as much as he was able, in order to protect his siksa-guru. He approached the Marshall County Chief Deputy to make sure the surveillance was perfectly legal. Gaura-Shakti explained:

I told them [prosecutors in Elkins, West Virginia] that I had previously made my intentions known to Kuladri that I would like to assist in some fashion, if there was anything I could do. . . . Kuladri told me on Monday [February 3rd] that Bryant was in the area, that Bryant had called him, and Kuladri wanted to know if I would just go out and follow him, just watch him so we could find out in the community if he was on his way out here.

I asked him if it was legal. He said he checked with Bordenkircher, and the sheriff told him not only was it legal, but he encouraged him to do so. So I told him I would, and before I did I called the sheriff's office and spoke with Chief Deputy [Joseph] Hummel and told him the same thing, and he gave me the same reply, "Yes, it's legal," and he also said it was a good thing to do.⁵⁵⁴

During Sulochan's meeting at the FBI office, he spoke about the alleged criminal activities at New Vrindaban, and hoped that they would conduct an investigation of the community. However, they showed little interest. Sulochan wrote in his diary, "Spoke with the FBI all day and the conclusion is vigilante justice." ⁵⁵⁵

Sulochan also notified the Marshall County sheriff of his plans and his travels. He understood his life was in danger and he wanted to work closely with the sheriff, as he had five months earlier during the September 1985 North American Temple Presidents and GBC meetings at New Vrindaban when the sheriff had placed him under protective custody in the Marshall County Jail. The sheriff knew where Sulochan was staying, and sometimes his deputies even visited him.

While at the FBI office, Sulochan received a message from his mother warning him that she had given away the phone number of his motel to an unknown caller. He prudently found other lodging and rented a room at the Fischer Motel, about three miles from the Scott Motel, also in Saint Clairsville. Sulochan noted in his diary, "Mother gave away my phone number to an enemy so I moved to another hotel [the Fischer Motel]." ⁵⁵⁶

When Sulochan left the FBI office Monday evening, Gaura-Shakti followed his vehicle but lost him; then a few hours later, discovered him again. Gaura-Shakti noted, "He [Sulochan] came out of the Federal Building [in Wheeling] and got in his car and drove west [on I-70], and I followed him. . . . He took off fast. I couldn't even keep up with him. And so I went past the [Scott] hotel looking for his car and his car wasn't there." ⁵⁵⁷

Tapahpunja confirmed, "[When I woke up from my nap around three p.m.] I phoned Villa (Kuladri). Villa narrated how Bryant caught on to Gaura-Shakti's surveillance and had driven at break-neck speed west on Interstate 70 away from the Scott Motel." ⁵⁵⁸ Sulochan had eluded his stalkers for the time being. However, Gaura-Shakti was patient; he stayed in the area hoping to find his quarry again. His tenacity was rewarded. Gaura-Shakti recalled:

So I drove just about a quarter mile away from the [Scott] hotel. There was a bar there. And I just parked in that area, just waiting to see if his car was going to come by because of the freeway and entrance and exit at that point. And I waited there about three hours until finally his car was there in the parking lot of the bar, and I suspected that he was in there, but he wasn't.

And I drove past the [Scott] hotel again, and I saw him there. He went over and got his car from the bar and brought it back to the hotel, checked out, and went and checked into another hotel [the Fischer Motel] just down the road two or three miles. . . . about 9:30 in the evening. . . . I just followed him to the next hotel and I saw that he went and checked in there.

And then I stayed in that area for about thirty minutes or so. And I called Arthur Villa several times during the evening to let him know what was going on. . . . After I felt that Steve was down for the night, so to speak, it was about probably 11:00 or 11:30. I said I am going to bed. So I left and went home.⁵⁵⁹

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH: SULOCHAN ELUDES HIS PURSUERS A SECOND TIME

The following day, Randall Gorby parked across the street from the Fischer Motel and watched the building for several hours. Gorby explained, “[I kept an eye out at the Fischer Motel] from sometime in the morning up until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon.”⁵⁶⁰ However, Sulochan noticed that he was being watched, and that afternoon he checked out and headed west on I-70. When he saw Gorby's vehicle in the rear-view mirror, he stepped on the gas and accelerated to such a high rate of speed that his pursuer couldn't keep up. Gorby gave up the chase and returned to Wheeling where he met Tirtha and Tapahpunja, and told them that he had lost Sulochan, who was headed west on Interstate 70 traveling a good deal faster than the speed limit.

Gorby claimed, “I went back and met Terry Sheldon and Thomas Drescher in, I believe, Wheeling, and I told them that Mr. Bryant had come out of the motel, the Fischer Motel, and headed west on I-70 at a high rate of speed, and that I had followed him for ten or fifteen minutes and couldn't keep up with him, that he had disappeared going west.”⁵⁶¹

TIRTHA FLIES TO LOS ANGELES TO RENDEZVOUS WITH JANMASTAMI

Tapahpunja, Tirtha, and probably Kuladri, after hearing that Sulochan was speeding west on the freeway, assumed that he had become frightened by the surveillance team and was going back to California. They quickly decided that Tirtha should fly immediately to Los Angeles where he would meet with Janmastami, who was already in California, and wait there for Sulochan to arrive.

Before flying to California, however, Tirtha received the first payment for his surveillance expenses. He said, “Later that day I got twenty-five hundred dollars. . . . Part of it [was] to cover expense and future expense for a trip to California for further surveillance. There was an indication that if he [Sulochan] was found out there that he should be killed. That’s what I was told.”⁵⁶²

With \$2,500 in his pocket, Tirtha traveled to the airport, purchased his ticket, and got on the plane to Los Angeles. He recalled, “It was prearranged that I meet with Janmastami and he was already there, supposedly gathering some data on him [Sulochan]. He met me at the [LAX] airport with a rental car.”⁵⁶³

Janmastami had rented a car because his van was in a garage for repairs. “My brand new van blew a fuel pump (too many 95 mph trips from Los Angeles to San Francisco).”⁵⁶⁴ On February 4th, Janmastami rented a 1977 Ford Granada from the Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car agency at the Los Angeles Airport branch, and provided a cash deposit.⁵⁶⁵ Janmastami also rented a room (room 121) at the Trade Winds Motel⁵⁶⁶ at 4200 West Century Boulevard in Inglewood, about three miles east from LAX International Airport. Janmastami registered under the name John Paul McPherson, as he had a fake identification card under that name.⁵⁶⁷

Soon after Tirtha left for California, Tapahpunja Swami visited Bhaktipada and informed him that Tirtha and Janmastami were in California with plans to kill Sulochan. Bhaktipada was reflective, thinking it over in his mind. Then he turned to Tapahpunja and said, “Maybe that’s what Krishna wants.”⁵⁶⁸

SULOCHAN FINDS A NEW HIDING PLACE

Members of the surveillance team had, however, incorrectly assumed that Sulochan was headed back to California; actually he had merely given Gorby the slip. After speeding west on I-70 for twenty or thirty minutes, Sulochan observed that his pursuer had given up the chase, and then he doubled back, perhaps by driving on back roads through the wooded hills of Belmont County. After crossing the Ohio River and entering West Virginia, he discovered a boarding house with rooms for rent in the Washington Lands district of Marshall County, about five miles south of Moundsville on Route 2. After he checked in, Sulochan notified the sheriff of his change in residence.

Sulochan noted in his diary, “February 4: Well, they found me at the next hotel [Fischer Motel]; had to get out fast. This [new] place [in Washington Lands] is perfect though. It’s near Moundsville and it’s not listed. Very safe boarding house.”⁵⁶⁹

At the boarding house in Washington Lands, Sulochan continued working on his newspaper article and hoped he could leave West Virginia in a week. He had no intention of hiding out in the woods near New Vrindaban with a sniper’s rifle. (He had left his 22 caliber rifle in Los Angeles with his friend Nistraigunya). Sulochan noted in his diary, “February 4: Got the article [for the newspapers] almost done. All that’s left is some titles and it’s ready to go. Once this gets out it’s all over. Hope to get out of here in a week.”⁵⁷⁰

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH: GORBY REVEALS SULOCHAN’S HIDING PLACE

Tapahpunja claimed that he called Gorby from a Wheeling phone booth, and that during his phone conversation Gorby revealed Sulochan’s new residence at the Washington Lands boarding house. Tapahpunja related, “I called Gorby. Gorby was absolutely convinced that Bryant was still in the area [and had not begun driving to California] and told me to stay the night with him in a motel room he had rented on U. S. Highway 2 just outside Moundsville. Gorby’s determination was remarkable. . . . Gorby

had . . . sniffed out Bryant's new hideaway [at the Washington Lands boarding house].⁵⁷¹

Gorby, claimed to have telephoned Kuladri early on Wednesday morning, February 5th, and at that time notified Kuladri that Sulochan had checked into a boarding house in Washington Lands. How did Gorby "discover" Sulochan's new residence, and so quickly? Gorby later claimed that he lied to Tapahpunja and Tirtha when he told them Sulochan had headed west on I-70 and he couldn't keep up with him. Gorby said this because he allegedly did not want Tirtha to murder Sulochan; he didn't want his conscience to be disturbed by the thought that he had assisted in a murder of another human being. Gorby testified in court, "[I lied to them because] after [hearing] the threat [by Tirtha outside the Wheeling Federal Building] of killing Mr. Bryant, I did not want that type of activity on me, around me, or on my conscience."⁵⁷²

We should not be fooled by Gorby's alleged awakening of his inner "conscience" and his sudden reticence to be involved in Sulochan's murder. This was nothing more than a lie he spoke in court to avoid implicating himself in the murder. As described earlier, he was, according to members of the conspiracy, one of the most vocal instigators in the murder plot. In addition (as we shall discover later in the next chapter), three and a half months later on May 19th, when Bhaktipada refused to authorize \$4,000 for Tirtha to fly to Los Angeles and hunt Sulochan, Gorby was visibly "furious and upset."⁵⁷³

In court, Gorby claimed that he had followed Sulochan from the Fischer Motel in Saint Clairsville to the boarding house in Washington lands. He explained, "I followed him [from the Fischer Motel] to a small community of South Moundsville, West Virginia: Washington Lands. He went into a weekly rental facility and parked his car out front, picked up his bags, took them in and I knew that he was going to be there."⁵⁷⁴

On the other hand, Gorby told Kuladri and Gaura-Shakti that he had lost Sulochan on Interstate 70, but "accidentally" found him later at

the Washington Lands boarding house. Gaura-Shakti recalled, “Randall Gorby by himself was watching him [at the Fischer Motel] on Tuesday, and he said he lost him, but just by chance again on Wednesday he found him in the morning [at the Washington Lands boarding house].”⁵⁷⁵

On Wednesday morning, Randall Gorby and Sthayibhava watched the boarding house, but for some reason or other, Randall didn’t like working with Sthayibhava. Gaura-Sakti recalled, “I got another phone call from Mr. Villa [on Wednesday]. He said Randall didn’t like Mr. Hamilton in that position, and [Kuladri] asked me if I would go out [with Gorby].”⁵⁷⁶ After the phone call, Randall picked up Gaura-Shakti at his residence at New Vrindaban and the two drove to the Washington Lands boarding house to spy on Sulochan.

Gaura-Shakti was curious as to how Gorby had discovered Sulochan’s new residence, and asked him, “How did you find this guy [Sulochan] here [after you lost him on I-70 yesterday]? There are no markings on the south side of the building [advertising it as a boarding house] and it just looked like another house in this short stretch of residential buildings.” Gorby replied, “I was sitting at home eating breakfast thinking, ‘Where did this guy go?’ so I said [to myself], ‘I just have to drive past that motel, Fischer Motel, and see if I can figure anything out.’”⁵⁷⁷

Gaura-Shakti continued, “He [Gorby] said he drove from his home in Bethany out to Fischer Motel, which is probably about . . . an hour’s drive.” Gorby finished his story, “I was driving westbound on Interstate 70 and, all of a sudden, I saw his [Sulochan’s] car go eastbound right in a place where I could make a U-turn on the freeway. So I made that U-turn and, boom, I was on him again.”⁵⁷⁸

GORBY’S MIRACULOUS TRACKING ABILITY

By all accounts, Gorby’s discovery of Sulochan’s hiding place at the Washington Lands boarding house was amazing. The previous day, while Gorby watched the Fischer Motel, Sulochan realized he was being

watched, and left in a hurry. Gorby claimed to the court that he followed Sulochan for twenty-five miles to the Washington Lands district of Moundsville where he observed Sulochan checking into the boarding house. It is positively unbelievable that Gorby could have followed Sulochan ten miles east on Interstate 70 and then fifteen miles south on Route 2, and then watched Sulochan check into the boarding house, without Sulochan noticing Gorby's pickup truck following him.

Sulochan knew he was being watched; he knew he was being followed. He was observant. On Monday, February 3rd, after leaving the Wheeling FBI office he noticed Gaura-Shakti was following him, so he sped off west on I-70, losing his pursuer. The next day, Tuesday, February 4th, he recognized Gorby's pick up truck in the parking lot across the street from the Fischer Motel. He may have remembered Gorby's pickup truck following him from the Scott Motel in Saint Clairsville to the Wheeling FBI office on the morning of the previous day. He must have recognized the same vehicle parked across the street from the Fischer Motel. Sulochan knew Gorby's vehicle. He knew he was being watched at the Fischer Motel. Could Sulochan then have been unaware of the pickup truck which allegedly followed him for twenty-five miles to Washington Lands? Tapahpunja, Tirtha, Gaura-Shakti and other members of the surveillance team thought that Gorby had miraculous tracking powers. Maybe he had a direct connection with Supersoul?

A more plausible explanation is that Gorby had a direct connection not with Supersoul, but with the Marshall County Sheriff's Office. Sulochan called the sheriff daily and notified him of his changes of address; it is not hard to imagine that Gorby's amazing gift of tracking his quarry came from the phone booth in conversations with the sheriff's office. Janmastami suspected that Gorby was in close communication with law enforcement as soon as he heard the story of the surveillance from Tirtha, after Tirtha arrived in California. Janmastami put two and two together and concluded that Gorby didn't "accidentally" discover Sulochan's

location, but had inside “friends” in law enforcement who informed him of Sulochan’s precise location by telephone. Janmastami explained:

I didn’t trust Randall Gorby right from the start and Tirtha’s claims of his “impeccable credentials” did not hold water with me. Plus, if Randall wanted it [the murder] done as badly as he kept telling everyone (he was more “fired up” than any of the devotees and that alone made me suspicious), he would have gone and done it.

You should have seen this “surveillance” operation [as Tirtha explained it to me]. Hare Krishnas do their Keystone Cops routine. Funny stuff. And then Randall runs off to a phone booth and comes back with information, *very, very* specific information that “a couple of friends of his” gave him on Sulochan’s whereabouts.⁵⁷⁹

Tapahpunja, at a later date, also suspected that Gorby had friends in the sheriff’s office. “Gorby . . . seemed to have a sixth sense (or maybe a hot line to the police) to know that Bryant had reappeared in the area. . . . Either Gorby had ESP or was secretly in touch with the police all along.”⁵⁸⁰

Gorby told four different stories, and none of them told the entire truth: (1) to Tapahpunja and Tirtha he said he followed Sulochan west on I-70 on Tuesday, apparently headed for California, and gave up the chase, (2) to Kuladri he said he lost Sulochan on Interstate 70 on Tuesday, but “accidentally” found him the next morning at the boarding house, (3) to Gaura-Shakti he said that he just happened to be driving west on I-70 on Wednesday morning, saw Sulochan driving east, made a U-turn across the Interstate median strip and followed him, and (4) to the court he said he followed Sulochan from the Fischer Motel to the Washington Lands boarding house on Tuesday. Tapahpunja claimed that Gorby’s testimony to the court was “bogus.”⁵⁸¹

It is far more likely that (5) Gorby lost Sulochan on Interstate 70, he telephoned his “friend” in the sheriff’s office a few hours later, and his “friend” notified him of Sulochan’s new address. It appears that someone in the sheriff’s office *wanted* the New Vrindaban ksatriyas to find their

quarry. More evidence that suggests that someone in the Marshall County Sheriff's Office provided New Vrindaban with confidential information about Sulochan will be revealed in the following chapter.

After Gorby informed Kuladri of Sulochan's new residence, members of the surveillance team were dispatched to watch the Washington Lands boarding house. Gaura-Shakti explained, "[On Wednesday, February 5th] I hooked back up with Kuladri and he told me that Tapahpunja was watching him [Sulochan] now and where he was, and I went down about 3:00 in the afternoon or so, and I followed Bryant until about 11:00 that night when I was sure he was bedded down for the evening. He hadn't come out of his hotel for two hours. Then I went back to the farm, went back home." 582

While the surveillance team watched the Washington Lands boarding house, they observed Chief Deputy Joseph Hummel and another deputy from the Marshall County Sheriff's Office drive into the parking lot, knock on Sulochan's door, and speak with him. The devotees, however, thought that the two law enforcement men were FBI agents. Kuladri explained, "Later that day two Federal agents pick him [Sulochan] up. Little do they know that they're protecting the criminal." 583

Sulochan wrote in his diary, "Found out that someone had called this guest house looking for me. Met the police—Hummel—who had been called about me for some reason. Things are starting to happen. Soon it will be all over, I hope." 584

WARRANT ISSUED FOR BRYANT'S ARREST

Gorby continued his story about the surveillance of Sulochan: "[On the morning of Wednesday, February 5th], I made a telephone call to the temple to Kuladri, and I told him where Sulochan was located and I would suggest they swear out a warrant they had talked about previously and get Sulochan arrested. He had made threats in the area so they [Kuladri] swore out a warrant for having him [arrested] for having made threats against members of the community." 585

In the warrant, Kuladri stated: “Mr. Bryant has repeatedly threatened my life as well as the lives of members of New Vrindaban Community over the phone, in person, and through the mail. Mr. Bryant openly admits that we should be killed. Bryant publishes D. A. S. (Devotee Access Service) and takes full credit for the mailing of such literature (told me personally) in which he encourages the readers to kill the leaders of New Vrindaban and ISKCON. He also states he is taking the law in his own hands and carries a weapon.”⁵⁸⁶

On Wednesday, February 5th, Sulochan noted in his diary, “Well, I got the article finished. Met Larry [from the newspaper] at 1:00 p.m. Had a nice meeting. He liked the article, but wasn’t sure if he could print it. . . . Starting on [Nikolai] hard vodka—my first fifth. Definitely better than beer to keep me engaged at night. It’s all exciting and new to me.”⁵⁸⁷

SULOCHAN TELEPHONES TAX ASSESSOR

That day (Wednesday) Sulochan telephoned the Marshall County Tax Assessor Alfred W. “Pinky” Clark and asked him to help him get into the Marshall County Jail so he could talk to Michael Shockman, who was incarcerated there. Sulochan told Clark that he was in Marshall County “to finish the job.” Alfred Clark remembered his telephone conversation with Sulochan:

Upon answering, he asked me to get him inside the jail to talk with Shockman. He said he had just arrived in Marshall County “to finish the job.” I informed him that I had no authority over the jail, I dealt strictly with property taxes and that he would have to get in touch with the Sheriff or Chief Hummel. He became somewhat persistent that I had to help him, and stated there would be “some wild shit come down in the next few days.”

He then insisted that I come down and meet with him. He would not tell me where he was unless I agreed to meet with him. He said he needed to talk with me, that there were some things that he had to

tell me—important things that I needed to know. I told him that if he wanted to see me he would have to come to my office.

He said he could not come out of hiding, that they were tailing him all over the country and he was a “marked man” and that I was “just like him.” [Bryant said,] “You are involved, you are a part of this—they will get you, too.” I asked who “they” were. He said, “Kuladri and the Swami.”⁵⁸⁸

Sulochan telephoned “Pinky” Clark because he thought Clark might have been able to get him into the Marshall County Jail to meet with inmate Michael Shockman. Little did Sulochan know that very soon he would, like Shockman, also be an inmate in the Marshall County Jail.

CHAPTER 10

The Demon Jailed

AFTER THE WARRANT FOR SULOCHAN'S ARREST was approved by Marshall County Magistrate David Buzzard, Kuladri decided to wait a while before calling the sheriff and "informing him" of Sulochan's hiding place at the Washington Lands boarding house. (Of course, the sheriff *already knew* where Sulochan was staying.) Kuladri explained, "At 9 p.m. [on Wednesday evening], just as I'm ready to lie down for the evening, I think, 'Let me turn him in now, so he can sit in jail overnight.' I call the sheriff and tell him I know where Bryant is, to go pick him up. The deputy says they'll go down to get him as soon as they find the warrant."⁵⁸⁹

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6TH: SULOCHAN ARRESTED

On the morning of Thursday, February 6th at 12:28 a.m. six squad cars showed up at the boarding house with a warrant for Sulochan's arrest. He was arrested on charges of assault and carrying a deadly weapon in connection with threats made against members of the New Vrindaban Community. He was carrying a loaded automatic pistol when he was arrested. (The assault charges were dropped, thanks to the efforts of Sulochan's attorney David Gold, on March 6, 1986.)

The Marshall County Sheriff's Department Watch Commander's Journal noted, "Time: 0028: All units out of car at Washington Lands Boarding House. Chief Deputy [Hummel] and Deputy Lightner took custody of Bryant and transported [him] to Wetzel County Correctional

Facility.”⁵⁹⁰ Sulochan was incarcerated at the Wetzel County Jail in New Martinsville, West Virginia (about 25 miles south of Moundsville), because the Marshall County Jail was under quarantine due to an outbreak of chicken pox.⁵⁹¹ Tapahpunja noted, “Villa and Gorby engineered the arrest of Bryant with the reluctant help of the Marshall County Sheriff’s Office.”⁵⁹²

Tirtha in California called Kuladri that morning. He said, “He [Kuladri] told us that Sulochan had been arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and was in the [Wetzel] County Jail, and it appeared that his parents were [not] coming to bail him out, and he would be on ice for several months.”⁵⁹³ New Vrindaban’s legal counsel Tulsi felt vindicated: “The arrest of Steven Bryant is indicative of what we have been saying all along concerning the state of mind he has been in recently. The charges he has made against us . . . are fallacious and without basis. Bryant’s arrest certainly bears this out.”⁵⁹⁴

“DEMON DISCREDITED”

The February 10th issue of *New Vrindaban News* featured an article titled “Demon Discredited: The Inside Story by Kuladri dasa” (actually ghost-written by editor Garga-Rsi—David Waterman).⁵⁹⁵ The article told the story of the collaboration between the New Vrindaban ksatriyas and the Marshall County Sheriff’s Office which resulted in the arrest of Sulochan. At the end of the article, Garga-Rsi compared Kuladri to J. Edgar Hoover, the first director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who built the FBI into a large and efficient crime-fighting agency. In the article, Garga-Rsi summarized the surveillance and arrest of Sulochan as told to him by Kuladri:

All glories to Lord Ramachandra’s victory of the demons. When Steve Bryant, formerly Sulochan, called me [late in January], my stomach immediately knotted and I felt repulsed by the creature on the other end of the phone. He asked for my offer, thinking that we would buy him off from his previous threats to destroy the community and its

individuals. I quickly responded, "I just want to tell you that you cannot step foot on New Vrindaban property." "Oh, yeah, well, your whole community will be destroyed within two weeks," he said. . . . Srila Bhaktipada returns from India, and Bryant shows up in the area. This is no coincidence; our anxiety over Srila Bhaktipada swells.⁵⁹⁶

Due to the danger of the immediate situation, one of New Vrindaban's more exalted Vaishnavas [Tapahpunja Swami]—who is certainly a liberated soul and beyond any varnashram distinction—plays the part of a ksatriya, with some behind the scenes work [on Sunday, February 1st, by calling Mrs. Bryant and tricking her into revealing her son's location]. Soon, he turns us on to a hot lead: Bryant is in a motel near the [Ohio Valley] Mall [in Richland Township, Ohio, about 25 miles from New Vrindaban].

During the next four days we keep a 24-hour watch on the demon. We sit quietly [on Monday, February 3rd] as he spends five hours with FBI agents in Wheeling. He leaves and then returns—another two hours. We can only imagine what trash he's presenting to the Feds. We alert the Sheriff's department that Bryant is in town. They request us to notify them as soon as we spot him. We keep his location under our sikhas [under our hats] for now.⁵⁹⁷ Four devotees [Tapahpunja Swami, Tirtha, Gaura-Shakti and Sthayibhava] and a good friend [Gorby] work around the clock to keep track of his nefarious movements. . . .

Bryant gives our men a temporary slip [on Tuesday, February 4th]. That night we take some extra precautions on the farm, especially for Srila Bhaktipada. We wonder if Bryant suspects our stake-out. Maybe he's headed back to the West Coast. [This was when Gorby lost Sulochan heading west on I-70, and Tirtha was subsequently sent to California to meet with Janmastami.] . . .

As the morning program finishes [on Wednesday, February 5th], I get a phone call in my room [from Gorby]. Bryant is back! We begin the stake out. Later that day two federal agents pick him up. Little do they know that they're protecting the criminal. . . . I finally finish up the complaint with the help of Magistrate Buzzard, who says he'll

send the warrant to the sheriff as soon as he records it. “Thanks, Hare Krishna,” I say, and head back to the farm. . . . A few more calls from the stake-out. Bryant seems to have settled in for the night. We’ve been up for five nights in a row, on and off the property, talking in phone booths, driving over the highways, keeping our eyes on this demon. Who knows what this night will bring.

At 9 p.m., just as I’m ready to lie down for the evening, I think, “Let me turn him in now, so he can sit in jail overnight.” I call the sheriff and tell him I know where Bryant is, to go pick him up. The deputy says they’ll go down to get him as soon as they find the warrant. . . . At 12:35 a.m. [Thursday morning, February 6th], the chief deputy of the sheriff’s department sends down two of their crack detectives. They pull up to the steps of the boarding house and find Bryant descending the stairs. He has a fully-loaded .45 automatic strapped on his belt, and he’s intoxicated on a third of a bottle of vodka.

The detectives grab him and take him to jail. The detectives obtain a search warrant, and after a quick search of his room, find a hash pipe and other assorted drugs. Bryant is charged with possession of a deadly weapon; assault, with drug charges to follow. In one fell swoop, Krishna has discredited this man’s character and sent him to jail. All of our accusations are proven and his credibility destroyed. Who can understand the plan of the Lord? . . .

Wednesday morning, 8 a.m. The sheriff calls me bright and early and gives me the news. I’m jumping for joy on the phone, and the sheriff sounds almost as excited as I am. I reflect what a difference it is working with the local sheriff’s department. . . . I offer my respects and thanks to the vigilant Vaishnavas who gave up their sleep and safety to help protect the devotees.

VICTORY TO RAMA!

P.S.—We’re still keeping a close eye on the demon. We don’t know if or when he’ll get out.

* New Vrindaban’s version of J. Edgar Hoover, Kuladri dasa, your servant. ⁵⁹⁸

Those Brijabasis who read Kuladri's story in the *New Vrindaban News* saw Krishna's hand in the arrest of the "demon" who had threatened to kill their beloved spiritual father. On the other hand, Sulochan's lawyer, David Gold, saw an entirely different perspective:

One key miscalculation was that Bryant thought the sheriff was on his side, and so he kept him informed of his moves to keep ahead of the Krishnas. In reality, Kirtanananda and the sheriff were on the same side of the table. Shortly after Bryant's return [to West Virginia], Art Villa [Kuladri], the president of New Vrindaban, sought and received a warrant from a Marshall County magistrate charging Bryant with assault for threatening the Krishna community. The warrant was granted even though verbal threats are not a crime in West Virginia. And because Bryant had been telling the sheriff of his moves, the arresting deputies knew just where to look for him—in a small boarding house just south of the Moundsville city limits.

When the deputies pulled into the boarding house parking lot, Bryant waved to them and stepped down off the porch. He had just seen the same deputies earlier in the evening, and filled them in on his plans. He thought they were merely stopping by for another chat. Instead, they placed him under arrest for assault. During the pat down search they found the loaded .45 he carried for protection, so they also charged him with carrying a concealed weapon. The sheriff got a search warrant and seized all of Bryant's papers. Then he invited the Krishnas to come down and look through them, and encouraged them to make copies of anything they thought might be of interest to the Swami. ⁵⁹⁹

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH: NEW VRINDABAN EXAMINES SULOCHAN'S PAPERS

Sheriff Bordenkircher suggested that New Vrindaban leaders come in to the sheriff's office to examine Sulochan's confiscated papers, including his telephone and address book: an extremely unprofessional and irresponsible decision which Bordenkircher later regretted. Kuladri said:

The morning after Steve Bryant was arrested, the sheriff called me and said that he had been arrested and gave me the story before it hit the news that he had a loaded gun on him and things, and the sheriff felt that he had defused a very difficult situation. And he was very happy that we had worked together on it.

He said that he wanted me to come down and see if there was any conspiracy, any relationship between Triyogi, who had attacked Bhaktipada in the fall, and Sulochan, who had been found with the gun. So he invited me to come to his office, which I did. He took me into Chief Hummel's office and asked Chief Hummel to show me Sulochan's address book and diary. And he left the room. And Chief Hummel showed me those things and pointed to a box, a few boxes, cardboard boxes full of papers behind him. We looked through the diary and the address book. . . . And we discussed things. And I said it didn't seem to me there was any apparent connection between the two incidents. And then the chief pulled out a gun and talked to me about other things.

[After I left Chief Hummel's office] I came back [to New Vrindaban] and told the security people, Sthayibhava and Gaura-Shakti. Gaura-Shakti asked me at that time if he could go in and see the diary and other things. And I said he would have to talk to the sheriff about it.⁶⁰⁰

Gaura-Shakti explained his role in the examination of Sulochan's diary and address book:

Kuladri had called me up, and he had told me that Bordenkircher, the sheriff of Marshall County at that time, had called him up and invited him down to the sheriff's office to go read Sulochan's diary, and go through his belongings. . . . And Kuladri was telling me, and he said, "See if you can go down and see it also." So I gave Chief Deputy Hummel a call. And we spoke briefly, and I asked him about that. And he said, "Yes, Kuladri was in," and invited me down to see it also.

So I called up Randall Gorby, because he was very interested in this stuff. He had come to my house. . . . Anyway, he lived about an hour away from us, Randall Gorby, and he drove down and brought me from the community into Moundsville about twenty-five minutes away.

Randall didn't want to go. I said, "Come on in with me." And he didn't want to come in, didn't even want to go over by the sheriff's office. ⁶⁰¹

So I walked over to the sheriff's office and I met with Chief Hummel and we chatted for about thirty minutes or so. And then he showed me Sulochan's diary. And he pointed over to the side, and said, he showed me the bottle of vodka he had when he got arrested and showed me the weapon that he had when he got arrested, showed me the mustache and false wig . . . he had when he got arrested. I had brought with me a pocket Dictaphone, a little tape recorder.

After Chief Hummel and I spoke for about thirty minutes, he got up and left me alone in his office for about two, or two-and-a-half hours. And I went through Sulochan's materials just very briefly because there was so much of it. And what I did was, I spoke into the tape recorder that I had, information about individuals who, in their own words, said they supported Sulochan's campaign to murder people or people who, in their own words, or in Sulochan's words, said, "Hey, this guy, I think he can be of some help in the future." ⁶⁰²

Janmastami collaborated: "When Sulochan was arrested on a weapons charge, New Vrindaban and the [sheriff] . . . conspired to study Sulochan's impounded personal papers and belongings, including his diary and from that diary a list of possible locations was made where Sulochan could be hunted down and killed. . . . Kuladri and Gaura-Shakti made this list and Radhanath distributed it to anyone they thought might, on their order, kill Sulochan. I was given a copy of that list." ⁶⁰³

Tirtha called Sulochan's diary "a fantastic and truly unprecedented gift." "When Sulochan was arrested by Bordenkircher's deputies outside the rooming house they found in his property a daily diary which contained a great bonanza of information that would later prove crucial in locating him. . . . Included among his memoirs were his thoughts and plans for committing murder, along with the names and addresses of his family, friends and confederates he plotted with. A veritable road map for anyone interested in locating and eliminating Sulochan and his co-conspirators. It was a fantastic and truly unprecedented gift." ⁶⁰⁴

The *Wheeling News-Register* reported, “Investigators said . . . they believe the Marshall County Sheriff’s Office may have inadvertently assisted in the suspected murder-for-hire by having earlier shown Bryant’s address book to Krishna officials.”⁶⁰⁵ U. S. Attorney William A. Kolibash said, “Maybe I don’t agree with the sheriff’s judgment, but whatever he did he honestly thought he was helping his investigation.”⁶⁰⁶

Tirtha noted, “Later, during two consecutive trials in Los Angeles, Deputy District Attorney Sterling Norris referred to Bordenkircher as, ‘That crooked West Virginia sheriff.’ Noting how he had compromised not only the integrity of law enforcement but had likely aided and abetted in murder.”⁶⁰⁷

TIRTHA AND JANMASTAMI REMAIN IN LOS ANGELES

Tirtha and Janmastami, after hearing the news that Sulochan had been arrested and jailed, began thinking of returning back east. Janmastami explained, “On the day that Sulochan was nabbed we knew about it that same day. We agreed to leave then—I already had my paraphernalia to go back east for selling.”⁶⁰⁸

But before they left California, they still had some important networking to do. They wanted to meet with Ramesvara’s ksatriya disciple, Krishna-Katha, request his assistance, and perhaps learn more about Bryant’s habits and movements. The two New Vrindaban hit men, who called themselves “Mr. T.” and “Bhakta Barney,” also wanted to get in touch with the San Diego ksatriya Yudhisthira, whom Tapahpunja had contacted a month earlier.

Tirtha noted Janmastami’s eagerness to assist in the assassination of Sulochan: “It was in California where I met Janmastami, who was already looking around in the area of the Los Angeles temple. He openly spoke of the need for killing Sulochan, and volunteered to assist in killing him. . . . In his van he kept a large metal strong box where he stored several guns,

knives, and even a vial of cyanide for his avowed purpose. He flatly stated that the surveillance exercise was merely a prelude to killing Sulochan.”⁶⁰⁹

Janmastami claimed Tirtha exaggerated his stockpile of weapons; he only had a little cyanide from New Vrindaban’s jewelry shop and a small handgun from the pujari room which didn’t work properly. In an e-mail to the author, Janmastami remembered:

The van did have a drop safe (that Bimbadhara [William Jones, a mechanic] or Marudeva [Jeffrey Forester, a welder] had fabricated) under the seat (very small), but there was nothing in there but cash. The old pujari room .38 (purchased by Bhagavatananda [Joseph Cappelletti]) was the only weapon that I had and it was not working. Before we left [New Vrindaban], Jai Sri Krishna and I had test fired it out at the mechanic shop in the sub-zero temperatures and the firing pin spring broke. The hammer wouldn’t drop on its own, so it would have to be cocked by hand each time you wanted to fire a round; not exactly the best weapon to bring to a “gun fight,” if that’s what it turned out to be.

The cyanide was true, but it wasn’t weapons grade, it was stuff that [Mother] Isani [Ellen Schramm] gave me from the jewelry room. Madhurya-Lila [Marian Phillips, who worked in the jewelry department] was there when I got it, but she may not have known what it was for. Isani knew, and because it was a “Radhanath says,” she gave it. The thought was to cyanide tip hollow point bullets, but it never came to pass.⁶¹⁰

Tirtha, during conversation with his partner-in-crime in California, admitted to Janmastami that Radhanath had recruited him, and Tapahpunja Swami as well, to “do the deed.” Janmastami claimed, “When Tirtha and I spoke at the Trade Winds Motel in Los Angeles, he said that Radhanath had called him first to ‘do the deed’ because he was known to be ‘qualified’ to whack someone. He [Tirtha] had also talked to Terry Sheldon (aka Tapahpunja Swami, Top Buffoon, T. P.), who had also been similarly instructed [by Radhanath].”⁶¹¹

SULOCHAN AND RAMESVARA

Sulochan was not liked by most devotees at Los Angeles ISKCON, due to his constant and bitter criticism of Ramesvara Maharaja and the other ISKCON gurus. Puskar recalled, “I don’t think many devotees [in Los Angeles] were friendly to him due to his criticisms of Ramesvara Maharaja. I had once heard that a messy pile of human stool was discovered on Ramesvara’s vyasasana and Sulochan was the primary suspect.”⁶¹²

Ramesvara knew that Sulochan had recommended deadly violence against the ISKCON gurus and therefore he wanted to keep close tabs on a potentially dangerous dissident. He asked Mukunda Goswami (Michael Grant), the director of ISKCON Public Relations and senior editor for *ISKCON World Review*, to keep close watch on Sulochan whenever he was in town. Nandini (Nori J. Muster), who served under Mukunda in the Public Relations Office, explained, “I’d known Sulochan for years as a friend of Mukunda’s. Lately, one of Mukunda’s responsibilities in internal communications was to take care of Sulochan. He didn’t tell me the details, but only said to put Sulochan through whenever he called or stopped by. Few people had that access to Mukunda, so I knew Sulochan was an important man.”⁶¹³

Once, when Ramesvara was at the Los Angeles ISKCON restaurant, Sulochan tried to enter with his gun, but was denied entrance. A typewritten document in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive noted: “In mid-January [1986], Bryant walked into Govinda’s Restaurant on Venice Boulevard, near the Los Angeles temple. On finding out that Ramesvara was in the restaurant, Bryant went to his van, got a .45 [pistol], and tucked it in the front of his pants. He tried to re-enter the restaurant, and was barred from entering. When Ramesvara heard about this, he said, ‘He [Sulochan] should be transmigrated to his next body.’”⁶¹⁴

RAMESVARA’S KSATRIYA DISCIPLE

Krishna-Katha dasa (Jeffrey Allen Breier, aka K. K.) served Los Angeles ISKCON as a temple security guard. He owned a .45 pistol and carried it

while on duty. He also carried a two-meter F. M. hand-held radio, which allowed him to receive and make phone calls without having to go to a phone booth. This device was one of the early precursors to the cell-phone. Krishna-Katha's roommate, Premadatta (Michael David Scheffer), served as Ramesvara's personal secretary.

Premadatta explained what Ramesvara meant when he said in Govinda's Restaurant that Sulochan should be transmigrated to his next body: "In the Vedic term, it means to send him from the body he is presently residing." ⁶¹⁵ In plain English: to kill him. Krishna-Katha spoke about his guru's remark also with Tirtha, who said: "It soon became evident from speaking with Krishna-Katha that he also had an interest in killing Sulochan, referring to some vague comment by his guru about giving Sulochan a 'new body.'" ⁶¹⁶

When Tirtha arrived in Los Angeles and rendezvoused with Janmastami, Ramesvara knew that the New Vrindaban hit men were in L. A. (probably from phone calls from Kuladri, or from speaking personally with Radhanath a week or two earlier during Radhanath's Los Angeles visit). Ramesvara ordered his ksatriya disciple to cooperate with the New Vrindaban hit men, and to keep an eye out for Sulochan. Krishna-Katha explained, "The only discussion I had with my guru, Ramesvara, about Sulochan was a very quick occasion when he was walking by the sidewalk, and I was up some stairs. He looked up at me and he said: 'K. K., if you ever see Sulochan, call New Vrindaban.' And he walked on. . . . I had a fear for my own spiritual master. I felt perhaps his life could be in danger as all the other gurus' lives were. And because I heard that Sulochan may frequent the area, I kept an eye out for his vehicle." ⁶¹⁷

Tirtha noted Krishna-Katha's enthusiasm to do "something really big" for his guru: "Krishna-Katha was quite eager to be involved in 'something really big,' as he put it. He carried his own gun, which he was quite eager to use. He was with me until moments before Sulochan was killed." ⁶¹⁸ However, another Ramesvara disciple claimed that his guru

told the Los Angeles ksatriyas *not* to get involved; they should let the New Vrindaban devotees assassinate Sulochan. Krishna-Katha's assistant, Mahamantra (David Fuller), who served as a maintenance man at the Los Angeles temple and also worked part time for the security department, explained, "For the record, as I testified [in court], Ramesvara . . . told us *not* to get involved, but if people from New Vrindaban were there to give Sulochan another body, then let them do it." ⁶¹⁹

Ramesvara was undoubtedly pleased that the New Vrindaban men were going to remove the undesirable trouble-maker Sulochan from his life. He would be able to benefit from the result without having to get "personally involved" in the murder conspiracy. He could wash his hands clean just like the Roman governor Pontius Pilate washed his hands after releasing Jesus Christ into the hands of the Jewish authorities. His conscience would be absolved.

Thirty-one years after the murder, in a comment on a post from the "Killing For Krishna" Facebook page, Ramesvara declared, "I was not involved in this heinous murder . . . there being no truth to this false accusation." The author replied to Ramesvara, "Considering your knowledge of the plot, did you try to stop or impede the murder? Did you try to warn Sulochan that hit men were hunting him? I think not. If this is not aiding and abetting, I don't know what is. You were very, very lucky that you were not questioned or subpoenaed to appear in court. Why don't you, like your disciple Mahamantra, just say, 'I was misguided and I regret my involvement in this crime.' ⁶²⁰ Please do not continue to live in denial. Your dishonesty looks very bad for you. Please, I beg you, become an honest disciple of Srila Prabhupada." ⁶²¹

SULOCHAN'S DISGUISES

Ravindra-Svarupa spoke about Bryant's disguises, "Sulochan was in L. A. He wanted to assassinate Kirtanananda, but decided it was too hard, and instead said he was going to try and assassinate Ramesvara, so there were

Ramesvara security agents kind of following this guy around. He was in disguise going from place to place, and then some people came from New Vrindaban to help them. One of them was a guy by the name of Tirtha who had been trained as a killer by the United States government in Vietnam. So he had valuable skills. He had been a soldier in Vietnam.”⁶²²

Attorney David Gold also remembered Sulochan’s disguises: “Sulochan was very paranoid about his safety. He was jumping from place to place. Whenever he would go to a hotel, somebody would call and ask if he was registered, or if somebody who looked like him was there. He carried a fake mustache, a fake beard.”⁶²³ Puskar confirmed: “When I saw Sulochan at the 1985 Los Angeles Rathayatra festival at Venice Beach, he was wearing a fake beard and funny looking eye-glasses with fake plastic nose; the kind you purchase at a dime store.”⁶²⁴

We cannot help notice the irony: Sulochan wore a disguise because he feared for his safety; he was afraid if he was recognized someone might attempt to kill him. Yet most devotees thought he wore the disguises so he could sneak up on an ISKCON guru without being recognized, and kill the guru. David Gold recalled, “Once . . . he dropped by the office wearing a false beard that was so cheap and phony looking I broke out laughing while he was telling me how much he feared for his life.”⁶²⁵

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ISKCON MANAGERS AWARE OF MURDER PLOT

Janmastami was not happy working with Tirtha, Kuladri or Tapahpunja Swami, as he felt none were exercising the caution and secrecy necessary to execute a successful assassination. Janmastami remembered, “Tirtha flew [to Los Angeles] under an assumed name. Tirtha felt that he looked like Nick Nolte [an American actor known for his trademark athleticism and gravel-voiced characters], so he flew under that name to attract attention to himself. He was that kind of a guy.”⁶²⁶

Janmastami thought that Kuladri was also attracting too much attention: “Kuladri had called temple presidents on the Left Coast to boast that ‘I

have hit men in California already!”⁶²⁷ Tapahpunja agreed, “EVERYONE, and I mean EVERYONE, knew that both Janmastami and Tirtha were stalking Sulochan in California.”⁶²⁸ Tirtha liked to brag about the important services he performed for the community. It was because of his bragging that he was convicted in the murder of Chakradhari nearly a year later, in December 1986. Several New Vrindaban residents testified at that trial saying that Tirtha had bragged to them about the murder.

Agnideva (Alvin Marsden: an African-American from Trinidad, who was a popular singer, kirtan leader and president of the Laguna Beach ISKCON temple) was respected for his “integrity and honesty.”⁶²⁹ He knew about the murder plot and admonished Tirtha not to kill Sulochan in his temple. The Laguna Beach temple had received negative publicity due to a drug ring bust and murder nine years earlier. At that time, several ISKCON members and former-members were implicated, and he didn’t want any more negative publicity. When Tirtha and Janmastami, during their travels, stopped in for lunch at Govinda’s—the vegetarian restaurant run by Laguna Beach ISKCON—Agnideva knew who they were, and why they were in Southern California. He came up to their table and ordered, “Don’t whack him in my temple; do it outside.”⁶³⁰

Janmastami recalled, “Agnideva, he had a real heavy Jamaican accent, and he knew who Tirtha was, and what was going on (now it seems he knew well better than me), and when Tirtha and I went to the restaurant in the temple for lunch, Agnideva sat down at our table and said, ‘Don’t whack him in my temple; do it outside.’ Tirtha assured him that we wouldn’t do it there.”⁶³¹

TIRTHA NEEDS CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT

Tirtha was not a steady, fixed-up devotee; he was a “fringie.” He wasn’t always able to strictly follow the four regulative principles; this inability contributed towards his feelings of unworthiness and lack of self-esteem. When challenged by obstacles or difficult tasks, he sometimes lost his

determination and became bewildered. Tirtha admitted, “I always felt like a failure because I wasn’t a surrendered soul.”⁶³² “Kirtanananda treated me like a failure . . . and I felt like one. So when my chance for redemption came along, well, I leapt at it. I had a fairly screwed up upbringing—a dysfunctional family, etc.—which didn’t do much for promoting much self-esteem.”⁶³³

Tirtha, while stationed in California with Janmastami, needed to call New Vrindaban by telephone every day for inspiration and guidance from more advanced devotees, as well to get as updates, such as news about Sulochan’s whereabouts. Tirtha recalled, “I called Kuladri . . . to get an update . . . every day.”⁶³⁴ Janmastami remembered his partner’s constant need to call New Vrindaban for “spiritual guidance,” his refusal to work with devotees, such as Tapahpunja and Kuladri, who couldn’t keep the assassination plot a secret, and his recommendation that Tirtha speak daily to Radhanath Swami for inspiration and guidance. In an e-mail to the author, Janmastami noted:

Tirtha was calling back to the farm every day (he needed his “spiritual guidance” if we were to be successful) and it was already to the point where I told him not to talk to Tapahpunja any more about my activities or we would part company. After I heard that Kuladri was also calling the West Coast and bragging, I told Tirtha that Kuladri would have to be “out of the loop” because I wasn’t going to have my safety, security and operation compromised by a couple of nubes playing gangsta.

Tirtha said “Who can I take my instructions from?” and I told him “Radhanath.” Radhanath seemed to be the only one [at New Vrindaban] with enough brains to keep his mouth shut. After that he [Tirtha] talked to Radhanath or Devananda [Daniel Van Pelt, the New Vrindaban Temple Commander, daily on the phone].⁶³⁵

Mahamantra, who traveled with Mr. T., Bhakta Barney, and Krishna-Katha for one day in California, also noted Tirtha’s deep-rooted insecurity, “[Tirtha] stated that he didn’t think himself a very good

devotee, and he thought by killing Sulochan that would be a good service to his spiritual master.”⁶³⁶ During the five days Tirtha was in California with Janmastami (February 4th to the 9th), he made three telephone calls to Tapahpunja at the Cleveland temple, six calls to New Vrindaban and twelve telephone calls to Gorby from the Trade Winds Motel. It is not hard to see who Tirtha really depended on to maintain his enthusiasm.⁶³⁷

Tirtha felt that it was his divine duty to assassinate Sulochan, for by so doing his spiritual master would be pleased, the karma from his past sins would be wiped away, and at the end of this life he would go back to Godhead. Five years earlier, around the time of Tirtha’s trial in Ohio for the manufacture of methaqualone, Bhaktipada actually said (as noted earlier in Chapter 7), “If Tirtha takes the whole thing, and no other boys get caught, then he’ll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime.”⁶³⁸

While in Los Angeles, Tirtha and Janmastami requested Krishna-Katha and Premadatta to help them contact Yudhisthira, apparently unaware that Tapahpunja had been in California a month earlier, and had already made personal contact with Yudhisthira, without success. The attempt by Tirtha and Janmastami to contact Yudhisthira suggests that the New Vrindaban murder conspirators lacked a leader; someone with (1) the intelligence to efficiently coordinate the various players in the drama, (2) strong personal charisma to insure that the players would obey his instructions, (3) the common sense to keep everything secret, and (4) easy access to at least ten thousand dollars for funding the mission. There was little coordinated action between the players. None of the conspirators had any experience, and few exercised the self-discipline necessary to keep the assassination plot a secret. One of the conspirators was actually a government spy, working against them. Janmastami noted earlier that the surveillance team reminded him of a disorganized and bungling Keystone Cops comedy film.

MR. T. AND BHAKTA BARNEY MEET KRISHNA-KATHA AND PREMADATTA

Tirtha and Janmastami knocked on the door of Krishna-Katha and Premadatta's apartment near the Los Angeles ISKCON temple on Friday, February 7th. Premadatta recalled:

I was at the apartment with Krishna-Katha. A knock came to the door. I opened the door, and there were two individuals standing outside the door, Tirtha and Janmastami, who introduced themselves as "Mr. T." and "Bhakta Barney." They indicated that they were looking for Yudhisthira and they had been directed to speak with my roommate, Krishna-Katha.

When they asked for Yudhisthira, I was concerned, because Yudhisthira had a reputation for dealings that were illegal. Krishna-Katha indicated that we did not know where Yudhisthira was, and at that time, we naturally inquired as to the purpose of their trying to find Yudhisthira. They responded that it was in relation to an individual named Sulochan.

When Tirtha mentioned Sulochan, we were concerned. We understood that either, (A) they were friends of his, or (B) enemies. Sulochan had written what at the time we considered to be more or less inflammatory exposés, specifically targeting the West Virginia temple and generally targeting the movement. It wasn't a casual thing that they were looking for him to go have dinner with.

I specifically asked: "Let's just stop everything right here, and let me ask you: What is your purpose? Are you friends of this guy, or are you enemies? What is your desire?"

They responded that they were most definitely not his friends, that they were looking for him, and ultimately they were interested in killing him. They said they were coming from New Vrindaban. Tirtha did most of the talking. He said, and I quote: "Bhaktipada wants this guy gone."

They indicated that Sulochan had been arrested in West Virginia and they were suspecting that he would be bailed out. If he was bailed out, they speculated that he would return to Los Angeles, and they were

there waiting in case this occurred. They discussed different methods to attempt to find him. They discussed driving through long-term parking at the Los Angeles Airport under the idea that possibly they would locate his vehicle and then be able to know at least if he came back where he would go.

They discussed if and when they found him the possibility of giving him a drug overdose so that it would appear that he was just a junkie who overdosed. They also discussed killing him and then very carefully disposing of the body so that there would be no evidence, the idea of some abandoned mine shafts somewhere in the upper desert in California.

Tirtha indicated that he had been following Sulochan and surveilling him for some time. Part of the time using his own money, and part of the time, including the time that we saw him, he was being funded by the New Vrindaban Community. He indicated that he was in need of receiving more money from them.⁶³⁹

Krishna-Katha remembered: “Tirtha and Janmastami said they were looking for Yudhisthira, a devotee from the San Diego area who has a reputation as a kind of thug, if you will. They were hoping he could supply them with heroin. Later they said they wanted to kill Sulochan, and they suggested a few different ways . . . various ways of killing him. One of the methods was to obtain some heroin and give an overdose injection and then dump the body. . . . Beating him to death, throwing him in a river. They were there because their spiritual master, Bhaktipada—an advanced person in the sense of spiritual life—had told him that that is what he wanted done. I took it as a very heavy weighty thing, here is this person who is receiving worship is ordering this, is wanting this to be done.”⁶⁴⁰

Although Tirtha and Janmastami agreed on the ends, they did not agree on the means. Janmastami claimed: “Tirtha had some pipe dreams about chain sawing up the body and putting it in dumpsters all over Los Angeles, but he surrendered to throwing the body out in the desert or down an old mine shaft because it would be less physical labor for him. He had ordered me to buy a chain saw and rain gear for the both of us, which I refused to do. He was not the boss of me.”⁶⁴¹

Tirtha wanted to know if Sulochan's parents were going to bail their son out of jail, so he tried the same trick that Tapahpunja had used on Mrs. Bryant five days earlier. Tirtha asked Krishna-Katha to pose as Sulochan's attorney, telephone Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, and ask them if they were going to bail their son out. However, Mrs. Bryant was not the type of person who could be fooled twice. Krishna-Katha related:

He [Tirtha] wanted me to pose as Sulochan's lawyer, and speak with the parents of Sulochan and ask them if they were planning on bailing their son out. He asked if he could use my telephone, and he said, 'I will call Sulochan's parents, and tell them your name is [David Gold], and ask them if they plan to bail their son out.' . . . A female voice spoke on the other end of the line. . . . She said she didn't want to say anything yet . . . "I need to speak with my husband." . . . She said "Just a minute." And then went like pause, blank for a while, and she came back on the phone, and said, "I am sorry, but I really don't know who you are," or, "We are getting lots of these kinds of calls." And she hung up. ⁶⁴²

SURVEILLANCE TEAM EXAMINES MINE SHAFTS

The next day, Saturday, February 8th, Krishna-Katha, in the company of his assistant Mahamantra, picked up the two New Vrindaban devotees at the Trade Winds Motel and took them on a drive in his Alfa Romeo sports car to Apple Valley—a town in San Bernardino County located at the southern edge of the Mojave Desert—where they examined abandoned mine shafts. Krishna-Katha explained: "We discussed an idea that had been brought to my attention by another devotee named Mahamantra dasa, about disposing of the body in some abandoned mine shafts that were in the Apple Valley area where he had grown up that he knew about. Myself, Mahamantra dasa, Janmastami and Tirtha left for the mine shafts in Apple Valley; it was about a four-hour drive. A long way longer than we were told. Four hours to go and four hours back. We looked at mine shafts." ⁶⁴³

Tirtha collaborated: “Janmastami, Krishna-Katha, myself and one other devotee friend of Krishna-Katha’s traveled to Apple Valley in Krishna-Katha’s Alfa Romeo to look for mine shafts.”⁶⁴⁴ Mahamantra explained in more detail:

I grew up in Apple Valley, California, mostly. It’s in the Mojave Desert, a high desert. There is not too much population there. . . . We drove to the high desert, and I was guiding them to show them a place to put Sulochan’s body. There were some mine shafts and some power line roads. There was some discussion between the two gentlemen in the back seat. Mr. T. said he was tired of following Sulochan and that he would like to get it over with, meaning to kill him, soon. The other fellow [Janmastami] said he could wait a long time if necessary. . . .

When we arrived at Apple Valley, first we went out to a place near a quarry, out in the desert. And I do remember Mr. T. saying he could bury a body out in the desert there. We then proceeded up to some mine shafts in the mountains, and we got out and looked into two of them, I believe. I remember Mr. T. saying he put different bodies in different ones, and he did mention Sulochan’s name and also a devotee up in Sacramento area.⁶⁴⁵

Could Mr. T. have been speaking of Puranjana in Berkeley?

ANOTHER CALIFORNIA KSATRIYA ASKED TO ASSASSINATE SULOCHAN

According to Puranjana, it seems that Tirtha and Janmastami contacted another California devotee with a reputation as a ksatriya—Vipra dasa (Vladimir Vassilievich), a former follower of Hamsadutta—about assassinating Sulochan. Puranjana remembered:

As we found out later, two men claiming to represent “the New Vrindaban hierarchy” had tried to get a devotee named Vipra (Vassilievich) to assassinate Sulochan. He refused, and in fact he had already been arrested for possession of a machine gun that had been

found by police in Hamsadutta's car in 1980. Vipra told me that the machine gun was not his, he had "taken the rap" for Hamsadutta. So we can also see how the "Kirtanananda and Hamsadutta alliance" was already working in early 1986. Kirtanananda's "hierarchy" needed a hit man and so they approached one of Hamsadutta's men. ⁶⁴⁶

Is this story factual? Janmastami doesn't think so. He claims that he and Tirtha, while networking in California with the Los Angeles security team, never contacted Vassilievich. Janmastami retorted, "This is Tim Lee's [Puranjana's] speculation. Unacceptable! Has Vipra confirmed this? I thought not! Another Tim Lee fairy tale! It wasn't me who contacted Vipra, and I know enough about Tirtha to know it wasn't him. Who else could it be? Lee's imaginary friend!" ⁶⁴⁷

Is it possible that Tapahpunja contacted Vipra during his January trip to California? No evidence exists to support this theory. Hamsadutta's followers often visited, and even lived at, New Vrindaban beginning in December 1985. Hamsadutta himself allegedly "surrendered" to Bhaktipada around this time (he came to New Vrindaban in part in an attempt to conquer his addiction to alcohol and painkillers), so Hamsadutta may have suggested to the New Vrindaban conspirators that they contact his former follower. Some of Hamsadutta's own henchmen might have done so.

THE TWO NEW VRINDABAN HIT MEN LEAVE CALIFORNIA

After examining mine shafts, Tirtha and Janmastami had no more business in California, as long as Sulochan remained locked up in the Marshall County Jail. But before Tirtha left Los Angeles, he gave several phone numbers to Krishna-Katha and asked him if he should see Sulochan or his van to call immediately. Tirtha said, "I gave him several numbers. One of them was [Tapahpunja Swami's number at] the Cleveland Temple, Randall Gorby's number, and . . . Kuladri's number. I gave him Janmastami's number in Philadelphia [a payphone at the ISKCON temple]." ⁶⁴⁸

On Sunday, February 9th, Tirtha and Janmastami checked out of the Trade Winds Motel; Tirtha flew to Ohio and Janmastami began driving his van to Philadelphia, where he had a business selling flowers. Janmastami said: “Tirtha flew out and I returned in my repaired van back east.”⁶⁴⁹

When Tirtha returned to Ohio he met with Tapahpunja and received another payment for surveillance expenses. The second installment was supposed to be \$2,000, but he only received \$1,700 in an envelope handed to him by Tapahpunja. Tirtha confided in his friend Randall Gorby: “Hey, they are jerking me around on what I was supposed to get for what I did in January. . . . Seventeen hundred? Why—I was supposed to get two thousand!”⁶⁵⁰

Around this time, after Tapahpunja delivered \$1,700 to Tirtha to reimburse his California surveillance expenses, Tapahpunja appeared to become less involved in the plot to murder Sulochan. During the previous several months, he undoubtedly had neglected his duties as president of the Cleveland temple, but now that Sulochan was locked up in jail, he may have thought that he should return to his regular service of preaching in Cleveland. He passed the torch to Kuladri, Hayagriva, Tirtha and Gorby, who continued their combined efforts to assassinate the “demon.” Three months later, however, as will be discussed in Chapter 12, Tapahpunja once again became an active participator in the murder conspiracy.

However, one of the residents at Cleveland ISKCON claimed that Tapahpunja was “far more involved in the murder than what anyone really knows.” My godbrother Ananda dasa remembered, “I was living at the Cleveland Temple and was helping to build the Kent satellite temple kitchen at the time [of the murder] and I know that Tapahpunja was far more involved than what anyone really knows. He was being very distant and secretive during the weeks leading up to the murder.”⁶⁵¹

SULOCHAN IN JAIL REACHES HIS “ROPE’S END”

Sulochan remained in the Marshall County Jail. Nobody posted his bail, not even his mother. After two weeks in jail, he requested to be moved to solitary confinement. Sulochan explained, “I require solitary confinement. The constant non-stop foul language, blasphemy, and TV noise prevents me from thinking or writing, which is necessary to prepare my defense.” Sulochan’s request was denied. ⁶⁵²

Beginning on February 26, 1986, ⁶⁵³ Sulochan staged a ten-day hunger strike and admitted: “I’ve pretty much reached my rope’s end in combating this demonic cult on my own and so I’ve decided to fast to death if I don’t get some government help.” ⁶⁵⁴ Because of his threat to fast until death, Sulochan was placed on a suicide watch. Every fifteen minutes, day and night, a guard checked into his cell and made a note in a report book. On March 7, 1986, at noon, the guard wrote, “Refused lunch of cheese sandwich, cream of mushroom soup, crackers, apple and Kool-Aid. He said he was too tired to come out. . . . He sleeps all day and only awakened when offered hot water, lunch and recreation time.” ⁶⁵⁵

Sulochan requested tea bags, allegedly to steep in hot water to drink, but he actually smoked the tea in hand-rolled cigarettes. The other inmates detested the horrible odor of burning tea leaves, and complained to Chief Hummel. Three inmates wrote, “Ever since Steve Bryant was okayed to have tea brang [sic] in, he has been smoking it, and you know how it smells. It really stinks. Us other guys on this side we would appreciate it, if you could either remove him from this side or something. Also he has an attitude. Well, what it amounts to is he’s causing a lot of problems.” ⁶⁵⁶

After Sulochan was forbidden to smoke tea, he began purchasing cigarettes by using the “Marshall County Jail Inmate Request Form,” in which money from his account was deducted for each request. He purchased at least twenty packs of Marlboro and Salem cigarettes between February 23rd and April 9th. ⁶⁵⁷

Sulochan's mother chastised her son in a letter, "Dear Stephen . . . Of all the dumb things to do, starting to smoke is the dumbest. Here you claim to have 'cleansed your body' from poisons with that fast, and then you put the worst one right back in it, and at a time when your body's defenses are so weakened from the fast and you are most vulnerable." ⁶⁵⁸

Sulochan passed the time by reading. He requested a couple dozen books from the library including, *A New History of India* and *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* by Stanley Wolpert, *The Odessa File*, *The Dogs of War*, *The Day of the Jackal* and *The Devil's Alternative* by Frederick Forsyth, *Shaggy Planet* by Ron Goulart, *Hadon of Ancient Opar* by Philip José Farmer, and the *Dune* science fiction novels by Frank Herbert. ⁶⁵⁹

On March 3rd, Sulochan filed a Grievance Form and alleged, "These other men are constantly verbally abusing me and now they are starting to threaten me with violence. I ask why they hate me but they won't say. If you don't move me elsewhere I can't guarantee there won't be violence. . . . Today #2 told someone over the phone that I was in here for 'sexual assault on the Swami.' I can't afford to have malicious rumors going around like this. Please move me away from these men." ⁶⁶⁰

On March 8th, Sulochan uttered obscenities to a Correctional Officer who was passing out hot water to the inmates. The Correctional Officer noted:

At approximately 1830 I was asked by Bryant if I could get Chapter 61 of the *West Virginia Code Book* for him. I told him that I would go upstairs and get it for him. He told me that another C. O. [Correctional Officer] had checked and that it wasn't up there. I told him that I would try and locate the book and let it to him.

I was passing around hot water at 2100 and Bryant inquired about the book. I told him that I hadn't found who had the book. Before I could finish what I was saying he interrupted with, "You're a fucking asshole." I asked him what he said, and he repeated the statement. He

told me that I wouldn't get it for him because, "You don't like me, and you're a fucking asshole."

I tried to explain to him that I had planned to check on the book for him as I passed around hot water, but he persisted with, "You're a fucking asshole," and "I have a right to the book and I want it now." He also said that, "The sheriff is going to hear about this in the morning. I need this book now so I can prepare for my trial on Tuesday." ⁶⁶¹

On March 9th, Sulochan fired his attorney David Gold. Sulochan wrote, "Gold and I had a fight and he stormed out unable to defend his action, so I'm sure I will be defending myself now with a court lawyer." ⁶⁶² Helga Bryant wrote to her son:

It makes me so mad to think that you could be out of there now if you hadn't goofed it up for yourself. . . He [David Gold] has always dealt fairly with us—he stuck by his estimate that he said it would cost when we first hired him, and he would have had you off and free now if you had let him and not blown up.

It was bad enough you fired him, but you had to add insult to injury by accusing him of working for the other side and threatening him besides. You don't do that to a professional man with good standing in the community. You were just way out of line. . . . It is too bad that you alienated the only friend you had down there. . . .

You are a good case of why people shouldn't be allowed to have guns, at least when they have tempers like yours! If you get mad enough you are likely to shoot somebody and pay for it the rest of your life. . . .

Love,
Mother ⁶⁶³

On March 10th, Sulochan was "moved to Max #3 due to problems with the other inmates." ⁶⁶⁴ On March 12th, a Correctional Officer noted in his logbook that Bryant was "a real *pain*." ⁶⁶⁵ On March 20th, a Correctional Officer noted in his logbook, "Gave two cups of hot water. Ready for Magistrate Court. He grabbed the greens out of my hand and threw them on his bunk. He kept complaining and I told him to grow up and act his age." ⁶⁶⁶

SULOCHAN MEETS TRIYOGI

Michael Shockman (Triyogi), who was serving time at the Marshall County Jail for assaulting Bhaktipada five months earlier, met Sulochan and the two became friendly. Sometimes Sulochan begged or borrowed money from Shockman to replenish his inmate account. When Sulochan became paranoid and suspected that someone might try to poison him, he requested that Shockman prepare his breakfast, lunch and dinner plates in the kitchen, and personally bring his meals to him. Sulochan trusted Shockman; after all, Shockman chanted Hare Krishna and he had tried to kill Kirtanananda Swami.

Beginning around March 20th, Sulochan's paranoia increased; he feared that one of Kirtanananda's followers would try to kill him, either by arranging for an inmate to poison his food, or by personally shooting at him when he was outside of the jail going to court. Sulochan wrote about his paranoia and expressed his demands to Chief Hummel:

No one here seems to respect my caution regarding food poisoning. . . . [There are several] reasons why Ham wants me dead. . . . He knows that my death by violent means will be very implicating whereas a slow-acting poison will virtually go unnoticed. He knows that if I'm not killed, he's finished. . . .

He has several very fanatical followers that I personally know of who would risk their lives to kill me. . . . Such fanatics could snipe me while walking in the open toward the courtroom since those dates and times are public knowledge.

Ham has an unlimited bank roll. . . . [He could] corrupt the residents in this jail. . . . Such bribed persons [could, with very little ingenuity, slip a drop of poison into my soup, etc. Such poison would not necessarily be a type that kills instantly. Such a thing as an AIDS-infected serum could be used. . . . It may already be too late.

[One inmate here] has a cast on his hand that I doubt you inspected thoroughly. That could have concealed a blade or vial of poison. . . . Unless Shockman personally makes my tray, and personally carries it down to me, I won't eat that meal and I will make a case with the media on this point.⁶⁶⁷

A Correctional Officer noted, “April 8, 1986, 17:20: Served supper to Bryant. He started yelling at Shockman and me, about his plate not being watched all of the time from being made, to his cell. He then threw the plate out of his cell and spaghetti went on the floor and wall. I gave him a couple of paper towels and told him to clean it up. He did. He is going to be written up. . . . [He] refused to sign.”⁶⁶⁸

While in the Marshall County Jail, Sulochan had great difficulty getting a satisfactory vegetarian diet. The only protein he could get was grilled cheese sandwiches and peanut butter. As time passed, he became more and more frustrated and more and more disagreeable (probably due to severe constipation). He had lost fifteen pounds since coming to the jail—partly because of his ten-day fast and partly because of dietary deficiencies. He requested a bag of prunes or a bottle of prune juice, and a small package of Epsom salt to use as a laxative.⁶⁶⁹

On April 5th, Sulochan submitted an Inmate Grievance Form in which he stated, “The previously agreed-upon diet for me was grilled cheese twice a day and peanut butter once. Please resume this as I cannot stomach peanuts three times a day as my mainstay. It’s become nauseating to me. If this cannot be done I will have to break my religious vows and start eating the meat diet, which I don’t want to do.”⁶⁷⁰

Two days later, Sulochan gave up and requested the regular inmate diet which included meat. He wrote, “If you won’t give me a decent vegetarian diet, I want the meat diet. I think I have a right to get what everyone else gets.”⁶⁷¹ From then on, Sulochan began eating meals which contained meat, like the rest of the inmates. The new diet seems to have helped him and relieved his constipation, because he didn’t complain about the food again.

SOMETHING FISHY IN THE SHERIFF’S OFFICE AND COUNTY JAIL

We should not neglect to ask: how did photocopies of all these confidential documents about Sulochan in the Marshall County Jail, including guard reports and letters from his mother, magically appear in the Keith

Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive? Apparently, New Vrindaban had some very special friends in the Marshall County Sheriff's Office and the Marshall County Jail. How else could New Vrindaban have acquired these documents, unless someone high up in law enforcement gave the authorization to share the documents?

Some very important people wanted New Vrindaban to know these things. Before Sulochan was arrested, (1) these people wanted New Vrindaban to know his change of addresses, as evidenced by Randall Gorbys's amazing sleuthing powers, and later, after Sulochan was incarcerated, (2) they allowed New Vrindaban to examine Sulochan's diary and address book; and even later, (3) they provided New Vrindaban with photocopies of the Correctional Officers' logbooks and even the personal letters which Mrs. Bryant sent to her son in jail. Could the Marshall County Sheriff have been following orders from a very powerful person in the federal government? Someone who *wanted* New Vrindaban to assassinate Bryant, as Janmastami alleged, so that the federal government could come down very hard on Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban after the murder was accomplished?

The author thinks this conspiracy theory is farfetched. It is far more probable that Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher and/or Chief Deputy Joseph Hummel personally and secretly photocopied the documents regarding Bryant and gave them to New Vrindaban simply because, (1) they were inexperienced lawmen and didn't know any better, and (2) they sincerely wanted to help protect Bhaktipada and the community. Bordenkircher was friendlier to New Vrindaban than his predecessor, Robert Lightner, who detested the Krishnas and said so.

Perhaps New Vrindaban may have also sweetened the deal and provided Bordenkircher and Hummel with a substantial bribe to increase their cooperation. David Gold, Sulochan's attorney, believed that Bhaktipada had used his financial acumen in the past to influence the course of justice in Marshall County, perhaps by bribing a judge or the sheriff. Gold noted "And though my experience as a Marshall County lawyer had been

relatively brief, I'd seen enough to know that the Krishna's vast wealth had produced a formidable influence in the court system. . . . We had reason to suspect that Krishna money and power had pre-empted justice in Marshall County." ⁶⁷²

Others also spoke about rampant corruption in the region. When I worked for New Vrindaban public relations (1992-1993), I several times met with a reporter from the *Wheeling News-Register*, George Belanus. He was a friendly, heavy-set, folksy, home-spun fellow—who drove a car filled with trash: empty soda cans, candy wrappers, etc.—who liked to talk. During one of our meetings, he told me that the Ohio Valley region was noted for corruption. Whenever he wrote articles for the paper which mentioned evidence of bribery or corruption amongst high-ranking members of the law-enforcement or judicial branches of County government, the senior editor deleted all mention of corruption from his articles. Apparently the newspapers were also involved.

In addition, Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher was not a career law enforcement man. He was formerly the warden at the West Virginia State Penitentiary who just happened to be unemployed when he ran for the position of Marshall County sheriff. He won the election only because Robert Lightner, the former sheriff and a trained police officer, had been disqualified due to term limits restrictions. After Bordenkircher took office, his staff and deputies recognized that he was not knowledgeable about law enforcement, and they resisted many of his orders. Similarly, Chief Deputy Joseph Hummel was not qualified to be an acting deputy, but he could be appointed to the position of Chief Deputy because it was a political position. In an e-mail to the author, Thomas Westfall explained:

Bordenkircher was not a police official, he was a political person who had name recognition because of his time as the warden of the West Virginia pen. He was out of work when he decided to run for the Sheriff's position and since his predecessor Robert Lightner was unable to run again, from term limits, Bordenkircher was running virtually with no opposition. He got elected, but by the third year of his term he

was aware that he might not even win the party nomination to run for a second term. And he did lose in the primary. In addition, Joe Hummel was not qualified to be a Deputy Sheriff, but could be appointed as the Chief Deputy, which is a purely political appointment.

The Corrections Officers at the jail did not respect Bordenkircher and Hummel, and the actual law enforcement deputies did not either. Still, I had never heard that they were copying Bryant's mail while he was in jail and releasing copies to anyone. That would violate an awful lot of correction's procedures that deal with inmate mail. Steven had an aggressive lawyer complaining bitterly every day about Steven even being in jail, and doing something with his mail would have been pretty risky.

That Bordenkircher or Hummel got involved with Villa, or whomever at New Vrindaban, and decided that jailing Bryant and allowing people to go through his personal papers was absurd, and not something that an experienced police officer would have considered doing. I was detached from the Sheriff's Department by a Federal agreement and worked out of the Federal building in Wheeling post-Bryant homicide. Bordenkircher was not investigating anything, he had no experience in doing investigations other than inside of prisons. I don't think he ever made an arrest all the time he was in office.

The staff resisted many of the personnel actions that Bordenkircher put on officers, both jail corrections officers and deputies, and there were endless civil service hearings and actions. He did not have very much control over the staff who quickly saw that he was not a law enforcement person. I never heard that Bryant's mail was being copied and given to NV.⁶⁷³

SULOCHAN'S CAMPAIGN LOSES STEAM

After nearly two months in jail, on April 3, 1986, Sulochan was found guilty by a Marshall County Magistrate Court on a charge of carrying a deadly weapon. His attorney wrote: "I went to see Bryant in jail. He was

crushed, truly defeated. The sheriff had betrayed him, and everything had gone terribly wrong. He thought he was on a holy crusade, but now he'd been arrested and painted as a killer, not a savior. He said he didn't want to live if this sort of thing could happen." ⁶⁷⁴

Kirtanananda Swami said: "I remember that while Sulochan was in jail, he was trying to contact reporters and media people, and they wouldn't come and talk to him. In other words, whatever credibility he had before being arrested he lost. Whatever threat he was—whatever motives there were to get rid of him before, didn't exist anymore. No one was listening to him." ⁶⁷⁵

When Sulochan was released on April 11th, after posting bail of \$5,000, he made a motion to appeal the case, and left West Virginia for Royal Oak, Michigan, where he stayed with his parents until April 30th. ⁶⁷⁶ To add insult to injury, he received a bill for \$2,086.00 for his incarceration in the Wetzel County Jail (14 days) and the Marshall County Jail (43 days). ⁶⁷⁷

After Sulochan's release from jail, Hayagriva spoke to Tirtha on several occasions reminding him that Sulochan must be killed. Tirtha said, "I really felt that it was unnecessary, that he wasn't a threat anymore. It seemed to me that he had gone to the FBI and done all this sort of muck-raking and [page missing from transcript]." ⁶⁷⁸

Although Tirtha alleged that he had lost his determination to continue to hunt and assassinate Sulochan, he still wanted New Vrindaban to reimburse him for his California expenses. He claimed to have spent "several thousand" dollars of his own money for surveillance expenses. Tirtha, accompanied by Gorby, went to Hayagriva's house and said he "wanted out of it." Tirtha remembered:

The situation had evolved to a point where I had spent several thousand of my own dollars doing this extra surveillance and running around. I just told him [Hayagriva], I really wanted out of it, and I said, "Well, if you intend to do this, I will have to have some money up front for expense money." . . .

At that time he indicated to me that he had spoken again [to Kirtanananda] and everything would be taken care of, that he wanted the man silenced. I figured what I had spent, on what the cost of my travel the next several weeks would be, and it totaled approximately eight thousand dollars. [After that conversation] I went with Gorby to Michigan.⁶⁷⁹

Although prosecutors (and Kuladri) later claimed that Tirtha agreed to murder Sulochan for \$8,000, Tirtha claimed it was not a “murder for hire,” it was service to his guru. Tirtha explained, “I was not a paid assassin. Whatever I did, I did out of a sense of duty to my spiritual master.”⁶⁸⁰

TIRTHA AND GORBY SPY ON SULOCHAN IN MICHIGAN

Tirtha and Randall Gorby stopped in at Radhanath Swami’s Kent preaching center and “announced they were going to Detroit and pay Bryant a visit.” Tapahpunja Swami, who was remodeling the building, asked “what their plans were.” In answer, “Gorby reached into his pocket and pulled out a Snoopy bumper sticker and said that he was going to put it on Bryant’s bumper just to let him know we are watching him.” Tapahpunja “thought the idea was silly, but did not do anything to stop them.”⁶⁸¹

Tirtha and Gorby drove up to the Bryant house in Michigan, and (can you believe it?!) Tirtha brought his son Tapas and his step-son Jayadeva along for the 425-mile round-trip ride. Couldn’t he afford to hire a babysitter and leave the children in Ravenna? This suggests that the New Vrindaban conspirators, although perhaps devoted and dedicated, were arguably the most unprofessional assassins that ever planned and executed a murder. Janmastami was correct when he referred to the New Vrindaban surveillance team as the “Keystone Cops.”

Gorby explained: “We were there around the [Bryant] house approximately three hours. The kids were in the car. There was a park down the street that we took them down there, and they played in the park. I took a Snoopy bumper sticker—‘Are we having fun yet?’—from Tirtha’s vehicle and put it on the back bumper of Sulochan’s vehicle.”⁶⁸²

Tirtha explained: “Gorby thought this would unnerve him [Sulochan].”⁶⁸³ Gorby disagreed, “At that time, I actually wanted to warn Steven Bryant . . . that he was being followed, that he was being watched.”⁶⁸⁴ Tirtha also took photos of Sulochan’s van, which he later asked Gorby to deliver to Hayagriva. Gorby noted, “Thomas Drescher took a camera and went across the street and took pictures of all sides of the van. . . . He had them developed in a 24-hour developing [service]. . . . After that we left the Detroit area and went to Kent, Ohio. . . . I stayed overnight in Kent State that night and he asked me if I would take those [photos] down to Howard Wheeler at the temple.”⁶⁸⁵

Sulochan noticed the Snoopy bumper sticker on his vehicle and told his parents that he must leave, for his safety and for his parents’ safety. Jack W. Bryant explained, “He [our son] was scared for his life, and also he was apprehensive about our safety. He didn’t want to stay here and endanger us, so he left for California.”⁶⁸⁶

SULOCHAN RETURNS TO CALIFORNIA

On April 30th Sulochan left Michigan in a van he had purchased a week before, and began his 2,400-mile journey to California, but the New Vrindaban ksatriyas already knew about his trip out west. Tirtha explained, “I was with Gorby, we were waiting at a convenience store that day and we just happened to pick up a newspaper. . . . One of us found [an ad] about a travel thing and it was Sulochan’s phone number, so Gorby called the guy, called the number, and he pretended he was someone that might be interested, and that’s the way we learned he was traveling, through that [ad]. It was just a quirk that we learned he was planning on making a trip the next week to California, and was taking riders to go to share expenses.”⁶⁸⁷

Sulochan telephoned his mother on May 11th to wish her a happy Mother’s Day. That was the last time she heard her son’s voice. Helga Bryant recalled, “The last time I talked to him he said he got something for me for Mother’s Day. That was the last time I talked to him. He was a good son.”⁶⁸⁸

After a long drive, Sulochan arrived in California, and in all probability, he first visited his friends in Berkeley, and then visited friends at the Three Rivers Hare Krishna community in Tulare County. Sulochan only had a few friends in ISKCON. Most devotees who lived at the Three Rivers community thought he was a “trouble maker.” Dayakrura (Harold Nicolet) said that Sulochan was a “trouble maker” and “few people even liked him.”⁶⁸⁹ Damodariva (David Peterson) said, “Bryant was a trouble maker.”⁶⁹⁰ Visvamurti (Donald Griffith) said, Bryant was “trying to create problems.”⁶⁹¹ Brahmahanu (William Smith) said, “Bryant was a self-indulgent person at the expense of others. . . It did not take a genius to figure that out.”⁶⁹²

Bhadrabara dasa (Gary Cochran) recalled, “In a way, Bryant was as power hungry and corrupt as those he was writing about. . . . Bryant had a personal problem with a guru, Kirtanananda, and in attempting to get even with him, got a taste of power and that corrupted him. . . . Bryant did not come around Three Rivers very often, and when he did, people would stay away from him because he was pushy and not many believed in what he was talking and writing about. . . . Most people wished that Bryant would go away and not come back.”⁶⁹³

From Three Rivers, Sulochan drove to Los Angeles. During his stay in Los Angeles, he parked his van in the driveway of his friend and godbrother Naranarayan dasa, who lived in a secluded house not far from the ISKCON temple. Narayana explained, “I invited Sulochan to park his van in the driveway of my three-bedroom house at Dauphin Avenue—which was quite hard to find—for about a month in May 1986. I told him he should stay with me, because very few people knew where I lived. He would be safer staying on my property. He knew that a few ksatriya-type devotees were following him; he claimed they intended to kill him. I wanted to help him as I also thought the zonal acharyas were not bona fide gurus.”⁶⁹⁴

Sulochan visited his godbrother and business associate, Nalinikanta dasa (Tom Hopke), who had an apartment on Canfield Avenue not far

from the Watseka Avenue ISKCON temple in Culver City. Nalinikanta recalled, “He [Sulochan] was an intolerably uncontrolled person. He was at my house about a week before he was killed. He was getting tired of his crusade a little bit, but he was really out of control of himself. I had to ask him to leave. . . . He himself was using drugs. He was using foul language. He was brandishing weapons and threatening death to the gurus.”⁶⁹⁵

Naranarayan also was shocked to learn that Sulochan was using drugs. He explained, “I was surprised to discover a pack of cigarettes in the visor of Sulochan’s van.”⁶⁹⁶ In addition to smoking cigarettes and drinking vodka and beer, Sulochan also snorted cocaine, especially during long drives in his van. Naranarayan recalled, “Sulochan went to visit Nistraigunya [Steven John Forbes] and I told him not to. Nistraigunya used cocaine; he sold cocaine, and I didn’t want Sulochan to get into that. I thought these drugs were dangerous. I was shocked when Sulochan told me he liked cocaine; he said it kept him awake and alert at night during long drives in his van between Los Angeles and Berkeley, or between Berkeley and the Three Rivers Krishna community near Visalia.”⁶⁹⁷

Despite his habit of imbibing intoxicants from time to time, Sulochan immensely enjoyed studying his spiritual master’s books. Practically every day while Sulochan lived in Los Angeles, he visited the home of a friend and godbrother, and the two held daily, informal *Bhagavad-gita* readings. Sulochan’s godbrother, who asked to remain anonymous, explained:

During May of 1986, Sulochan used to come nearly every day to my apartment on Watseka Avenue, about a half mile from the temple, and read *Bhagavad-gita* with me. He loved the *Gita*. He had his own book; it had a professional-looking, custom-made, black hard cover with his name, Sulochan dasa, on the spine. He really treasured that *Gita*.

At the time, I was working as a carpenter and general contractor. I was really busy with my work and I only went to the temple maybe twice a week. I used to come home from work, relax and watch television. Sulochan came to my apartment daily in the late afternoon, about four or five p.m. When I’d get home from work, he’d be sitting on the

floor in my living room reading his *Gita*. Instead of watching TV, I'd join him and we'd read together. He was really immersed in the *Gita*; not necessarily in memorizing verses, but studying and understanding the story of the *Gita* and its transcendental meaning. My wife really appreciated him coming over; she saw that Sulochan's association was good for my rather-tepid spiritual life. I appreciated him also. He was my friend, and he was Krishna conscious.

Sometimes other friends would visit my apartment when Sulochan was there, and they sometimes chastised him, "You're too fanatical. You've gotta cool it about the gurus," and Sulochan responded, "Yes, you're right. I've been also lately thinking of giving up this fanatical crusade of revenge for losing my wife and children. I agree; it's time to move on with my life." ⁶⁹⁸

SUNDAY, MAY 18TH: NEW VRINDABAN MANAGERS ATTEMPT TO PROCURE FUNDING FOR TIRTHA

In Los Angeles, Sulochan's van was spotted by the temple security guard, Krishna-Katha, who said, "I first saw the van that fit the description in front of Nistraigunya's house." ⁶⁹⁹ K. K. immediately placed telephone calls to the numbers that Tirtha had given him three months earlier. He succeeded in contacting Janmastami in Philadelphia and informed him, "Sulochan's back in town!" Tirtha confirmed: "I received information from Janmastami who was then staying in Philadelphia, that Krishna-Katha (K. K.) had called him to say that Sulochan had arrived in the Los Angeles area and was living out of his van with Michigan license plates. Shortly thereafter [after meeting with Hayagriva and others, and receiving more funding for surveillance expenses] I traveled to Los Angeles and met with K. K." ⁷⁰⁰

When New Vrindaban leaders heard the news that Sulochan was back in Los Angeles, an important meeting was held at Hayagriva's house on Sunday, May 18th. In attendance were Bhaktipada, Hayagriva, Kuladri, Tirtha and Gorby. Hayagriva's wife, Purnamasi, overheard

some of the conversation from another room. The purpose of the meeting was to convince Bhaktipada to authorize a payment of \$4,000 for Tirtha to fly out to Los Angeles, spy on Sulochan, and assassinate him at an opportune time.

Although Tirtha earlier had told Hayagriva he needed a minimum of \$8,000 to continue the chase, senior management might have thought that Bhaktipada would immediately reject authorizing such a large amount of money. Perhaps if they asked for half that amount, Bhaktipada might consider their request. The conspirators, of course, understood that the purpose of the surveillance was merely a prelude to assassinate Sulochan at an appropriate time. At the meeting, when Hayagriva asked Bhaktipada to authorize \$4,000 for Tirtha, Bhaktipada adamantly refused and raised his voice, “No! I don’t want to have anything to do with it.”⁷⁰¹

Hayagriva’s wife, Purnamasi, recalled, “One day, Tirtha, Gorby, Hayagriva, and Kuladri (who just drops by) have a meeting at my house and decide that Tirtha is supposed to go to Los Angeles to help keep an eye on Bryant. Hayagriva asks Bhaktipada for the money (\$4,000) and Bhaktipada says, ‘No!’ He doesn’t want to have anything to do with it. Gorby is furious and upset. So [after Bhaktipada leaves] they [Hayagriva, Kuladri, Tirtha and Gorby] have more ‘meetings.’”⁷⁰²

Bhaktipada later recalled, “I personally did not want to hear such stuff, and I don’t want that done. As far as I was concerned, the damage that he [Sulochan] had done, had already been done, and he couldn’t do any more. But a lot of damage could be done [to us] if we tried to do something [to murder him]. I knew that! If anything happened to the guy, naturally they [law enforcement] would blame us [New Vrindaban].”⁷⁰³

Purnamasi claimed that Kuladri was a vocal instigator for the murder, not a pacifier as he later testified in court. She said, “Kuladri, Tirtha, Gorby and Hayagriva had a [second] meeting at my house. Kuladri left early. He wanted Bryant killed. The meeting lasted one hour or so. This was . . . [Sunday, May 18th]. By Thursday morning, Bryant was dead.”⁷⁰⁴

BHAKTIPADA ALLEGEDLY AUTHORIZES \$2,500

That evening (Sunday), Bhaktipada was scheduled to leave New Vrindaban for a five-day European tour, accompanied by Devamrita Swami and two teenage boys—his personal servant Chaitanya-Mangala (Christopher Walker) and Jayananda (Jacob Lennon, Jr.).⁷⁰⁵ Whenever Bhaktipada departed on a trip, it was his custom to give last-minute orders to New Vrindaban department heads, and also, if necessary, to authorize funding for their projects. Sometimes the department heads visited him in his home prior to a trip, and sometimes they spoke to him while he sat in his Cadillac limousine in his driveway before departing for Pittsburgh International Airport. During this time, Bhaktipada allegedly told Kuladri that Hayagriva could have \$2,500. Kuladri explained:

Bhaktipada was going to . . . [Germany and The Netherlands],⁷⁰⁶ and as was customary before leaving, he left final orders for different people. And I remember him authorizing a number of, amount of money, to a number of different members. And there were a number of people. I think it was in the limousine, four or five people were in his house before going to the airport.

And during that period he mentioned instructions on printing, some other things, and said Hayagriva could have twenty-five hundred dollars. He also said that if he could go to the [accounting] office and get the money, I have authorized it. If the office doesn't have money, you can go to Dharmatma if he needs cash.

Bhaktipada left [on] that date for . . . [Germany and The Netherlands], and the next morning in the temple I went to the people that had been given authorization by Bhaktipada that their request had been okayed. And I told Hayagriva also. He said, "Okay, please be sure to tell Dharmatma that Bhaktipada has authorized [the] money."⁷⁰⁷

In retrospect, is it possible that Bhaktipada *did not* authorize this money for Hayagriva? Perhaps Kuladri simply told everyone that Bhaktipada had authorized the payment. One week later, during a

conversation with Adwaitacharya dasa in New York, Kuladri claimed that Bhaktipada knew nothing of the murder plot; his memory had deteriorated to such an extent that he was completely “out of it.” Kuladri told Adwaita, “He [Bhaktipada] doesn’t even know what’s going on half the time. He’s out of it!”⁷⁰⁸

Considering Kuladri’s unflagging determination to see Sulochan murdered, and his knowledge of Bhaktipada’s compromised memory, he might have invented the story that Bhaktipada had authorized the payment simply to expedite the murder. As Purnamasi indicated earlier, “Kuladri . . . wanted him killed.” Since Bhaktipada was leaving for Europe and wouldn’t return for nearly a week, perhaps Kuladri thought it would be better to finish off Sulochan while Bhaktipada was gone. In retrospect, it is possible and perhaps likely that Bhaktipada did not authorize the \$2,500 payment for Tirtha?

Kuladri later confirmed this, “That is a complete lie! . . . Bhaktipada never told me to give anyone any money.” On March 22, 1990, a private investigator hired by New Vrindaban visited Kuladri at his home at 108 David Drive, Slidell, Louisiana. After questioning Kuladri, the investigator reported, “In regards to telling Dennis Gorrick to give money to Wheeler, 2,500.00 dollars, Villa said, ‘That is a complete lie.’ He said that he never told Gorrick to give anyone any money and that even if he had, Gorrick would not have done. He gave two reasons for this. One, Gorrick and Villa did not like each other; Two, no one could spend any money without the direct okay from Bhaktipada. However, Villa denies telling Gorrick to give anyone any money. He denies ever receiving any money for surveillance and he denies ever being approached by Wheeler and asked for money, and he denies ever being told by Bhaktipada to give anyone any money. . . . Villa says that he feels it highly unlikely that Bhaktipada would authorize funds for a surveillance and he is very tight fisted when it comes to spending money. He also said that there were too many people that would have done what he wanted [destroy the demon] for free.”⁷⁰⁹

Years later, one of Kuladri's godbrothers, another former ISKCON temple president, noted Kuladri's importance at New Vrindaban as the primary dispenser of funds, including the funding for the surveillance and murder of Sulochan. Rochan recalled, "Many devotees will testify to the fact that Kuladri was Kirtanananda's number one manager at New Vrindaban, and that meant money. . . . His acumen as a money manager was known far and wide. In the case of how blood money was managed with respect to Tirtha's murder of Sulochan, it wasn't simply a question of his payoff or getaway money, there was also the matter of day-to-day expense money related to the murder conspiracy. It costs a lot of money to have men running around the country in surveillance mode. Someone had to have approved these expenditures and known what the money was being used for. And obviously, that person appears to have been Kuladri. Kirtanananda never handed out money. He sent people to Kuladri to get the money, and Kuladri would ask them twenty questions about what the money was to be used for." ⁷¹⁰

MONDAY, MAY 19TH: TIRTHA RECEIVES \$2,500

The next morning, Monday, May 19th, Kuladri spoke to Dharmatma during the morning service at the temple and told him that Bhaktipada had authorized a \$2,500 payment to Hayagriva. Dharmatma explained: "Kuladri approached me during the morning program. We were walking around Tulasi devi, an auspicious plant that we worship, and Kuladri came up to me during that time and told me that Hayagriva was going to come to me for twenty-five hundred dollars and to give it to him. I asked, 'What is up?' He said, 'It is for surveillance of Sulochan.' So I asked, 'Is it cool to give it to him? Is it authorized by Bhaktipada?' and he said, 'Yes. Go ahead.'" ⁷¹¹ But Hayagriva never came to get the money; instead Tirtha came to get it. Dharmatma continued:

I received a telephone call from Tirtha sometime after that [my conversation with Kuladri]. And during that conversation he asked me, basically told me, that Hayagriva says that you have got twenty-five

hundred stickers for me, referring to the bumper stickers that we distribute on sankirtan. I immediately put two and two together, and said, "Yes. I have got twenty-five hundred stickers." And he said, "I will be over to pick them up."

Tirtha came over. I had people in my house, so he kind of stayed outside. And we went along, kind of alongside my house, and sat down on some logs or something that was there. And he started talking to me about how upset he was at the fact that Sulochan had been criticizing and blaspheming Bhaktipada and writing all of these horrible things and saying all of these horrible things about him. He was very vehement and angry at the fact and said, "He has to be taken care of," and "This can't go on," and how "It is really horrible that he is blaspheming a pure devotee." And he kept saying, "You know, we got to do something about him. He has to be taken care of."

And then he showed me an article which Sulochan had written. I guess it was some of his writings. And in there, there was a large paragraph criticizing Bhaktipada. There was another paragraph criticizing Kuladri, and another paragraph criticizing myself. I had heard all of these things before, so I wasn't very disturbed at what he was saying about me. And I proceeded to go in and get the money for him, give him the money.⁷¹²

Tirtha confirmed, "I asked Hayagriva to make that arrangement for me through whatever channels he did. I was directed to go to Dharmatma and when I approached Dharmatma after some conversation he gave me I think another twenty-five hundred dollars. . . . It was supposed to be some mystery as to what I was getting the money for, where I was going, but he knew, and Sulochan's name came up, so I showed him one of the literatures that Sulochan had been distributing and he came out. He was in his house and he actually came out and had several other of the things that he had previously published and he was in general agreement about the guy. He [Sulochan] was blaspheming the Swami."⁷¹³

Randall Gorby confirmed, “About the \$2,500 . . . it was ongoing expenses that he [Tirtha] had been incurred in the trailing of Steven Bryant and then he said it was a partial payment of \$8,000 that had been negotiated sometime previously with members of the community for killing of Steven Bryant.”⁷¹⁴

TUESDAY, MAY 20TH: TIRTHA FLIES TO CALIFORNIA

Early on the morning of Tuesday, May 20th, Tirtha flew to Los Angeles. He telephoned Janmastami in Philadelphia and asked him to join him again in California to hunt Sulochan, but Janmastami was tied up with business and couldn't come until three days later, on May 23rd. Tirtha recalled, “I flew . . . from Cleveland to Los Angeles. I sent the weapon by Federal Express to be picked up in Los Angeles like a Will Call. It was a .45 caliber. Janmastami was supposed to meet me and assist in the murder, but he didn't show up. I waited and I called him up in Philadelphia and he said he was going to come out, could I wait a couple of days, or something, and I said, you know, ‘It doesn't look like it.’ He was basically making excuses, it just seemed to me that he was. So I decided to do it alone.”⁷¹⁵ Tirtha continued, “He [Janmastami] got cold feet when it came to actually doing the deed. He wasn't up to it. I can't blame him. He opted out in time.”⁷¹⁶

According to Tapahpunja, Tirtha flew to Los Angeles on his own volition; no one ordered him. He was on his own. Tapahpunja recalled, “Tirtha's decision to fly to Los Angeles was an independent act, partially financed by Kirtanananda's \$7,500 bidding.”⁷¹⁷ Notice how Tapahpunja, in this statement, tries to protect the members of the conspiracy by pointing the blame at Kirtanananda, who in all likelihood, knew *nothing* about the \$8,000 promised to Tirtha. Truly, there is no honor among thieves.

After arriving in Los Angeles, Tirtha rented a 1981 Chevy Caprice at the Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car agency (Los Angeles airport location). He put down a \$300 cash deposit for the car. The receipt was dated May

20th. The time: 8:00 a.m. ⁷¹⁸ On the car rental application form Tirtha indicated he was employed by ISKCON Cleveland at 15720 Euclid Avenue. He claimed he had been employed there for twelve years. He also listed three persons as references: Daniel Reid (Daruka) in Culver City, California, and Paul Ferry (Parambrahma) and Arthur Villa (Kuladri) in Moundsville, West Virginia. Tirtha explained why he was in California:

Sulochan had been targeted for death by the [New Vrindaban] community's leaders. . . . Kuladri directed me to see Dharmatma to pick up additional expense money. Earlier, Kuladri had talked to me about taking another trip to California. He said he'd received a call that Sulochan was traveling between Berkeley and Los Angeles, rallying his forces again. Kuladri said that Sulochan had called him a few days earlier to tell him that he would "get even," if it was the last thing he ever did. According to Kuladri, that could only mean one thing. Sulochan was determined to kill Bhaktipada.

"We have to finish this thing," Kuladri said. "As long as that guy is walking around, he's a threat to Bhaktipada. He won't be thinking anyone's after him out in California. At least no one from New Vrindaban. If something happens out there, there won't be as much heat on us. In time the whole thing will blow over. If everything runs smoothly, they won't be able to prove anything." ⁷¹⁹

Krishna-Katha, who had discovered Sulochan's van near the Los Angeles temple, followed his quarry north on Interstate 5. After some time, Krishna-Katha assumed Sulochan was going on to Berkeley and turned back toward Los Angeles. When Tirtha arrived at LAX from Cleveland, he telephoned Krishna-Katha's number and asked "Where is the slime?" ⁷²⁰

SULOCHAN PREDICTS MURDER AS HIS DESTINY

Krishna-Katha told Tirtha that Sulochan was last seen driving north on Interstate 5, and so Tirtha turned north on the freeway to pursue his quarry. But it appears that Sulochan turned off I-5 onto California Route

99 and passed through Bakersfield on the way to the Three Rivers Hare Krishna farm near Visalia in Tulare County, some 200 miles north of Los Angeles, to see some friends, including his new godsister girlfriend and fiancée, Bhagavati dasi (Cathy Barry).⁷²¹ Tirtha sped north about 400 miles on I-5 to the San Francisco Bay area.

Sulochan and Bhagavati drove up into the mountains towards Sequoia National Park, a few miles past the Three Rivers community, to get away and relax in the peace and tranquility amongst the giant conifers and the stunning vistas of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He had become disillusioned with his impossible quest. Sulochan had predicted his death some months earlier, and he spoke about it with a former New Vrindaban friend, Gail Conger. “When I die,” Sulochan told her, “then everyone will see [that I was right about Keith Ham].”⁷²²

In the mountains, Sulochan spoke again about death to Bhagavati, although it caused her grief to hear his grave prophesy. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* later interviewed his fiancée, and reported:

Shortly before he was murdered, Bryant had talked of dying to the woman he’d planned to marry. They were up in the mountains of central California, near Sequoia National Park, and the grandeur of that setting did little to relieve the sense of frustration he felt. For two years, he had fought to expose the hierarchy of the Krishna sect. But now, in the mountains, he seemed finally to have grown tired. His Berkeley friends who saw him said the same thing. *Steve had reached the end of his rope*. Privately, now, he acknowledged that he might not be able to achieve his goals. At least not while still alive.

“Upon my death,” he told his girlfriend, “that’s when everything will unfold.” She didn’t like him to talk that way, but Steve wouldn’t stop. “When I die, then everyone will see,” he said. “Don’t die for a cause,” she told him. But Steve said it was his destiny.⁷²³

Sulochan was a bold, daring, and active devotee who was martyred for the cause of the Absolute Truth. When he saw the end coming, he refused

to run and hide; he accepted his fate. He understood that his death was necessary for his preaching to succeed. He willingly gave up his life in the pursuit of truth. In this regard, perhaps some readers might, in their minds, compare him to Jesus Christ, who also refused to run and hide when he was apprehended by the Roman guards, whom he knew intended to crucify him. Rather than run or fight, Christ commanded his disciple, “Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Of course, Sulochan—who was anything but a saint—cannot be compared to a *saktyavesa-avataar*. Sulochan, at the moment of his death, was in all likelihood smoking marijuana and drinking vodka. Still, he was, and remains, a martyr and freedom fighter for Krishna consciousness. In an interview with United Press International, Sulochan predicted: “They are constantly watching me. I know some morning I will go to sleep and not wake up.”⁷²⁴

After visiting with Bhagavati and other friends at the Three Rivers Hare Krishna community, Sulochan got back on the road and headed northwest for 250 more miles to visit acquaintances in the San Francisco Bay area. One of his friends claimed he was in San Francisco on Tuesday, May 20th, two days before his death. Lilia Aguirre Williams noted, “I was friends with Sulochan and he visited me in San Francisco. Two days later he was dead.”⁷²⁵ While in the area, Sulochan also visited his Berkeley buddy. Puranjana remembered the last time he saw his friend:

Sulochan then came to visit me in Berkeley. We talked as usual but as he was getting ready to leave he said, “I have the sudden feeling that I am not going to ever see you again, Puranjana.” I said, “I have the same feeling. Something is up. You could be in big trouble. Please do not go to Los Angeles, we have a lot of sympathy here, and the police like us here in Berkeley. Do not go back to Los Angeles, this is dangerous.”

Sulochan said, “No, it is better if we split up. That way if they get one of us, the survivor can help the police and the FBI.” He also said that he was not going to live “on the run” and “if they want to kill me,

they will kill me anywhere I go. It does not matter if I am here or there.”
We put our arms on each other’s shoulders and said good-bye.⁷²⁶

After saying farewell to Puranjana, Sulochan returned to Los Angeles where he visited other friends. His vehicle was seen by Ramesvara’s security-guard disciple, Krishna-Katha, who constantly kept an eye out for Sulochan’s van. Sometimes, while driving around Culver City looking for Sulochan, K. K.’s friend and security assistant Mahamantra accompanied him in the passenger seat of his Alfa Romeo.⁷²⁷ When Tirtha in San Francisco learned of Sulochan’s whereabouts by telephone from K. K., he turned around and headed back toward Los Angeles. In two days Tirtha put 1,082 miles on his rented car.⁷²⁸

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21ST: TIRTHA AND KRISHNA-KATHA SPY ON SULOCHAN

When Tirtha returned to Los Angeles late in the morning of Wednesday, May 21st, after his long-distance drive from the San Francisco Bay area, Krishna-Katha showed him where he last observed Sulochan’s van at Nistraigunya’s house on National Boulevard, about a half mile from the ISKCON temple. Krishna-Katha remembered:

Tirtha met me at my apartment. I told him that I would jump in my vehicle and for him to follow me and I would take him to where Sulochan’s van is at Nistraigunya’s house. But the van was not there. I had learned of another location that the van sometimes would be seen by another person at that time—the temple—and I had also checked on that and had seen the van there. So I said to Tirtha, “Drive your vehicle and follow me and I will take you to a second location. The van may be there.” As we drove down the street I went past Sulochan’s van, and I doubled around the block and Tirtha followed. I stopped along the curb and he pulled up in front of me, positioned his vehicle so that he could have a clear view of Sulochan’s van.

I went and sat in the passenger side of his vehicle. This would have been around the beginning of the afternoon just after noon on May

21st. We sat there a couple hours. Tirtha noticed that the van had just driven off slowly, and for me to get out and he wanted to follow. So I got out and got into my vehicle and followed him. . . . The van first made a stop at a gas station on Overland and Venice Boulevard, and I parked in a parking lot. I didn't see Tirtha at that time, where he was. And then as the van pulled away, I continued following and it made its way to Nistraigunya's house on National [Boulevard], and parked in front of his house.

I passed by the van and went around the block in my vehicle. And then I noticed Tirtha's vehicle and again he pulled up in front of mine, positioned his vehicle on a side street so that he could get a clear view of the van. I got into Tirtha's vehicle. He showed me a gun, a .45 caliber Star Model P. D. I saw him with a loaded magazine and I remember what bullets he had and I remember him loading the magazine into the gun. I recall him saying that he wanted to just storm the place and do everyone in there. He didn't care, they were "fringies" anyway, and that none of them deserved to live.⁷²⁹

SULOCHAN GIVES UP HIS CRUSADE, MORE OR LESS

Sulochan visited his long-time friend, Nistraigunya, at his house on National Boulevard near the Los Angeles temple during the evening of May 21st. Nistraigunya remembered: "On that evening Sulochan said he was more or less giving up on his crusade, and that he felt no one really believed him and he didn't have much success with the press. He felt . . . it was like fighting the windmills. And he was interested in a young woman and wanted to get married. And he was more or less going to give it up to God, more or less, you know."⁷³⁰

Sulochan had, more or less, decided to give up his fanatical crusade against Bhaktipada, Ramesvara, and the other ISKCON gurus. He realized that his divorced, remarried and pregnant former wife would never love him and return to him, and that he couldn't save ISKCON if ISKCON didn't want to be saved. He was disappointed that the Moundsville jurors

took only twenty minutes to convict him. The whole time he was locked up, hardly anyone called him. He decided that nobody cared. Why should he care? Sulochan thought his one-man crusade against Bhaktipada and the other gurus had become a “fight against windmills,” like the imaginary giants (windmills) which Don Quixote battled in Miguel de Cervantes’ 1605 novel.

Sulochan was worn out, tired and fed up. He couldn’t continue any longer. He said, “Right now . . . those people hate me so bad. If those guys found me they’d have killed me in a second. . . . I’ve been living in hiding for a year and a half. I’m just disturbed. I can’t sleep; can’t eat with this kind of life, and it’s draining me. I can feel it draining me.”⁷³¹

And Sulochan had recently met a woman who seemed to like him the way he was, with all his idiosyncrasies and bad habits; and, best of all, she was not a brainwashed groupie for a bogus spiritual master, she was free to give her heart to him. Perhaps now, at the age of 33, he could settle down and have the wife and family he so much desired.

Sulochan had given up his fight; he was, more or less, no longer a threat to Bhaktipada or the other ISKCON gurus. He decided not to protect himself with guns, but to simply “depend on Krishna.” But no one at New Vrindaban or Los Angeles ISKCON seemed to know this, only Sulochan’s closest friends. And Tirtha was still on the prowl; he was tired of stalking Sulochan and he wanted to get it over with.

MURDER IS “A NASTY THING”

Krishna-Katha, quietly sitting with Tirtha in the rental car near Nistraigunya’s home, began to feel uneasy as the night wore on. He excused himself and returned to the temple. He recalled, “I stayed [with Tirtha] there [near Nistraigunya’s house] forty-five minutes, maximum an hour. After I left I went back to the temple on Watseka [Avenue] to do my service. . . . I was very scared. . . . But I did know that I felt at the time that I shouldn’t be there, so that is the reason I left.”⁷³²

Although Krishna-Katha claimed he stayed with Tirtha for only an hour, Tirtha claimed that he remained with him for most of the day and into the night, until just moments before the one a.m. murder. In a letter to the author, Tirtha explained, “He [Krishna-Katha] was with me until moments before Sulochan was killed.”⁷³³ The sun set in Los Angeles on May 21, 1986 at 7:52 p.m. Tirtha quietly stalked his quarry during the night for another five hours.

After leaving Tirtha and returning to the Los Angeles temple, Krishna-Katha met his friend and security assistant Mahamantra, and informed him that he had found Sulochan’s van and Mr. T. was staking it out. Both of the Los Angeles ksatriyas knew that the “demon” had to be given a new body, as ordered by their spiritual master, but the realization that the assassination was coming very soon became unbearable to Mahamantra. He became agitated in his mind and began praying desperately for the ordeal to end.

One can intellectually understand that another human being must be killed for the benefit of ISKCON and the world, but the emotional experience of witnessing (or even imagining) a murder can be excruciatingly painful for a gentle soul not accustomed to killing and violence. Mahamantra recalled, “We had known for a long time there was a plan to kill Steven Bryant, and . . . as soon as Mr. T. found him, he would kill him. . . . I was praying . . . ‘Let’s get it over with, because it is a nasty thing.’”⁷³⁴

HIDING IN THE SHADOWS

After speaking to his assistant Mahamantra, Krishna-Katha might then have returned to his apartment, but if he intended to lay down and sleep, he discovered he could not. His mind was racing a mile a minute, and he was terribly afraid, as he admitted later in court. However, his curiosity got the best of him, and late that night Krishna-Katha secretly returned to Nistraigunya’s neighborhood, parked his Alfa Romeo in a secluded place where Tirtha and Sulochan could not see it, exited his vehicle, and quietly and stealthily crept up to the area near Sulochan’s van. He

concealed himself in the shadows, away from the street lights, watching and waiting. Nori J. Muster (Nandini), an ISKCON public relations assistant, claimed that Krishna-Katha told her that he had witnessed the murder while “hiding near Sulochan’s van.” Muster explained:

In May 1986, less than a week after the murder, my husband and I drove to L. A. to visit my father and stop by New Dwaraka [Los Angeles ISKCON]. My husband was talking to some of the men in front of Ramesvara’s office and I was chanting on my beads. Krishna-Katha came by and said, “Hello,” then said, “We have to go for a walk.” He and I walked around the block, and he spilled his guts about the night of the murder.

He said he was on duty patrolling the grounds and Ramesvara had given him a phone number to call if he saw Sulochan. K. K. said he spotted Sulochan’s van parked near National Boulevard, so he called the number. He recognized the voice on the other side—Tirtha. Knowing Tirtha, he worried something bad might happen, so he went back and hid near Sulochan’s van.⁷³⁵

While Krishna-Katha concealed himself in the shadows, Tirtha kept watch on Nistraigunya’s house, where Sulochan was visiting. At approximately 12:45 am, Sulochan said goodbye to his friend, left the house, walked to his van, got in, started the engine, and drove a very short distance. Nistraigunya remembered the last time he saw his friend, “I asked him to stay overnight, but he felt that he was in danger. He felt he was in danger because of the work he was doing, and he didn’t want to jeopardize his friends by staying with them. He said: ‘I have decided to just depend on Krishna to protect me.’ When he declined to stay with me, he said he would drive in his van, drive a block or so away, and stay there. He left the house sometime after midnight, twelve-thirty, quarter to one, like that.”⁷³⁶

Sulochan, after leaving Nistraigunya’s home on National Boulevard, turned north on nearby Cardiff Avenue and parked about a block away near the intersection at Flint Avenue. There he intended to spend the

night. But before crawling into his sleeping bag in the back of the van, he remained in the driver's seat for a few minutes and rolled a joint. "Perhaps," he may have thought, "a little weed will help me relax."

Tirtha followed his quarry and parked a safe distance away. He sat impatiently in his rented car, watching and waiting, and waiting and watching. Finally, he could not sit still any longer; he had to do something. Krishna-Katha, who had followed them and remained hidden in the shadows, observed Tirtha walk up the sidewalk to the driver's window of Sulochan's van. He heard Tirtha speak to Sulochan, "Chant Hare Krishna, because you're about to die." Then he witnessed the murder. Nandini remembered, "K. K. told me Tirtha's last words to Sulochan were, 'Chant Hare Krishna, because you're about to die,' then he witnessed Tirtha shoot Sulochan in the head."⁷³⁷

Tirtha thought he was doing Sulochan a big favor by ordering him to chant Hare Krishna before he killed him. In *Bhagavad-gita* (8:6), Krishna explains, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail." Vaishnavas believe that if one thinks of Krishna, or chants His Holy Name at the moment of death, the soul of that person will immediately go back to Godhead upon quitting the material body. Three days after the murder, Tirtha spoke with his friend Randall Gorby, who recalled their conversation:

Tirtha said that he had flown to California, rented a motel and a car, and that he had made contact with Sulochan within a matter of three hours after arriving; that he had a person with him from the temple in Los Angeles [Krishna-Katha—Jeffrey Breier] and that he had trailed Sulochan. He said that he and the other fellow were in the automobile sitting behind Sulochan's van and that the other fellow had forgotten his weapon, or went away to get his weapon, and that Tirtha decided, "I might as well get this over with now." And he climbed out of the car, walking up alongside of the van and shot Sulochan twice in the head.⁷³⁸

CHAPTER 11

The Murder

AT APPROXIMATELY ONE A.M. PACIFIC TIME (four a.m. Eastern time), during the night preceding Lord Nrsimhadeva's appearance day, on Thursday, May 22, 1986, a decisive event occurred which ended the life of the protagonist in our story, and inevitably and irrevocably changed the destiny of New Vrindaban. While the 33-year-old Sulochan sat rolling a joint ⁷³⁹ in his rusted 1976 Dodge van, maroon in color, parked near the intersection of Flint and Cardiff Avenues, a half-mile from the Los Angeles ISKCON temple in Culver City, California, ⁷⁴⁰ his brains were blown apart by two bullets from a Star Model P .45 caliber hand gun fired through the driver's side window glass at close range.

The coroner reported: "Gunshot wound number one was to the left lower jaw region of the cheek, and it caused injury to the jaw bone, caused injury to a vessel of the carotid artery, and went through the cervical spine, that is, the spine in the neck region, and a bullet was recovered. There was injury to the spinal cord as a result of this gunshot wound. The second gunshot wound . . . also entered the face and the entrance was in a region just in front of the left ear. This gunshot wound went through the cheek region of the left side to a bone called the maxilla, went into the oral cavity and came out through the right maxilla, the cheek bone, and exited, that is came out, in the right cheek region. . . . The bullet was recovered from the musculature behind and lateral to the neck spine on the right side. . . . Surrounding the entrance of gunshot wound number one there were multiple abrasions or scrapes in which there was some glass pieces." ⁷⁴¹

Through the shattered driver's-side van window, Tirtha observed tiny liquid particles of Sulochan's brain spray out from the bullet holes in his face and splatter inside the vehicle. Tirtha described this in a conversation with Gorby (and also with Tapahpunja) two days later, "Randy, do you remember a scene in the *Deer Hunter* [movie] where they were playing Russian roulette? The brains come out identically that way in slow motion." ⁷⁴²

After shooting Sulochan twice in the head, Tirtha ran back to his rental car, started the engine, and sped off towards LAX. Krishna-Katha, hiding in the shadows and undoubtedly terrified, also ran back to his car and sped off to his apartment near the temple. Nistraigunya recalled hearing two gunshots and two vehicles starting up soon after his friend Sulochan departed from his house:

After he [Sulochan] left [my house], I turned out the lights and went directly to bed. In the time when I laid down just nodding, not even long enough to drift off, I heard what I thought to be one gunshot, and then a second gunshot. The first one I didn't react, though, and the second one, I did jump out of bed because I heard a car starting up, from what appeared to be the same direction. And I thought something is going on.

I ran out to my front step which was just ten or fifteen feet from my bed. A second vehicle seemed to come from the same area and did go past me while I was standing there. I listened and heard nothing [more] and went back to bed. ⁷⁴³

After arriving at the airport, Tirtha telephoned his murder accomplice and warned him not to come into the area. (Of course, Krishna-Katha had witnessed the murder and had already left the area, but Tirtha did not know this.) Tirtha always protected his accomplices, and Krishna-Katha was no exception. Krishna-Katha continued his recollection of the night of the murder:

Around one or two o'clock in the morning I received a phone call from Tirtha. I had to carry on my belt, [a] two-meter F. M. hand-held radio,

that I had. One Star made it so that my telephone would ring, it would ring my radio and by pushing certain buttons would access through a phone patch the person calling. So it was like a phone, it was like a radio, it was both. But it wasn't a cellular phone. They had not made those yet.

Tirtha said: "K. K., whatever you do, don't come in the area. I repeat, don't come in the area. I am going to disappear for a while. I will get a hold of you later." And he hung up.⁷⁴⁴

According to Vedic astrology, the time at Sulochan's death was "extraordinarily inauspicious," and "highly favorable to evil acts." Kailasa-Chandra, a sidereal astrologer, commented:

Sulochan was murdered during the fourteenth tithi (lunar phase) of the waxing Moon, during the night preceding Lord Nrsimhadeva's Appearance Day, an extraordinarily inauspicious time. The fourteenth tithi of the waxing Moon, active at the time of the assassination, previous to dawn, highly favors evil acts. This particular tithi is considered the third-most inauspicious of the thirty-phase lunar tithi cycle; surpassed only by the two "Witches' Tithies"—the fourteenth tithi waning Moon and the fifteenth tithi (*amavasya*).

The propaganda that Sulochan was killed on Lord Nrsimhadeva's Appearance Day is false. He was killed on the day before His Lordship's appearance. According to the Vedic calendar, a holy appearance day does not begin until the Sun rises on the eastern horizon. On May 22, 1986, in Los Angeles, the Sun rose many hours after the point-blank hit.⁷⁴⁵

Sulochan's body was cremated in California and his ashes sent to India, as he requested in his will. Mrs. Bryant noted, "My son will be cremated in California. In his will, he stipulated that his ashes be spread over India."⁷⁴⁶

NEWS OF THE MURDER SPREADS QUICKLY: NEW VRINDABAN ALL A-BUZZ

The news of Sulochan's murder traveled fast: lightning fast. The murderer, Bhaktipada's disciple Tirtha, made a speedy getaway from the Los Angeles temple vicinity to the airport (about five miles from the scene of

the murder), where he dumped his rental car and made a quick telephone call to New Vrindaban authorities while waiting for the next flight back east. He said, “I went to the airport, dropped off the vehicle, took the first flight out of Los Angeles . . . I guess about an hour and forty-five minutes later. It just happened to be going to Dallas.”⁷⁴⁷

That same morning at approximately 7:30 a.m. Pacific time, the Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car agency received a telephone call from Tirtha, who informed them that he “had left the vehicle parked at one of the parking lots at Los Angeles International Airport, and that he had to leave unexpectedly and fly out.” An employee from the agency picked up the car about nine o’clock.⁷⁴⁸

During the japa period preceding the *mangala-aroti* morning program at New Vrindaban, the news of Sulochan’s death brought great excitement to the devotees in attendance. The news couldn’t have taken longer than twenty or thirty minutes to reach them after the murder was committed. When the news was announced, the entire temple allegedly erupted in “five minutes of applause and cheering.” Tirtha explained, “When it was announced during the morning program at New Vrindaban that Sulochan was dead, a great cheer went up, followed by five minutes of cheering and applause. Then a big kirtan. Not coincidentally, it was Lord Nrsimha’s appearance day. They all took it as a divine omen. Everyone was happy. Though not for long.”⁷⁴⁹

The sankirtan leader, Dharmatma, also remembered the “excited, jubilant, upbeat, and festive atmosphere” preceding the early morning service at the temple:

It was the morning of Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day. Nrsimha is a form of Krishna that protects the devotees. He is half-man, half-lion. When I came in [the temple room] in the morning everyone was very excited and jubilant and the whole temple was buzzing. Everyone was talking in little circles. It seemed to be a very upbeat mood in the morning. I asked someone, “What is going on?” because it was like a festive

atmosphere. The devotee told me, “Haven’t you heard? Sulochan was killed in California last night!”

During the question and answer period after class [a couple days later], a devotee asked Bhaktipada, “How should we understand it when a demon is killed?” Bhaktipada responded that “A devotee isn’t disturbed when a snake is killed.”⁷⁵⁰

New Vrindaban devotees in Philadelphia also heard the news soon after the murder, as did the Philadelphia ISKCON temple leaders. Janmastami, who was living in Philadelphia running his flower-selling business, claimed that the Philadelphia ISKCON temple president, Ravindra-Svarupa, knew about the murder hours before the Los Angeles police discovered the body. Janmastami explained, “Ravindra-Svarupa knew Sulochan was dead several hours before the body was found [by Los Angeles police]. We know that Sulochan was killed at 4 a.m. East-Coast time, and yet by 4:30 a.m. both NVC as well as the NVC devotees in Philly also knew that as well. Stitha-Dhi-Muni dasa [Stewart Kreitzer] (currently of Alachua Fame) was the Temple Commander at the Allens Lane temple when these events took place, and him having heard Tirtha’s phone call to the NVC devotees living in Philly at the time, reported what he had overheard at the payphone to both Ravindra-Svarupa dasa, as well as Sesa dasa (an “Officer of the Court”) before *mangala-aroti* that morning.”⁷⁵¹ Janmastami continued, “After Sulochan’s murder, no one from NVC was welcome there [at Philadelphia ISKCON] anymore.”⁷⁵²

As noted in Chapter 8, Ravindra-Svarupa, the ISKCON Philadelphia temple president, confirmed Janmastami’s assertion, “When Sulochan was killed, everybody in ISKCON knew that Kirtanananda was behind it. Because we had New Vrindaban devotees come and tell us, ‘What’s the matter? It was authorized.’ Everybody knew it. No devotee would kill another devotee unless it was authorized (laughter).”⁷⁵³

Some devotees were shocked to hear the news of Sulochan’s murder. Jamuna dasi, Sulochan’s divorced wife, said, “I was extremely shocked. I hadn’t in the slightest expected that that could have happened.”⁷⁵⁴ A

devotee artist recalled the shock she experienced upon hearing the news of Sulochan's death. Saradiya devi dasi (Loetitia S. Lilot) recalled, "In May-June of 1984, my family and I had visited New Vrindaban for about a month. Sulochan asked me to do a painting of Sri Krishna for him and I did, for a minimal amount of money. . . . I was totally shocked when I heard of his death." ⁷⁵⁵

One godbrother, who served with Sulochan in Los Angeles (1976), Vrindaban India (c. 1978), and again in Detroit (c. 1982), remembered, "I never saw Sulochan again after my visit to Detroit. I was very shocked when I found out what they did to him. He was a great person, a very sincere follower of Srila Prabhupada, and a good friend of mine." ⁷⁵⁶

Another godbrother remembered, "Sulochan came every day to read *Bhagavad-gita* with me at my apartment on Watseka Avenue; but then one day he inexplicably didn't show up. I was quite surprised and bewildered; he was so steady. What happened? The next day I found out to my horror and shock that he had been brutally murdered just a few blocks away. He had left his *Gita* in my living room. I lost a good friend." ⁷⁵⁷

Others however, such as Radhanath Swami, were pleased to hear the news. Ramachandra dasa (Richard Cousineau), a New Vrindaban sankirtan "picker," asked the most-senior New Vrindaban sannyasi, Radhanath Swami: "Do you know who killed Sulochan?" Radhanath replied: "I don't know, but whoever it was, he was doing devotional service to Krishna." ⁷⁵⁸

Most devotees at the Three Rivers California Krishna community near Visalia thought Sulochan was a "trouble maker," and would have agreed with Radhanath Swami's assessment, that whoever killed him was doing devotional service. Jyotir dasa (Tom Greenspan), who lived at the Three Rivers community, said, "He was a trouble maker. . . . Bryant had a lot of enemies within the Krishna movement and was having to move around a lot just to keep from confronting people he had stepped on. . . . Whoever killed him was a hero in [my] eyes and the eyes of Krishna." ⁷⁵⁹

In an e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja Swami recalled, “When the news came that Sulochan had been killed, it came as a shock—and a relief—to everyone back in New Vrindaban.”^{760 761} Dharmatma continued his recollection of the day of the murder: “Later on after the morning functions, I had a discussion with Kuladri. He was quite disturbed. He mentioned . . . how it shouldn’t have been done like that. And that how Radhanath, Hayagriva and Tapahpunja were pushing like crazy for this to happen, and how he had told them not to do it.”⁷⁶²

Janmastami had planned to fly to California the next day, at Tirtha’s request, to again assist his partner-in-crime to “destroy the demon.” But since the mission was already accomplished, Janmastami remained in Philadelphia running his business selling flowers.⁷⁶³ Los Angeles police were notified of the murder about 9:45 a.m. Pacific time when a pedestrian walked past the van, noticed the broken glass, glanced inside and called police.⁷⁶⁴

From Dallas, Tirtha caught a flight to Cleveland, Ohio, where he probably arrived in the late afternoon or early evening. We do not know what he did for the next 24 hours, but we think he was picked up at the airport by his wife, son and stepson, and taken to their trailer park home in Ravenna, Ohio, to catch up on his rest, as he had not had an opportunity to sleep (except perhaps during the two flights) since Wednesday morning.

TIRTHA TOLD TO GO TO INDIA

Tirtha was instructed to fly to India with his family, where Bhaktipada’s wealthy disciple, Nathji dasa (Dr. Narendra D. Desai—an industrialist, philanthropist, educationist, and the chairman of APAR Industries), would, it was claimed, provide for their lodging. During a telephone conversation with Randall Gorby recorded by the West Virginia State Police, Tirtha explained:

This is extremely privileged information. They want me to go to India. That's Number One's plan. He has a disciple who's a real wealthy man and he is going to instruct him first with a Telex that I'm arriving, so on and so forth. And then, when he [Bhaktipada] goes over there, supposedly next month, he will take him aside and explain the whole situation to him. . . .

I'm going [to India] . . . with [my wife] Suzanne and [son] Tapas. . . . We're supposed to go to New York . . . and get all that shit [passport and visa] together. You know, in New York you can do it all in a few days.⁷⁶⁵

Tirtha's wife, however, was not keen about moving to India permanently. She explained, "I don't think I'm ready for it. [I could go to India] to visit, but I know I couldn't live there. . . . It's hard to live there, I've heard."⁷⁶⁶

ESCAPE MONEY DENIED TO TIRTHA

Tirtha had successfully executed the community's objective, but he still had to make his escape: he desperately needed to leave the country until things cooled down. However he didn't have enough money to purchase plane tickets for himself and his family. New Vrindaban still hadn't delivered him in full the promised amount of \$8,000—they owed him about \$5,500—but for some reason, the community was dragging its feet; the money was not forthcoming. Tirtha telephoned Gorby and complained "[I'm] tired of them [New Vrindaban] dribbling it [the money] out."⁷⁶⁷

Tirtha had little money himself; in fact, according to Tapahpunja Swami, he was in debt. Tapahpunja described Tirtha's financial straits during an interview with a private investigator, who explained, "Drescher told Sheldon that he was financially destitute. Drescher had moved his family into a run down mobile home near Ravenna, Ohio. His credit rating was so bad that he had needed someone to use their name to have a phone installed and the electricity turned on. At this meeting he again offered to sell his white Isuzu [Trooper, a four-wheel-drive SUV] in order

to continue living. Sheldon said that he chastised him for his foolhardy spending habits and admonished that unless he made a wholesale change in his life he was a burden to deal with.”⁷⁶⁸

After returning home to Ravenna, Tirtha telephoned Kuladri, Dharmatma, Hayagriva, and Dulal-Chandra (the comptroller of New Vrindaban) and tried to get his money, to no avail. In an e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja explained, “Tirtha tried asking every conceivable New Vrindaban manager to ‘get his money,’ but no one would even answer his calls. He was, to put it lightly, radioactive. He was really angry and feeling betrayed. I was in contact with him via phone.”⁷⁶⁹

DHARMATMA REFUSES TO GIVE TIRTHA ANY MORE MONEY

Tirtha telephoned Dharmatma on Friday, May 23rd, and demanded the remainder of his promised payment. Tirtha recalled, “I was previously promised that in the event I needed to leave [the country] there would be money available, so I . . . called Dharmatma myself to ask him for some money.”⁷⁷⁰

However, Dharmatma refused to give Tirtha any more money. Just four days earlier, on May 19th, he had personally given Tirtha \$2,500 in cash to pay for his second trip to California, because Kuladri told him that Bhaktipada had authorized that payment. Dharmatma would not give Tirtha, or anyone else for that matter, any money without authorization from Bhaktipada. In addition, now that Sulochan was dead, Dharmatma was afraid that if he gave Tirtha any more money, he could be further implicated in the murder. Dharmatma explained:

Tirtha called me on the phone and asked me if I had any more money for him. I said, “No. I didn’t know anything about any more money.” He said, “Well, there is supposed to be some more money for me. Talk to ‘Number One’ [Bhaktipada], and I will get back to you.”

When Tirtha called back [later that same day], first of all, he asked if I had talked to ‘Number One.’ And at this point I was really freaked

out because the murder happened and I knew that I had given him twenty-five hundred dollars [for his California trip], so I realized somehow I was implicated and I was very frightened. So I told him, “Well, no. I looked for him but I couldn’t find him,” when in fact I had not really looked for him. I didn’t want to involve myself anymore.

Tirtha got very angry at that and said, “You both, you are bull shitting me.” I said, “No, no, you know how he is. He is hard to find. Sometimes I can’t find him.” [Incidentally, Bhaktipada was not in New Vrindaban when Tirtha telephoned Dharmatma; he was returning from Europe and wouldn’t be back until late Friday night.]

And then Tirtha got very angry and he started swearing, and saying, “This is just fucking me around, they are just screwing around with me. Bhaktipada always screws me around. I am supposed to have more money. I got to leave the country. I did the job, you know. I need my money.” He kept yelling and screaming.^{771 772}

Why was Tirtha unable to get the money which Hayagriva had promised him? Dharmatma could have given Tirtha the money if he wanted to; if he thought Bhaktipada had authorized the payment. But Dharmatma had become fearful of incriminating himself further in the murder conspiracy. By the same token, Kuladri could also have authorized the acquisition of funds for Tirtha even in Bhaktipada’s absence; he could have pulled some strings, if he wanted. But it seems that Kuladri now also had second thoughts; he had, like Dharmatma, also become reticent to incriminate himself further. Kuladri had, in effect, pulled another New Vrindaban “Okey-Dokey” on Tirtha, as he had done to so many others in the past: “Promise him everything and deliver nothing.” This was simply “business as usual.” Tirtha was on his own; hardly anyone at New Vrindaban would even talk to him.

TIRTHA SPEAKS TO TAPAHUNJA IN COLUMBUS

After hanging up on Dharmatma, Tirtha was upset and worried (and rightly so) that he might not receive the balance of his payment which Hayagriva had promised. What could he do? He thought, “Perhaps my

comrade Tapahpunja can help me.” Tirtha got in his SUV and drove to Columbus to the Festival of India sponsored by Ohio State University, arriving during the afternoon. The Columbus ISKCON temple had an exhibit at the festival. Tirtha chatted with the temple president Karusadasa (Kerry Roth), Tapahpunja Swami and a visiting sannyasi from New Vrindaban, Varshan Maharaja (Jack Mowen, formerly Kasyapa), who were preaching at the festival.⁷⁷³

The most pressing thought on Tirtha’s mind was getting the remainder of the \$8,000 he was promised by Hayagriva for “destroying the demon,” and purchasing air tickets for himself and his family to leave the country. During an August 2003 telephone conversation with the author, Tapahpunja explained, “I was in Columbus when suddenly Tirtha showed up and told me, ‘The tripe is gone.’ I asked, ‘What are you gonna do?’ Tirtha replied, ‘I dunno. Kirtanananda hasn’t finished paying me. He gave me some expense money, but he still owes me a lot. I’ve been calling New Vrindaban, Dharmatma, Kuladri and Dulal to get my money, but they just give me the run-around.’”⁷⁷⁴

Twelve years later, in an April 2015 e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja told the same story, “The day . . . Tirtha pulled the trigger, he flew back to Cleveland and then drove to Columbus the next afternoon. I was preaching at Ohio State University’s Festival of India. He told me the horrid details. . . . I shook my head in disbelief and asked him about his plans. Tirtha wanted to take his family and leave for India but not without the remainder of the money owed to him by Kirtanananda Swami. He was stuck and no one [at New Vrindaban] would talk to him.”⁷⁷⁵

The author asks: can we trust Tapahpunja’s memory? He claimed (twice) that Tirtha told him Kirtanananda promised the money, yet Tirtha didn’t say he called Kirtanananda to get his money, he said he called Dharmatma, Kuladri and Dulal. Why not simply call Kirtanananda, if Kirtanananda had promised him the money? That question is most easily answered if we understand that Hayagriva had promised the money, not

Kirtanananda. Tirtha never even talked to Bhaktipada about the murder, much less the “surveillance” expenses which had to be reimbursed.

Later in this chapter, we will discover that Tirtha did call Hayagriva for the money, and to emphasize his dire need, he threatened to do bad things to Hayagriva’s wife and children if he didn’t get the money soon. Either Tapahpunja was confused, or perhaps he was trying to protect the other members of the conspiracy by putting the blame solely on Bhaktipada, where it does not belong.

Regardless, it seemed that Tapahpunja was not able to offer Tirtha much solace. Who could Tirtha turn to? In his mind, Tirtha thought of his friend Gorby, who was like a father to him. Tirtha may have surmised, “Gorby is friends with Hayagriva. Hayagriva has promised me the money. Maybe Gorby can help me by speaking to Hayagriva.” Tirtha telephoned his friend, Randall Gorby, from Columbus, saying: “I am in the Big ‘C,’ and took care of everything in California, and would like to talk to you.”⁷⁷⁶ The two friends made an appointment to meet at the Dutch Pantry restaurant outside of Youngstown, Ohio.

BHAKTIPADA IS NOTIFIED OF THE MURDER

When Sulochan was murdered on Thursday, May 22nd, Bhaktipada was celebrating Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day festival at the Nrsimha-Ksetre (Simhachalam) ISKCON temple/farm in Jandelsbrunn, Germany. On Friday, he began the last leg of his European tour on a LTU (German Charter Airlines) flight from Frankfurt to New York City with Devamrita Swami and two teenage boys, Jayananda and Chaitanya-Mangala. Bhaktipada heard the news of Sulochan’s murder after passing through customs at Kennedy International Airport.⁷⁷⁷ Madhava-Ghosh picked up Bhaktipada and his entourage at the international terminal and transported them to the domestic terminal for their flight to Pittsburgh. Madhava-Ghosh told Bhaktipada that “Bryant had been killed.”⁷⁷⁸

Bhaktipada's servant, Chaitanya-Mangala, remembered, "Our traveling party celebrated Nrsimha Chaturdasi at the ISKCON Nrsimha-Ksetre (Simhachalam) temple/farm in Jandelsbrunn, Germany. The next day we flew to New York. As soon as we got in the van at the New York terminal, while still parked curbside, the devotees picking us up eagerly shared news that Sulochan had been killed the day before. This was clearly the first time Kirtanananda was hearing about this. He responded that he saw it as an auspicious sign, having just come from celebrating Nrsimhadeva's appearance day with great pomp and circumstance at the Simhachalam farm. He added that, like with Prahlada and Hiranyakasipu, it was clear the Lord had simultaneously protected His sincere devotees and killed a demoniac personality. As the van traveled towards the connecting terminal for our flight to Pittsburgh, devotees commented how they saw this as further proof of the Divine intervention of Lord Nrsimhadeva, Who some believed had previously appeared in one of Kirtanananda's medical brain scans." 779

That evening, Kuladri greeted Bhaktipada and his entourage at Pittsburgh International Airport. Devamrita Swami recalled that Kuladri showed Bhaktipada "a newspaper article about Bryant's death" and that Kuladri "acted pleased." 780 According to Devamrita Swami, it appeared that Kuladri was more pleased to inform Bhaktipada about the murder than Bhaktipada was after hearing about it. Bhaktipada, after all, may not have known it was his men who plotted and executed the assassination, but Kuladri knew. Kuladri had endeavored with determination for months to achieve this end. Kuladri must have been very pleased. However, his satisfaction, as we shall see in the following pages, did not last very long.

BACKLASH

Sulochan's murder prompted law enforcement agencies to treat his accusations against Bhaktipada seriously; perhaps, they suspected, Bhaktipada was responsible for Sulochan's death. One police officer noted: "Bryant

was a martyr for his faith. He was one lone voice in the wilderness and he was killed because he talked about corruption. He went up against the heavyweights and he lost.”⁷⁸¹

Sulochan’s attorney explained, “Bryant’s murder was the beginning of a long downhill slide for Swami Kirtanananda, mainly because it happened in California, beyond the reach of his millions. The two investigators assigned to it, Paul ‘The Stump’ Tippin [a detective for the city of Los Angeles assigned to the Robbery Homicide Division], and [his partner] Leroy Orozco, were experienced Los Angeles detectives who had worked on several high-profile murders. There would be no cover-up.”⁷⁸²

Even Krishna-Katha (Jeffrey Breier), Tirtha’s accomplice and sidekick in Los Angeles, was impressed with the two detectives, Tippin and Orozco, as having “integrity.” During a telephone conversation with the author, Breier claimed, “Those two detectives who questioned me became a big influence in my life. I felt they had integrity. I gave them some of Prabhupada’s books to read, and I could tell they actually read the books, because their questions to me reflected the knowledge they had acquired from reading Prabhupada’s books. After I left ISKCON, I went on to become a police officer myself, and I tried to serve with integrity.”⁷⁸³

Sergeant Thomas Westfall noted, “Steve Bryant’s murder was a catalyst because it gave us [the local Marshall County Sheriff’s Department] the chance to get the Federal government involved.”⁷⁸⁴ During a lecture at a 1999 ISKCON seminar, Ravindra-Svarupa spoke about the investigation of Sulochan’s murder:

So all of a sudden Sulochan is passing around papers about the ISKCON game and stuff and everybody’s dismissing him as a nut until he was murdered. His stature increased immensely and his credibility in the eyes of the police. And they [law enforcement agencies] began an investigation into his murder.

And Tirtha, for some reason, left a wide trail leading back to him and New Vrindaban. The car he was using he had rented at the

airport, using his photo ID and stuff like that. And so they quickly concluded that this was a professional hit and that New Vrindaban or Kirtanananda was behind it.

Because it started in West Virginia and happened in California, it went across state lines and so the Federal Government came in. The FBI investigated, they started to find out how New Vrindaban was making its money and all of a sudden there's a prosecutor from the Federal Government Justice Department investigating New Vrindaban. . . .

The newspapers were just going to town about this whole thing. This reporter from the *San Jose Mercury News* named John Hubner wrote a two part series called "Crime and the Krishnas." Starting with Kirtanananda . . . Hamsadutta had unburdened his soul to this reporter . . . and he also talked about Kirtanananda and what happened out there.⁷⁸⁵

As Ravindra-Svarupa noted, Tirtha was extremely careless about leaving clues for law enforcement agents to track. Janmastami confirmed, "Tirtha left a trail as wide as a twelve-lane highway, and as the Los Angeles homicide detective Tippin said, 'this was a professional hit; it just wasn't professionally done.'"⁷⁸⁶

ISKCON LEADERS DENOUNCE THE MURDER

ISKCON leaders who were aware of (or supported) the plot to murder Sulochan began to distance themselves from New Vrindaban once the federal government became involved in the investigation. Janmastami confirmed: "Only after the murder had been committed did any of ISKCON's leaders challenge the philosophy that prevailed at New Vrindaban at that time."⁷⁸⁷

For example (as described earlier), in January 1986 Radhanath Swami flew to Los Angeles and met with Ramesvara Maharaja, reportedly to discuss cooperation between the two temples to "destroy the demon." Ramesvara, in turn, ordered his ksatriya security-guard disciple to

“cooperate” with the New Vrindaban hit men who were hunting Sulochan in California. He made his orders clear at the Los Angeles ISKCON restaurant, when he emphatically declared, “Sulochan needs a new body.”

Yet after the murder, Ramesvara Swami suddenly claimed that he and Sulochan were practically buddies. Ramesvara Swami insisted, “As far as I know, Sulochan didn’t have any bad feelings toward myself and similarly, I had no bad feeling toward him. He wasn’t disturbing us. He came and went very secretly. A number of our core members attended his funeral in Los Angeles; they wanted to show their sympathy and outrage.”⁷⁸⁸ Mukunda Goswami, director of public affairs for ISKCON and senior editor for *ISKCON World Review*, said it was “absolutely absurd to think that our society would have anything to do with the man’s murder.”⁷⁸⁹

ISKCON World Review, known as “the ISKCON propaganda headquarters for the world,”⁷⁹⁰ suddenly became silent regarding New Vrindaban. The *IWR* public relations assistant explained, “Bhutatma [a writer, the general manager and treasurer for the newspaper] called a moratorium on New Vrindaban press releases or any news from New Vrindaban. Our newspaper was silent.”⁷⁹¹

The editors of the *ISKCON World Review* attempted to “perpetrate denial and disinformation.” Nori J. Muster noted, “It was our policy not to report problems because we saw ourselves as gatekeepers who had to maintain the pride and enthusiasm of other ISKCON members. In effect, our department perpetrated institutional denial and disinformation.”⁷⁹² Despite the silence of *ISKCON World Review*, national and international newspapers enthusiastically covered the murder. Nori J. Muster explained:

The *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, UPI, AP, and most other news organizations reported the murder investigation. In its article “Troubled Karma for the Krishnas,” *Time* magazine quoted Sulochan’s allegation that New Vrindaban “was becoming like the Rev. Jim Jones’ notorious People’s Temple.” The headline in *Hinduism Today*, widely circulated in the Asian community, summarized the unfortunate situation: “Murder

Quickens Wider Crisis in Krishna Sect: In-Fighting, Succession Struggle and Demands for Reform Convulse ISKCON.” We [the editors of *ISKCON World Review*] felt the convulsions in the form of telephone calls pouring into the office. What to do about the flood of negative publicity? we were asked. ⁷⁹³

Ramesvara was livid about the widespread negative publicity because of the Krishna killing hardly a mile from his temple. He telephoned the editors of *ISKCON World Review* and expressed his displeasure:

“What the hell are you going to do about this?” Ramesvara said. “What do you think I’m paying you for?”

“It isn’t my job to make people stop killing each other,” Mukunda said.

“Look, I can cut your budget off if you don’t do something. Get out there and see what’s going on.” ⁷⁹⁴

At New Vrindaban, Bhaktipada denied that he had anything to do with Sulochan’s murder and said that the fact that he was in the news did not concern him. He said: “I don’t care what they say about me as long as they say it. All I know is that more people than ever are coming to visit the Palace. Business is wonderful.” Regarding the murdered Sulochan, Bhaktipada said: “He had a lot of enemies. Mostly, he had the Lord as his enemy.” ⁷⁹⁵

Bhaktipada attempted to discredit Sulochan: “Who is Bryant? Even his parents admitted he was unstable. For years he wandered around lost; he beat his wife, abused his children—he slowly became crazed, and his only objective in life was to tear down the authorities.” ⁷⁹⁶ Another time, Bhaktipada called Sulochan a “crazy fanatic.” ⁷⁹⁷

PURANJANA AND KAILASA-CHANDRA FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES

Puranjana and Kailasa-Chandra, who had supported Sulochan in his preaching against the zonal acharyas, feared that they may have also been targeted for surveillance, or worse. When he heard about Sulochan’s

murder, Puranjana in Berkeley was shocked and saddened, but not surprised. Soon after, he claimed he was attacked by three New Vrindaban enforcers. Puranjana remembered:

A few days later [after the murder], I was informed by a Berkeley devotee, “Sulochan was assassinated, his body was found in his van, it was full of bullets.” I was shocked, saddened, but not really too surprised. I also knew that I was next on their list. . . .

Shortly after that, officer Joe Sanchez came to meet me at the Berkeley temple. He said that the FBI had discovered that Tirtha was planning to assassinate me next. “You are next on their list, they found a note in Tirtha’s pocket with a description of your truck. They are doing surveillance on you,” he said. He wanted me to move away, under a witness protection program perhaps, but I told him that this would be too complicated since the Krishna devotees find out where other Krishna devotees are—real soon. So I had to call Joe Sanchez every day at a random time so he could check on my welfare.

Meanwhile, three “goons” came from New Vrindaban to beat me up. They were chasing me down the street when officer Joe Sanchez came screeching around the corner in his patrol car with the lights on and the siren blaring. He got out and placed handcuffs on all three. One of them was Hamsadutta’s goon by the way. And he told them all to go back to West Virginia and stay out of Berkeley.⁷⁹⁸

Can we accept Puranjana’s story at face value? Probably not. He claims he was attacked shortly after Sulochan’s murder, maybe a week or two later. Yet we know that after the murder, and especially after Tirtha’s arrest five days later, the conspirators were paralyzed with fear. They were fearful for their own safety, as they knew they had participated in a grave felony offense and would likely be implicated in criminal charges. (This will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 13). After the murder, none of the New Vrindaban or California hit men would have threatened a fly. They knew that they were, as Janmastami noted later, “in very deep doo-doo.”⁷⁹⁹

Who then, were the three enforcers who chased Puranjana down the street? After Tirtha fled from Los Angeles to Cleveland on May 22nd, New Vrindaban had no more hit men left in California. The three men who chased Puranjana could, however, have been Hamsadutta's men in Berkeley. Five months earlier, Hamsadutta had brought his faithful followers to New Vrindaban to surrender to Bhaktipada. Hamsadutta and Bhaktipada had close ties, and both were known for keeping company with thugs. Perhaps these three Hamsadutta hit men might have lived at New Vrindaban for a time, but they were certainly not working in collaboration with the New Vrindaban murder conspirators. Perhaps they had a personal vendetta against Puranjana, but whatever was their disagreement with him, it was probably not in relation to Sulochan.

Kailasa-Chandra—the brains behind Sulochan's book, *The Guru Business*—also feared retaliation from New Vrindaban enforcers. Although Sulochan promised to keep his brahmin friend's identity secret, Kailasa-Chandra's legal surname—"Jay"—was handwritten in Sulochan's personal papers. After the Moundsville Sheriff allowed New Vrindaban intelligence to examine his diary and personal papers, some efforts were apparently made by the murder conspirators to discover the identity of "Jay," but without success. Kailasa-Chandra explained:

When I assisted Sulochan by making suggestions and editing his various documents in the summer of 1985, I made it known that I did not want my involvement in his mission advertised. Since the 1979 Vrindaban debate with the "zonal acaryas,"⁸⁰⁰ I had known about and witnessed the extreme and fanatical mentality possessed by most henchmen of the "new gurus" (not just Kirtanananda), and I was not willing, unlike Sulochan, to make myself an easy target.

This strategy of painstakingly keeping my identity more or less covert proved useful when New Vrindaban attempted to discover who was in cahoots with their arch-nemesis, Sulochan. When he was arrested by deputies of the Marshall County Sheriff's Department, New

Vrindaban authorities were given permission to examine Sulochan's diary and his other papers. My last name at that time (Jay) was found amongst these papers, and the New Vrindaban goons attempted to discover my identity—fortunately for me, without success.

I came to know of most of this much later. Some months after Sulochan's murder and the arrest of his murderer, a sergeant with the Berkeley Police Department contacted me and informed me of a cryptic note found on the assassin's person which, citing my last name, questioned who and where I was. Even after Sulochan's murder, for decades I continued to keep my former relationship with him more or less confidential. Only recently have I permitted my collaboration with Sulochan to be more widely known.⁸⁰¹

Kailasa-Chandra, while at Mount Kailasa, kept his eyes open for threatening strangers which might cause him to leave at a moment's notice. He recalled, "After Sulochan's assassination, I was especially alert to be always packing while at the isolated Mount Kailasa project in northern California."⁸⁰²

Eric Johanson also remembered Kailasa-Chandra's concern regarding strangers at Mount Kailasa and his habit of carrying a gun for protection. Johanson recalled, "At the [Mount Kailasa] farm Kailasa-Chandra dasa always kept a firearm close by, especially after Sulochan dasa's murder. When mysterious vehicles were seen across the elevated mountaintop valley from the extremely isolated and sparsely populated farm of 1987, the usual concern was that it could be someone from New Vrindaban."⁸⁰³

Even today, more than thirty years after Sulochan's murder, Kailasa-Chandra still carries a gun on his person. He believes that it is better to be "safe than sorry." Kailasa-Chandra explained, "I am psychologically and practically prepared and able to use lethal force against any 'ISKCON' aggressor should that violent cult mentality rear its ugly head once more, reverting back to its gross, old ways of thuggery, up to and including murder."⁸⁰⁴

As noted earlier, Kailasa-Chandra's concern for imagined retaliation by New Vrindaban hit men was unfounded. Yet Puranjana and Kailasa-Chandra's fears for their personal safety were reasonable, considering that they knew nothing of the widespread dysfunction and paralysis which crippled the determination of the New Vrindaban murder conspirators shortly after the fact.

MARSHALL COUNTY TAX ASSESSOR BUYS A GUN

Another person who feared for his safety was the Marshall County tax assessor, Alfred W. "Pinky" Clark. When Sulochan had warned him during a February 5th telephone call that, "Kuladri and Bhaktipada will get you too," Clark had little reason to become alarmed. But after Sulochan's murder, Clark purchased a silver-plated .38-caliber revolver, which he carried in his jacket pocket at all times. The Sheriff's Department also provided surveillance of Clark's Pleasant Valley home, about two miles from New Vrindaban.

Clark was extremely unpopular at New Vrindaban, because he had fought against the community for years through the courts. He attempted to assess the Palace as a business instead of as a non-profit religious organization, and he also attempted to revoke the community's tax-exempt status. If a New Vrindaban "enforcer" killed Sulochan, Clark thought, perhaps he might be next. Clark's suspicion was collaborated by a hired employee at New Vrindaban who said that "the talk [at New Vrindaban] was [that someone was] going to get Clark."⁸⁰⁵

Clark explained why he purchased a gun, "My only involvement with them [New Vrindaban] is the tax case now in litigation. But Bryant said I was 'involved,' [he] said I was just like him—being stalked. I've been in office twenty years. It's a damn sad day that I would have to be recommended law enforcement protection. They [the Krishnas] are not the God-fearing, worshiping people they purport to be."⁸⁰⁶ Clark concluded, "I always keep it [my gun] pretty close. . . . It's just a matter of time before trouble hits."⁸⁰⁷

The New Vrindaban spokesman, Tulsi dasa, tried to reassure the media that the tax assessor had nothing to fear. Tulsi explained, “[His fears are] absurd. Clark does not have anything to fear nor does anyone else have anything to fear. . . . To think we could consider hurting someone is preposterous.”⁸⁰⁸

SULOCHAN’S ATTORNEY BUYS A GUN

David Gold, Sulochan’s attorney, also purchased a handgun to protect himself, an aluminum Colt .38, after he was told by Fred Gardener, an assistant prosecuting attorney who worked out of Thomas White’s office, that a high-ranking New Vrindaban resident said that Bhaktipada had put out “a hit” on him. Tirtha had allegedly followed Gold a few times, under the cover of darkness, to his isolated cabin in the woods on Richard Rose’s property. David Gold explained:

[Fred Gardener told me] “We’ve been interviewing devotees recently about the Chuck Saint-Denis murder. Lots of people who are afraid of Drescher are starting to come forward now because they really think we might have him this time. Anyway, we had this one devotee in last week, a pretty high-up guy in the organization. Been at New Vrindaban from the beginning. He had some good corroborating details on the Saint-Denis case, and validated a few things we already knew about the Bryant murder. I could tell he had good information so I asked him if Keith Ham had a hit out on anybody else.”

Fred paused for effect then grinned. “He said, ‘Yeah, that lawyer, David Gold.’ This witness said Drescher used to follow you out to your cabin. You’ve got a cabin out at Rose’s place, right? Dark brown wood, cement block foundation? Sits right above a little stream?” I nodded.

“Yeah, well, that’s the place Drescher described to this witness. Drescher said he followed you out there a few times. . . . Drescher told this guy, ‘The only reason that son-of-a-bitch Jew boy is still alive is I couldn’t find the right spot to blow him away.’”⁸⁰⁹

Tirtha denied the accusation that he had stalked David Gold. “Gold may have been approached by Tom White and he may have been told that story of a stalking-murder attempt. I guess it could have been Kuladri who leaked it to them. . . . Or maybe someone else, although it had to be someone very high up. . . . I certainly didn’t know Rose had a cabin there [in the woods]. And I never walked the property looking for Rose or Gold. It makes a good Hollywood script, but isn’t true.”⁸¹⁰

BRIJABASIS CAUTIONED NOT TO SPEAK TO MEDIA OR POLICE

Many New Vrindaban devotees correctly guessed that Tirtha was the murderer. During a telephone conversation with Gorby, Tirtha explained, “He [Tapahpunja] said [to me] that half the devotees in New Vrindaban were talking that it was me that did it. So that’s why they want to move me on out [to India]. . . . I would feel a lot more assured if I could meet with Bhaktipada himself just briefly and he just said, ‘Just do like this and do like that.’ I would feel confident then that I was doing the right thing. . . . I could try to do that [meet with Bhaktipada] but I’m not sure he would even talk to me now. I think the Iron Curtain dropped out there. I think they’re covering [their eyes] with both hands again.”⁸¹¹

Scarcely a week after Sulochan’s murder, one high-ranking ISKCON sannyasi who had come to live at the community a few months earlier, Devamrita Swami, wrote a feature article for the *New Vrindaban News* titled “A Word To The Wise Is Sufficient” which warned devotees to keep their mouths shut if questioned by the media or police. If anyone knew of any criminal activities, he said, they should report it not to the police nor to the media, but to the temple authorities, who would, it was implied, take whatever action they deemed appropriate. Devamrita Swami preached:

Life in the material world is constantly full of upheavals, and a fruitive worker never ceases his efforts to squeeze out some sense gratification, regardless of whether the situation is one of so-called happiness or so-called distress. Right now the media and some

law enforcement officials are amusing themselves by harassing the New Vrindaban Community about the death of one great *vaisnava-aparadhi* (offender) on the west coast.

The media and some police are clearly more interested in creating a sensationalistic atmosphere and profiting from it than in reporting truth or stopping violence. Therefore, if our devotees engage in wild rumors and gossip about the mundane affairs of L. A. street crime, they can actually help the karmis toward their sublime goal of an endless stream of “juicy” news to report and “suspicious” hearsay to interrogate innocent devotees about.

Naturally, if anyone ever has any factual knowledge of someone performing criminal acts, he should inform the temple authorities. Otherwise what is the use of exchanging who-dunit speculations about the illusory activities of the gross materialists? This is called *gramya-katha*, “town talk,” by Sri Jagadananda Pandit [the eternal associate of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and incarnation of Satyabhauma, who, according to *Caitanya-caritamrita*, prominently assisted in Mahaprabhu’s pastimes at Navadvipa and Puri], who warns devotees against indulging in such stale topics.

This is not the first time controversy has been stirred up against the community nor will it be the last. Whenever there is powerful preaching, Maya always supplies resistance. Obviously, the best thing we can do both for ourselves and all other living entities is to absorb the consciousness in talks of devotional service, specifically how to sacrifice everything to build Srila Bhaktipada’s project.⁸¹²

More articles warning devotees to keep quiet appeared in other New Vrindaban publications:

Maintain the purity. . . . Srila Bhaktipada has stated that he does not know of any illegal activities in New Vrindaban and he flatly disapproves of such things. Any devotee who may know of illegal activities in New Vrindaban is requested to report them to the community administration. Srila Bhaktipada has also requested that devotees refrain from

indulging in idle gossip and rumor-mongering about individuals and issues, and that they maintain the purity of New Vrindaban by speaking of the nectarian pastimes Lord Krishna and His devotees.⁸¹³

Be Careful Who You Talk To, Prabhus—. . . This is a warning to devotees not to talk about these allegations with any unknown men or women who suddenly appear in our community. Although we have nothing to hide, there are those who will distort even the simplest truths. Also, remember that there is an organized conspiracy to destroy this community, and demons can come in many disguises. Putana [the witch] came as a lovely lady and fooled the residents of Vrindaban, but she came to kill Krishna. The devotee has to be just as desirous to protect Krishna as the demons are to destroy Him. Then the devotee is always victorious. The U. S. Navy has a tagline: Loose lips sink ships.⁸¹⁴

Kuladri confirmed that standard New Vrindaban policy was not to cooperate with the police. Kuladri said, “This was a continuous policy that Swami recommended: no devotee talk with the police, and he was continually portraying the police as persecutors and demoniac. He said they were not interested in the religious goals of the community, and they were simply hinderances and would stop it [New Vrindaban] if they could, and any problems in the community—he always made an effort to hide them from the police.”⁸¹⁵

Bhaktipada ordered an internal investigation of Sulochan’s murder. A portion of a trial transcript in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive noted, “Overt Act 37. On or about June of 1986, defendant KEITH GORDON HAM, a/k/a NUMBER ONE, told an individual known to the grand jury to conduct an internal investigation of the Stephen Bryant murder.”⁸¹⁶

Five years later, Bhaktipada was charged with obstructing justice. The trial transcript reported, “It was a further part of the conspiracy that defendant KEITH GORDON HAM, a/k/a NUMBER ONE, would obstruct the murder investigation by having a sham internal murder investigation conducted, and by impeding the flow of information to law enforcement investigators.”⁸¹⁷

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Tirtha called his friend Randall Gorby on the phone and complained that New Vrindaban was not paying him the balance of the promised \$8,000 for his expenses in eliminating Sulochan. Tirtha explained, "I called him because I needed help and he has always been a close friend to me, but little did I know . . . [that my 'friend' Gorby was a snitch.]"⁸¹⁸

At the time, Tirtha did not realize that some of Gorby's telephone calls were being recorded by the West Virginia State Police. Gorby had become a government informer. Due to his grievances against New Vrindaban (explained earlier), Gorby had gone to the State Police and offered to become an informant. Gorby did not have recording equipment on his home phone. Whenever he received an important call at his residence, such as a call from Tirtha or Hayagriva, he told the caller that he would call back in fifteen or twenty minutes. Randall then would drive to the State Police office in Wellsburg (about seven miles from his home in Bethany), and call back on their telephone, which had tape recording equipment already set up. (At this time there was no such thing as Caller ID.)

Gorby: Do you have a place to go?

Tirtha: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Gorby: Well, I'd really get on 'em. I can't understand them not coming through with it.

Tirtha: It's just ridiculous because they've got a hundred thousand [dollars] coming in every week.

Gorby: What agreement did you make with. . .

Tirtha: Well, it's just that eight figure [\$8,000].

Gorby: Yeah.

Tirtha: I mean it was just like they, a . . . liked it. They actually thought that was a bargain basement price and they were all happy with it.

Gorby: Yeah.

Tirtha: It was a bargain fuckin' basement. I mean you couldn't go any lower than that.⁸¹⁹

On Saturday, May 24th, Tirtha and Gorby met at the Dutch Pantry restaurant outside of Youngstown, Ohio. Tirtha revealed his desperate predicament: he had accomplished the community's objective, but now they were refusing to pay him the balance due for "doing the deed." Tirtha practically begged Gorby to intercede on his behalf; to help him get the money he needed to leave the country. Later that day, on behalf of Tirtha, Gorby telephoned Hayagriva from the State Police office.

Gorby: Hello, is Howard there please?

Paurnamasi: Yes.

Hayagriva: Hello.

Gorby: Hello, Howard. I just talked to Tom. He's impatient.

Hayagriva: Well, I can't discuss this on the phone.

Gorby: Okay, well whatever you decide. ⁸²⁰

Hayagriva's wife, Paurnamasi, recalled, "We get a phone call. Gorby asks Hayagriva for some money because Tirtha needs money. [Then we get a phone call from] Tirtha [who] threatens my family and tells Hayagriva if he wants to see his family again, he'd better cooperate." ⁸²¹

CHAPTER 12

The Cavalry Comes to the Rescue

RANDALL GORBY, AFTER MEETING WITH TIRTHA in Youngstown, Ohio, on Saturday, met with Hayagriva at New Vrindaban the following day to inquire about the balance from the \$8,000 which was due to Tirtha. An investigator noted, “Gorby stated that he had met Howard Wheeler on Sunday, May 25th, regarding Drescher’s request that he get \$8,000 from Wheeler in order to leave the country. Gorby asked Wheeler how they were going to get the money to Drescher, and Wheeler had told him that they would do it through the normal procedure, and they were trying to set up the delivery.”⁸²²

Tapahpunja also wanted to leave the country along with Tirtha and was disturbed about the unavailability of escape money. The two devised a plan: Tirtha would offer to sell his Isuzu SUV, allegedly worth \$20,000, to New Vrindaban in a last-ditch effort to get his money. He couldn’t take the vehicle to India anyway, he thought, so he might as well try to get something for it. Tirtha signed over the title and gave it to Tapahpunja to use as leverage. Tapahpunja confirmed, “Before I left Cleveland to request the rest of Tirtha’s money, Tirtha signed over the title to his Isuzu Four-Runner. In other words, it was Tirtha’s way of securing the rest of his payoff by exchanging his vehicle for the cash.”⁸²³

On the same Sunday that Gorby met with Hayagriva, Tapahpunja drove from Cleveland to New Vrindaban with the title to Tirtha’s vehicle to meet with Bhaktipada and convince him of the gravity of the situation. Surely, Tapahpunja thought, Bhaktipada would authorize the release of

funds if he only understood the great danger to New Vrindaban if he and Tirtha were arrested and prosecuted. Tirtha explained, “He [Tapahpunja] drove to the New Vrindaban Community and had a private meeting with Kirtanananda.”⁸²⁴

Tapahpunja recalled, “In his typical miserly manner, Kirtanananda Swami had only given Tirtha a portion of the \$7,500. [For the record, the actual amount promised was \$8,000, and Hayagriva had promised it, not Bhaktipada]. I tried to secure the rest of the money and drive Tirtha and family to La Guardia [International Airport].”⁸²⁵ Tapahpunja arrived at New Vrindaban during the annual Memorial Day festival, and probably first visited the sankirtan house. Dharmatma explained:

A few [three] days after the murder, Tapahpunja arrived at my house, which was also the Sankirtan Department, and he was getting things out of my garage. In the garage there were lockers that a lot of the sankirtan devotees kept their personal belongings and different things. . . . He had camouflage pants on, an army shirt on, black boots. . . .

And we got into a discussion about the circumstances of the murder. He was saying “Wasn’t it neat that it happened on Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day! It was very auspicious, very wonderful that a demon was killed on this particular day!” [As explained earlier, Sulochan was not murdered on Lord Nrsimhadeva’s appearance day.]

And then he went on to describe to me in detail how it happened. He said, “You should have heard how it happened. It was real neat.” And he proceeded to tell me how Tirtha approached the van from the driver’s side and came up to the window where Sulochan was sitting, and he told me that he was rolling a joint with his head down and Tirtha shot him twice with a .45. And he proceeded to say his brains were splattered all over the ceiling [of the van].

Then Tapahpunja said things were getting very hot; they had to leave the country. He said he was there [at New Vrindaban] to get money for himself and Tirtha to get out of the country. I told him he should talk to ‘Number One’ about the money.^{826 827}

BHAKTIPADA REFUSES TO AUTHORIZE MONEY FOR TIRTHA

Tapahpunja Swami also approached Kuladri for money; but Kuladri, like Dharmatma before him, suggested he talk to “Number One.” When Tapahpunja finally got a moment alone with Bhaktipada and requested that he authorize “traveling expenses” for him and Tirtha, Bhaktipada emphatically responded, “I don’t want to hear about it!” During a telephone conversation with the author, Tapahpunja explained:

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, I drove . . . to New Vrindaban and spoke personally to Kuladri, and then with Bhaktipada. Kirtanananda said, “I don’t want to hear about it.” I countered, “I think you should listen to me; this has serious implications for New Vrindaban. Tirtha wants the rest of the money; he needs to leave the country immediately.” But Bhaktipada didn’t want to pay up. He argued, “Tirtha still owes us \$700 for his kid’s tuition at the gurukula.”⁸²⁸

Kuladri collaborated: “Bhaktipada and Tapahpunja were in Bhaktipada’s [Toyota] Land Cruiser, and they were speaking. And as I walked up to the Land Cruiser, I heard them talking, and I overheard two statements. Bhaktipada said, ‘Disciples should not ask their spiritual master for money,’ and ‘I am not going to give Tirtha any more money.’”⁸²⁹

Tirtha couldn’t believe it when he heard about it later. He explained: “The part about owing Kirtanananda some \$700 for tuition is amazing. I remember his asserting that. My wife and I gave him \$500 on one occasion and he said, ‘Okay, that’s your donation as a disciple; now where’s the tuition?’ I was floored. I didn’t even have a kid gurukula age.”⁸³⁰ Janmastami noted: “Their plan never went any further than doing the deed. They forgot about making the safe escape afterwards.”⁸³¹

BHAKTIPADA POSSIBLY KNEW LITTLE OR NOTHING OF THE MURDER PLOT

The dilemma of murderer Tirtha and conspirator Tapahpunja trying desperately to get sufficient cash to make their escape from the country when New Vrindaban sankirtan “pickers” were collecting up to \$100,000

each week defies the imagination. It is completely beyond belief. Why wasn't the money forthcoming? Didn't Bhaktipada realize the seriousness of the situation and the necessity for quick action? Although there are several possible reasons for this gross neglect, I think two scenarios are most probable:

(1) After Bhaktipada's October 27, 1985 head injury, his memory had degenerated to such an extent that he had actually promised the money, but later forgot all about it. Bhaktipada's personal servant, Chaitanya-Mangala, noted Bhaktipada's short-term memory loss (anterograde amnesia) and devised a secret system of facial expressions and spoken words to help Bhaktipada remember things when he became forgetful during important meetings. However, Chaitanya-Mangala was unable to remind him of these alleged commitments authorizing the funding for Sulochan's murder, because he was asked by the others involved to leave the room when these kinds of confidential matters were discussed. Therefore, Chaitanya-Mangala knew nothing of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan and could not assist Bhaktipada in remembering his past promises. Bhaktipada, afflicted with anterograde amnesia, was on his own.

(2) Another explanation is that Bhaktipada knew very little or nothing about the plot to murder Sulochan. The conspiracy to murder Sulochan began in earnest soon after Triyogi assaulted Bhaktipada and cracked his skull with a three-foot-long iron bar, reported to weigh twenty pounds. Bhaktipada lay helplessly in a coma with severe head injuries in Pittsburgh's Allegheny General Hospital. Tapahpunja Swami heard the news in Cleveland, came to visit his unconscious master in the hospital, and resolved that "should Bhaktipada wake from his coma, I would protect him with my life."⁸³²

Soon after, Tapahpunja chastised Kuladri for not protecting Bhaktipada, and community administrators, enforcers and friends—such as Kuladri, Hayagriva, Tirtha, Gorby, and others—began meeting together to decide what should be done to protect Bhaktipada in the future. As evidenced from statements by Tirtha and others, we can understand that

New Vrindaban community leaders, and not Bhaktipada, took the initiative to formulate the plan to murder Sulochan. Therefore, it is entirely possible that Bhaktipada knew little or nothing of the plan to murder Sulochan until three days *after* the murder, when Tapahpunja approached him and asked him to authorize the escape money for Tirtha. Naturally, if that was the case, Tapahpunja would have to tell the entire history of the murder plot from the very beginning (Tapahpunja later told Tirtha he was with Bhaktipada for “ten straight hours”), and then Bhaktipada would naturally be reticent to authorize the payment and involve himself directly in the murder conspiracy.

Janmastami corroborated, “This is where I think Kirtanananda Swami first knows of the depth of Radhanath Swami and Kuladri’s involvement in the murder. That’s what took so long to explain to Kirtanananda Swami. Why else would he let Tapahpunja hang out and rag him for money? It would be ‘yes,’ or ‘no,’ and then ‘goodbye.’ What takes ten hours, other than trying to explain the intrigue to Kirtanananda Swami, who won’t give out money for anything, *except* to save certain select butts?”⁸³³

SOME SAY BHAKTIPADA KNEW ABOUT THE MURDER PLOT

On the other hand, Bhaktipada was allegedly informed of the plot to seek out and murder Sulochan on several occasions. Hayagriva reportedly first spoke to him about eliminating Sulochan in September, 1985, soon after the New Vrindaban GBC meetings and before his October 27th assault and head injury. When Hayagriva told Bhaktipada that Sulochan should be “eliminated,” Bhaktipada allegedly replied: “It would be better for New Vrindaban and me if Sulochan was not around.”⁸³⁴

When Bhaktipada returned from the hospital in November, he was undoubtedly unaware of the murder plot for some time, but around December the New Vrindaban elders might have felt he had recovered sufficiently from his head injury to discuss the delicate issue

of Sulochan's proposed assassination. Bhaktipada's servant remembered: "I was generally around Bhaktipada, taking care of him, but a few times I was asked to leave the room when New Vrindaban elders wanted to talk privately with Bhaktipada. I recall that this happened once at the end of December 1985 and then again in January 1986. At the time, I wasn't fully aware of what was going on, but in retrospect, I think I was asked to leave because they were discussing sensitive details regarding the surveillance of Sulochan."⁸³⁵

Tirtha claimed he personally spoke with Bhaktipada about the plot and requested his spiritual master's blessings before he executed the important "holy inquisition." At the August 11, 1994 Grand Jury in Wheeling, Tirtha explained:

After speaking with Hayagriva, I decided that it's serious, so I didn't want to do anything of that magnitude just on someone else's hearsay, out of someone else's words, so I approached Kirtanananda myself at his home. He was semi-convalescing at that time. Nobody else was in the room. I entered the room, and I had some difficulty with his dog, had to make myself heard because his hearing was severely impaired after he got hit on the head, and I asked him, . . . I told him, "Hayagriva and some of the other devotees told me that you wanted this guy killed," and I said, "Is this what you want? Are you convinced this would be the best thing?" and he nodded his head in the affirmative.

I said, "Do you mean 'Yes?'" I said, "I need for you to tell me just so that I'm clear on this." Because I wasn't sure that he heard me, and when I repeated it again he was sort of pensive and he said, "Under the circumstances, we have to do what is best for Krishna." He says, "So under the circumstances, yes. It would be best."⁸³⁶

Tirtha continued, "I was acting in defense of my spiritual master's life. I was given a rather gruesome task to perform. Had I not been given authorization personally by Kirtanananda, I would not have been in California to eliminate Sulochan."⁸³⁷ Tapahpunja Swami claimed he also personally spoke with Bhaktipada in February 1986 about the

murder plot. He informed Bhaktipada that two devotees (Tirtha and Janmastami) were in California with plans to kill Sulochan. Tapahpunja said, “He [Bhaktipada] was reflective. Then he turned to me and said, ‘Maybe that’s what Krishna wants.’”⁸³⁸

Kuladri claimed that Radhanath had probably also spoken about the murder plot to Bhaktipada. During an interview (c. 1989) with an investigator (as noted earlier in Chapter 8), Kuladri was asked:

Q. . . is there any question in your mind that . . . Kirtanananda knew that Slavin was preaching . . . the devotees “had to do whatever it took” to protect their Swami. . . . Did Kirtanananda know that Slavin was making these preachings?

A. . . . I would say yes, because Radhanath Swami, Richard Slavin, was always talking with Kirtanananda because he represented Kirtanananda. He would invite people to take initiation from Kirtanananda. He was opening temples for Kirtanananda, so he was always in communication with Kirtanananda, and his preaching would always reflect Kirtanananda’s desire.⁸³⁹

SOME SAY BHAKTIPADA DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THE MURDER PLOT

At another time, Kuladri claimed that Bhaktipada knew *nothing* of the plot to murder Sulochan. He unequivocally stated this during a conversation a week after the murder during a visit with Adwaitacharya dasa, who was hiding from law enforcement authorities in the three-story New Vrindaban satellite center at 1025 Manhattan Avenue in the Polish/Latino neighborhood of Greenpoint, Brooklyn.⁸⁴⁰ In 1986, when Kuladri visited him, Adwaita kept a low profile, because he knew he was a wanted man.⁸⁴¹

The same day that Tirtha and Tapahpunja were arrested (which will be discussed in the next chapter), Kuladri flew to New York City and met with Adwaita, who lived in an apartment under an assumed name (John Jenkins) with his wife Madri (Mary Campbell) at the New Vrindaban satellite center.

Adwaita: Did anyone ever discuss this [murder conspiracy] with Bhaktipada?

Kuladri: No way. Are you kidding me? He doesn't even know what's going on half the time. He's out of it! The other day he asked me if you should come to New Vrindaban to help out. I told him, "Bhaktipada, Adwaita can't come live here. He's a fugitive. He has problems with the [law-enforcement] authorities." He [Bhaktipada] didn't even remember. He's out of it.⁸⁴²

Kuladri's assistant, temple commander Devananda, also claimed that Bhaktipada was not aware of the plot to murder Sulochan. A hand-written note in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive reported, "Devanananda says he was caring for Bhaktipada and he was in no condition to be involved in the Bryant thing. Says he knows Tapahpunja and Janmastami were and will testify."⁸⁴³

It is important to note that Tirtha later reversed his testimony on the matter of Bhaktipada's personal involvement in the murder plot. Nearly two decades after the murder, in a letter to the author, Tirtha admitted that he never personally heard Kirtanananda authorize Sulochan's murder. He had fabricated the story about meeting Bhaktipada (and his dog) in his house and getting the order to kill Sulochan, "Under the circumstances, we have to do what is best for Krishna." It wasn't true. Tirtha made up the story just to put his former spiritual master in prison.

In an October 2004 letter to the author, Tirtha explained, "Gorby put together several meetings between devotees, or was present or appraised of their content, with regard to concerns over Sulochan. I went to one of those meetings. At that time, I requested that Kirtanananda be asked directly if having Sulochan killed was what he wanted. Some days later I received a response through Gorby that Kirtanananda's exact words were, 'Yes, I think it would be best.' This came allegedly after the entire risk scenario was presented to Kirtanananda. I also asked one other devotee to ask Kirtanananda the same question. The reply was identical. I took this as confirmation that

he approved of it. However, I can't say I am positive he ever actually said that. I certainly believed it at the time. I believe it today.”⁸⁴⁴

Bhaktipada claimed he had tried to discourage his ksatriyas in the very beginning from forming a surveillance team. He said, “I do recall that the question of surveillance came up and I laughed at it. I said, ‘Why do you want to do that?’”⁸⁴⁵ As noted in Chapter 8, Hari-Venu (Geraldo Altamirano) confirmed Bhaktipada’s reluctance to retaliate against Sulochan, “After Bhaktipada got hit in the head, the devotees became really angry; like if you kicked a nest of hornets. I was sitting in Bhaktipada’s house, or maybe it was in the temple room, but I remember some senior devotees came up to him and said, ‘Something has to be done,’ about Sulochan. Bhaktipada responded, ‘Leave it alone. We don’t have to retaliate.’”⁸⁴⁶

Is it possible that Bhaktipada did not authorize this murder, even of a person they considered to be such a vile, blasphemous creature as Sulochan? Could the murder have been “authorized” by the leading New Vrindaban managers and “spiritual” leaders, and partly funded by Kuladri’s verbal forgery? After reviewing the testimony (some of it conflicting) of all those involved in the murder plot, it becomes clear that Bhaktipada most definitely authorized and encouraged the murder, although he probably only spoke of it to his confidant, Hayagriva. All others, including Kuladri, Radhanath, Tapahpunja, Tirtha, Janmastami, Gorby, Dharmatma, Sthayibhava, Gaura-Shakti, Devananda, and in California, Ramesvara, Krishna-Katha and Mahamantra, apparently did not communicate personally with Bhaktipada regarding the details of the murder plot.

BHAKTIPADA AGREES TO AUTHORIZE ESCAPE MONEY FOR TIRTHA

Tapahpunja pleaded on Tirtha’s behalf, and (according to his story) he finally convinced Bhaktipada to pay the balance of the promised payment, which, according to Tapahpunja, was \$3,000. In a telephone conversation with the author, Tapahpunja recalled, “I pleaded, ‘But Bhaktipada, Tirtha

needs to leave the country right away. Give me the money so he can buy a plane ticket for him and his wife and son.”⁸⁴⁷

After ten hours of persistent badgering, Bhaktipada finally acquiesced and returned to his house with Tapahpunja. Bhaktipada then asked (as explained to me by Tapahpunja) his personal servant, Kumar dasa (Craig Thompson, the manager of the New Vrindaban mold shop, and Desire Tree—a New Vrindaban company which manufactured cultured marble deities, thrones and altars), to open his safe and count out the money. However, Bhaktipada’s personal safe did not contain enough money to purchase plane tickets to India for Tirtha and his family. Bhaktipada normally kept only between \$500 and \$1,000 in cash at home.

Mahabuddhi (Donald Ferry), the accounts payable manager at New Vrindaban, claimed that Bhaktipada only kept between \$500 and \$1,000 in cash in his safe at home. An FBI investigation report in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive noted, “[Donald] Ferry stated that Bhaktipada had cash, usually between \$500 and \$1,000, but never \$3,000.”⁸⁴⁸

Noting with great disappointment the insufficient funds in Bhaktipada’s safe, Tapahpunja may have thought of Dharmatma, the sankirtan leader. Dharmatma’s “pickers” brought home sometimes \$100,000 per week. Certainly, Dharmatma would have the money in his safe. Bhaktipada drove his Toyota Land Cruiser to the sankirtan house, in the company of Radhanath Swami, who we think was present during Tapahpunja’s impassioned ten-hour conversation with Bhaktipada to attempt to convince him to surrender the escape money for Tirtha. In fact, we think it is unlikely that Tapahpunja could have convinced Bhaktipada without Radhanath’s help, as Bhaktipada seemed to think little of Tapahpunja and often publicly derided him, according to the author’s recollection. Yes, Bhaktipada also publicly derided Radhanath Swami, and called him “useless” from time to time, but Radhanath was, after all, the senior sannyasi, and was more respected as a saintly preacher by the Brijbasis.

Actually, it is far more likely that it was Hayagriva—who Gorby had visited earlier that day to inquire about money for Tirtha—who came to Bhaktipada’s house that Sunday evening and convinced Bhaktipada to authorize the expenditure. Although Hayagriva had no official position within the community, he had significant influence nonetheless, because Bhaktipada loved him.

In any case, we know with certainty that Radhanath Swami accompanied Bhaktipada to Dharmatma’s house. Why did Radhanath Swami accompany Bhaktipada? Is it possible that Radhanath was aware of Bhaktipada’s anterograde amnesia, and he insisted on accompanying “Number One” to make sure he didn’t forget why he was going to the sankirtan house? Dharmatma recalled:

The next day [Sunday, May 25th] Bhaktipada, along with Radhanath, drove up in my driveway in Bhaktipada’s vehicle and tooted the horn for me to come outside. When I came to the car we engaged in some small talk, I don’t remember what. And then Bhaktipada asked me if I had six thousand dollars cash in the house. And I said, “I don’t know. I will see, if you want.” He told me to go in and see if I had six thousand dollars.

I went in the house and went into my safe and . . . I counted out six thousand dollars and brought it out to him, and handed it in through the window. I don’t remember if I gave it to Radhanath and he passed it to Bhaktipada, or I gave it directly to Bhaktipada.

The mood was a little bit strained, and I said, “What is this? So they [Tirtha and Tapahpunja] can get out of the country?” And Bhaktipada and Radhanath smiled and nodded their heads: “Yes.” And then they said, “Hey, we’ve got to go,” and they left.⁸⁴⁹

Bhaktipada claimed that Dharmatma handed the money directly to Radhanath and he “never looked at it.” Bhaktipada recalled, “I remembered going with Radhanath to Dharmatma’s house. I don’t remember how much money we got. I remember Dharmatma came out with a bag of money. He gave it to Radhanath, and I never looked at it.”⁸⁵⁰

After receiving the bag of money from Dharmatma, Bhaktipada and Radhanath Swami returned to Bhaktipada's house, where Bhaktipada personally counted the money. During a conversation with the author years later, Tapahpunja tried to make it sound like Bhaktipada had all the money in his safe, apparently to bewilder the author and keep Radhanath Swami's involvement secret. Tapahpunja explained:

Bhaktipada called over his servant Kumar, told him to open the safe [in his house] and count out \$3,000 in cash. Kumar pulled out bags of money and counted it out, mostly five and one dollar bills. Then Bhaktipada counted it also, note by note. He told me that Tirtha could stay with Nathji dasa in Bombay. I wrote his instructions down in a little notebook I carried in my pocket. Then I returned to Kent, Ohio, to help Tirtha get out of the country.⁸⁵¹

When Tapahpunja spoke to me, he was very careful not to incriminate Radhanath Swami in the acquisition and delivery of the escape money, and he said that only he returned to Kent with the money. But actually, Tapahpunja drove to Kent in the company of Radhanath Swami. This was pointed out by Kuladri, who indicated that after getting the cash from Dharmatma, *both* Radhanath and Tapahpunja Swamis left New Vrindaban together and drove to Ohio. During an interview with an investigator, Kuladri said, "Terry Sheldon, yes, he left with Radhanath Swami and headed for Ohio to one of the preaching centers."⁸⁵²

Tirtha himself confirmed that Radhanath Swami "delivered a bag of cash" to him "after the murder." In a letter to the author, Tirtha attempted to protect Radhanath Swami but inadvertently revealed him as the person who actually delivered the escape money to him. Tirtha explained, "The facts, when properly understood, in the right sequence, further make the case of clearing Radhanath as a co-conspirator, since he had no involvement with me in it, much less Janmastami. Kirtanananda duped him into delivering a bag of cash to me after the fact [murder]. It wasn't a payoff. It was what K. still owed me for some other stuff I did for him, though not murders. Some arson stuff, etc."⁸⁵³

Tirtha, however, only received \$3,500 from Radhanath, which he revealed to Gorby during a telephone conversation.⁵⁵⁴ What happened to the rest of the \$6,000 in the paper bag which Dharmatma passed to Radhanath? Did Tapahpunja skim off \$2,500 from the top for his own purposes?

BHAKTIPADA CLAIMS MONEY WAS FOR A LOAN FOR A VEHICLE PURCHASE

After Tirtha was arrested a couple days later and the money was confiscated, police investigators discovered Bhaktipada's fingerprints on the bills. Kirtanananda presented his alibi in an interview published in the *Brijabasi Spirit* and titled "A Pure Devotee Faces A Fallen Nation."

Dave Fitzgerald: But police say that Mr. Drescher [Tirtha], when arrested in Ohio, was found with \$4,000 in cash, some of which had your fingerprints on it.

Bhaktipada: Yes, but there's also a very logical explanation for it. The president of the Cleveland temple had just bought a vehicle from him, for which the Cleveland temple had borrowed \$3,000 from me to purchase it. I did not know where they were buying the vehicle, but even if I had, I had no reason to think that it was not proper.⁵⁵⁵

However, it is not difficult to see through Bhaktipada's lame attempt to rationalize why his fingerprints were on the money which Tirtha intended to use to purchase plane tickets to India. We think only the most-fanatical and emotionally-invested New Vrindaban residents were convinced by this argument. The idea that Bhaktipada counted out \$3,000 in cash from his personal safe to make a loan to the Cleveland temple for an automobile purchase was quite odd, to put it mildly.

Bhaktipada rarely ever had anything to do with the Cleveland temple: he disliked even going there. He considered it a temple of Bahukas. According to *Srimad-bhagavatam*, the Bahukas are a race of people with a complexion "black as a crow"—dark-skinned people with African ancestry—an allegedly inferior race. Bhaktipada once said that he sent Tapahpunja to Cleveland to manage the temple as a "punishment" for his offenses.

The accounts payable manager at New Vrindaban also thought it “odd” that Bhaktipada would authorize and personally count out \$3,000 for an automobile loan for the Cleveland temple. An FBI investigation report noted, “[Donald] Ferry [Mahabuddhi] was asked if it was normal for Bhaktipada to give a \$3,000 loan to a devotee to purchase a vehicle. Ferry stated that Bhaktipada had cash, usually between \$500 and \$1,000 but never \$3,000. Ferry thought it would be extremely odd for Bhaktipada to give a \$3,000 loan for a car.”⁸⁵⁶

In court five years later, evidence was submitted—a \$3,000 loan agreement between New Vrindaban and ISKCON Cleveland dated May 22, 1986 (exhibit 84)—in an attempt to prove Bhaktipada’s claim. However, one of the prosecuting attorneys, Michael Stein, revealed the document to be a fraud when he questioned Mrgendra dasa (Harvey Mechanic), a New Vrindaban resident (c. May 1986 to January 1987) who provided legal counsel for the community.⁸⁵⁷ Mrgendra had drafted the loan agreement between New Vrindaban and Cleveland ISKCON.

Under questioning, Mrgendra admitted that the loan agreement was a fraud. “It [the loan agreement] was prepared approximately two weeks after that time [May 22nd],” Mrgendra explained. “Mr. [Kirtanananda] Swami . . . asked me to date it the 22nd of May, a time when Mr. Sheldon was there at the community in New Vrindaban. And so it was back-dated to that time at Mr. Swami’s request. Because . . . he heard that there was some money that was found on Mr. Drescher [when he was arrested on May 27th], and he was concerned that he cover for how the money was obtained by Mr. Drescher.”⁸⁵⁸

Although Bhaktipada’s story about the automobile loan to the Cleveland temple is fabricated, we must not forget one very important point in his statement published in the *Brijabasi Spirit* which he got absolutely correct: he got the money from Dharmatma, in the company of Radhanath, *before* Tirtha and Tapahpunja were arrested. We cannot forget this simple truth. In this regard, at least, Bhaktipada’s testimony corroborates Dharmatma’s testimony and contradicts the testimony of Radhanath Swami and Tapahpunja.

RADHANATH CLAIMS MONEY WAS FOR TAPAHUNJA'S BAIL

Three years later, during Radhanath Swami's interview with a Grand Jury on December 7, 1989, in Elkins, West Virginia, he presented his version of the money story, "I usually spend most of my time in India and I was not aware of what Sulochan was doing in regards to New Vrindaban. I was at New Vrindaban on the day that Tirtha was arrested with Tapahpunja in Kent, Ohio. Devotees from Kent called and informed us that they were in jail. I called Kirtanananda and asked him if we should bail out Tapahpunja. It was agreed that we should bail out Tapahpunja because of his position at the Cleveland temple. I rode with Kirtanananda Swami to Dharmatma's house and picked up a brown paper bag that contained an unknown amount of money. I was then directed to drive to the Cleveland temple and place the money in the safe. I did deposit the money and returned to New Vrindaban two days later."⁸⁵⁹

Twenty years later, after Janmastami, one of the murder conspirators, came out of the closet, broke the unspoken silence and announced that Radhanath was, in fact, the person who recruited him to join the plot to "destroy the demon" (see Chapter 16), Radhanath Swami, and the co-GBC representative for New Vrindaban (Malati devi dasi: Melanie Nagel, formerly Malati Swami), again claimed that the purpose of this money was not to get Tirtha and Tapahpunja out of the country after the murder nor to purchase a vehicle for the Cleveland temple, but to bail Tapahpunja out of jail.⁸⁶⁰ Both Radhanath and Malati claimed that Dharmatma was "confused."

DHARMATMA CLAIMS HE WAS NOT CONFUSED: THE MONEY WAS FOR TIRTHA TO ESCAPE TO INDIA

However, Dharmatma was unequivocal about the actual timeline of events (although after twenty-two years, he seemed to forget the actual amount of cash in the bag which he handed over to Radhanath Swami) and responded in an October 2008 letter published by *Sampradaya Sun*:

Actually, there was nothing for me to be confused about. As per my testimony under oath, Kirtanananda and Radhanath Maharaja drove into the driveway of the sankirtan house and honked the horn. When I approached the car I was asked if I had \$5,000.00 in the safe. I went in, retrieved it, and handed it to Radhanath Maharaja, who handed it to Kirtanananda. I asked if this was to get them [Tirtha and Tapahpunja] out of the country. I received affirmative smiles in response. *Bas* [the Hindi word for “stop; enough”], that was it!

The same or next day, Tapahpunja prabhu showed up and cleared out the locker he had at the sankirtan house. Within a few more days, Tirtha, his wife Suksmarupini and kids, and Tapahpunja prabhu were surrounded and arrested . . . in Kent, Ohio. Laksmi [money] was confiscated from them that bore the fingerprints of Kirtanananda, as per the court testimony. There was no way that the money was given to Kirtanananda after Tirtha and Tapahpunja were arrested in Ohio. ⁸⁶¹

Tapahpunja expressed his low regard for the “knuckleheads,” “spineless bastards” and “jack asses” who accused Radhanath Swami of being involved in the murder of Sulochan:

The reason for the confusion is that Dharmatma made the error of thinking that the money he handed over for my Kent bail was Tirtha’s escape money. I have spoken with Dharmatma on two occasions and he has corrected his misunderstanding. [Dharmatma denies this.]

I have also openly challenged the knuckleheads who continue spreading the misinformation about Radhanath Swami’s involvement with the so called ‘get away money.’ Spineless bastards that they are, they never take up the challenge. I have also conducted lengthy phone conversations with other devotees in good standing who requested clarification on this issue. I also discussed every detail of what happened with Michael Stein, the Assistant U. S. Attorney who requested me to testify at Kirtanananda Swami’s [1996] trial. God help the fools who continue to blaspheme devotees or who think they can understand what happened.

If as these jackasses have asserted, Radhanath Swami was delivering Tirtha's escape money, then explain to me how Tirtha could have escaped after his arrest in Kent.....duh!⁸⁶²

Bhaktipada, Radhanath and Tapahpunja, and Dharmatma all had different versions of the money story. Which one appears to be the most probable explanation? Let us first examine Radhanath Swami's statement before the Grand Jury, "I usually spend most of my time in India and I was not aware of what Sulochan was doing in regards to New Vrindaban." (We will examine Radhanath's statement about the bail money later, as well as his statement regarding his ignorance of Sulochan's activities.)

"I usually spend most of my time in India." This statement is incorrect. Yes, Radhanath spent most of his time in India *after* Sulochan's murder, but not *before*. During the first half of the 1980s, he did not visit India often. He may have visited India more than most New Vrindaban residents, but he was a sannyasi, and sannyasis are supposed to travel and preach. Factually, from about 1982 to 1986, as I recall, Radhanath spent most of his time maintaining his many preaching centers and college vegetarian cooking classes in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. That was his big preaching at the time, not India.

It was only *after* Sulochan's murder and the arrest of Tirtha when Radhanath began spending most of his time in India, only visiting New Vrindaban a few times a year. It seemed he practically abandoned his preaching centers and cooking classes. If you can find them, ask the people who took over Radhanath's centers: Jagadananda (Jeff Dalton) in Cincinnati, Narasimha-Guru (Martin Lyons) in Athens, Tappanacharya (Thomas Lape) in Morgantown, and, as I recall, Krishna-Katha (Carl Carlson) in Kent.

MONDAY, MAY 26, 1986: "PACKED AND READY TO FUCKING GO"

Tirtha and his family were nearly ready to leave Ravenna forever. During the weekend, in addition to making phone calls to New Vrindaban to try to get his money, he and his wife packed for their

forthcoming trip to New York and India. Tirtha was greatly relieved when Radhanath and Tapahpunja delivered the money, which took nearly all day Sunday for them to secure. However, Tirtha was unhappy, because the amount he received (\$3,500) was not the full amount he had been promised. New Vrindaban had cheated him again. Tirtha spoke to Gorby on the phone:

Tirtha: But I don't think he's setting me up. I really don't think Bhaktipada's trying to set me up. That's who Tapahpunja was with.

Gorby: Oh.

Tirtha: He [Tapahpunja] was with him [Bhaktipada] for ten straight hours [yesterday].

Gorby: And Dharmatma gave him? Had the money?

Tirtha: No. He got it right out of his hand.

Gorby: Oh, from Bhaktipada?

Tirtha: That's right. He counted it out personally.

Gorby: Well why the hell didn't he give you the full amount, Tom?

Tirtha: I don't know. ⁸⁶³

Although Tirtha did not receive the full promised amount, apparently what he received was sufficient to purchase tickets to India for himself and his family. By Monday evening, Tirtha's white Isuzu SUV was packed and ready to go. The next day he and his family intended to leave their rented mobile home in the Ravenna trailer park and never come back. The only task which remained was going to the bank Tuesday morning and exchanging \$4,000 in small bills for big bills.

During a telephone conversation which was taped at 7:00 p.m., Monday, May 26th, by Trooper W. I. Knight at the West Virginia State Police office in Wellsburg, Tirtha told Gorby that he was "packed and ready to fucking go," but that he was considering making a special trip to New Vrindaban on the way to New York City and shaking down Dharmatma for the balance of his promised payment.

Tirtha: I'm packed and ready to fucking go. . . . I'm leaving here tonight, and I won't come back here. We didn't like the place anyways, so it's no great loss.

Gorby: How are you going to stay in touch with them?

Tirtha: I'll just have to call. I'm going to call up Dharmatma now and say, "What's going on?" and if they haven't done anything [to get me the balance of my promised payment], I'll just scare them a lot and say, "Well, I'm coming in, I'm coming in to the [Memorial Day] festival [at New Vrindaban] and I'm going to get this straightened out." That should work, right? I'll say, "Either you come to me, or I'm coming to you." I'm just going to tell them, what the hell. ⁸⁶⁴

The next day (Tuesday), after exchanging currency at the Kent bank, Tirtha—along with his wife, son (and possibly also his stepson), and Tapahpunja—planned to head east on I-76, get on to I-80 east near Youngstown, pass through Pennsylvania and New Jersey, cross the Hudson River on the George Washington Bridge into Manhattan, turn south on Harlem River Drive, cross the Queensboro Bridge into the Borough of Queens, head south a short distance, cross Newtown Creek on the Pulaski Bridge into Brooklyn, and arrive at New Vrindaban's 1025 Manhattan Avenue satellite center after a 440-mile journey.

The following day, on Wednesday, if all went according to plan, they would apply for their visas at the Consulate General of India office in Manhattan. As soon as they received their visas, hopefully by the next day (exactly one week after the murder), they would then purchase their tickets to India from Radha Travel Agency and be gone. Tapahpunja had been advised to purchase "round trip tickets, or customs may throw you out." ⁸⁶⁵ It would be very difficult for U. S. law enforcement authorities to find and catch them in India.

However, Tirtha and Tapahpunja did not know that the three-day delay in securing the escape money would cost them dearly. The Los

Angeles investigators had discovered many clues which lead them to Tirtha and New Vrindaban. Tirtha's sidekick, Krishna-Katha, when questioned by the police the following morning after the murder, revealed that Tirtha and New Vrindaban were the principal players in the drama. Nori J. Muster explained, "The next morning [after the murder] he [Krishna-Katha] was chanting japa near the temple and the police pulled up. They said, 'How was your night?' K. K. played dumb and didn't say much. Then the police added, 'What would you say if we told you we were tapping your phone last night?' K. K. agreed to cooperate." ⁸⁶⁶

After speaking with Krishna-Katha, Los Angeles authorities contacted the West Virginia State Police, who had been recording Gorby's phone calls, and "Bingo!" They knew exactly where to find the murder suspect. A warrant was issued for Drescher's arrest, and the Kent, Ohio, police were contacted on Tuesday morning, May 27th. The Kent police began cruising around town, searching for Tirtha and his white Isuzu SUV.

At that moment, Tirtha, his wife and children, and Tapahpunja, were enjoying a leisurely breakfast at a Kent vegetarian restaurant. Normally Tirtha's wife would have prepared something simple at home, but since their pockets were stuffed with cash, they thought they'd splurge one last time before making their escape. Their dallying cost them dearly.

CHAPTER 13

The Rats Jump Off the Sinking Ship

FIVE DAYS AFTER SULOCHAN'S MURDER, on Tuesday, May 27th at 11:55 a.m., Tirtha was arrested in the parking lot of Bank One on South Water Street in Kent, Ohio. The Kent police officer who arrested him, Ronald L. Piatt, had only begun looking for Tirtha's white Isuzu SUV a short time earlier, perhaps only minutes. Officer Piatt recalled:

Myself and my partner, detective David Doak, at the time went out looking for the person that we had received information from the West Virginia State Police. . . . [We were looking for] a white Isuzu four-wheel drive [vehicle]. . . . We checked some of the nature food stores in the city that sell vegetarian-type food. We checked a phone booth that the suspect, or they say, Drescher made a phone call from. And we checked a restaurant, a vegetarian restaurant in the city. . . .

[We located the vehicle] traveling south on South Water Street in the city of Kent. [The suspect had] just left a restaurant. The driver of the vehicle matched the description that we were given for Mr. Drescher. We were organizing a stop of the vehicle when the driver pulled the vehicle into a local bank. At that point, we did what we call a felony stop on the vehicle. . . . We ordered Mr. Drescher, the driver, to shut the vehicle off and exit the vehicle. . . . He was placed under arrest and transported to the Kent Police Department.⁸⁶⁷

Staying in Ravenna Monday night was Tirtha and Tapahpunja's final and fatal blunder. If they had left their mobile home on Monday evening,

and driven all night to New York, they could easily have exchanged their bills at a Brooklyn or Manhattan bank the next day, and they might have eluded the police and escaped to India.

The warrant for Tirtha's arrest—a felony warrant for murder—was issued by West Virginia authorities not for the murder of Sulochan, but in connection with the unsolved disappearance in 1983 of another New Vrindaban devotee, Chakradhari (Charles Saint-Denis). Kent Police officer Ronald L. Piatt and his partner, David Ronald Doak, said that when they arrested Tirtha, they found on him eleven “surveillance notes” describing Sulochan's van, his physical appearance and his movements in Los Angeles.” Tirtha also carried \$4,261 in cash. Tirtha's SUV was “packed to the top. . . . There was everything in the back of the vehicle from clothing to food, cooking utensils, sleeping bags, suitcases, overnight traveling bag.”⁸⁶⁸

Inside the Kent Jail, a detention officer for the City of Kent Police Department made some casual conversation with Tirtha, “Since you have a sizeable amount of money on you, it seems like you should have enough money to make bail.” Tirtha responded with pessimism, “With what you [the police] have on me, that money won't help me.”⁸⁶⁹

Tapahpunja Swami was also arrested with Tirtha. Suksmarupini and her son, who were also in the vehicle, were released. Tapahpunja had clippings from three newspapers about the death of Sulochan and written instructions (in Tapahpunja's notebook) saying that, if Tirtha were ever wanted by the police, he should be sent to a temple in New York, then flown to India, where he should go to the Juhu temple and contact Nathji. At the time of his arrest, Tirtha's vehicle was packed with clothing and other goods, and his rented mobile home was found nearly empty. “We think he was in the process of activating those plans [to leave the country],” Officer Piatt said.⁸⁷⁰

Tirtha was held in the Kent City Jail without bail, but Tapahpunja was allowed to leave after posting \$7,500 bail. New Vrindaban provided

the money; Radhanath Swami delivered it to Cleveland ISKCON and handed it to Rukmini dasi (Cynthia Shaffer),⁸⁷¹ a young 23-year-old woman (fifteen years younger than Tapahpunja) who joined ISKCON in mid-February 1986 at the Cleveland temple and served as Tapahpunja's personal secretary. Rukmini spoke with a private investigator in June 1989, during which she described receiving the bail money for Tapahpunja. The investigator reported:

[Shaffer] stated that in May, on the date that Drescher and Sheldon were arrested [Tuesday, May 27th], that she was made aware of that fact by some of the men from the temple. She said that at the time she was working at the Cleveland temple and that Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja) was the temple president. She advised that she was very worried about Sheldon. She then advised that she was having an affair with Sheldon and his being in jail was something that she took personally.

She said that she knows that several people were trying to raise Sheldon's bail, but that the temple could not come up with the money. She said that several phone calls were made to the community at New Vrindaban for assistance.

She said that a couple of days after the arrest [Thursday, May 29th], Radhanath Swami (Richard Slavin) came into the Cleveland temple and gave her an envelope. She said that Slavin told her that it was money for bail for Sheldon and to put it in the safe until whoever was in charge could get over and post the bond. She said that she did as she was told and placed the envelope into the safe. She said that when one of the men came into the office she told him about it and he said that he would take care of it.⁸⁷²

In a November 2016 e-mail message to Dharmatma, Radhanath Swami collaborated Rukmini's recollection, "I was given that Laksmi [money] to leave at the Cleveland Temple for Tapahpunja Prabhu's bail. I left it with Rukmini dasi (Cindy Schaffer) at the temple and it was put in the safe. Within minutes I left, and traveled to give a weekly cooking class at Oberlin College. This is true and factual. . . . I was then a traveling preacher just stopping through New Vrindaban for a couple hours to pick

up some pots, not knowing much what was going on, and asked to drop the bag of Laksmi off at Cleveland, since I was going in that direction.”⁸⁷³

In an e-mail to the author, Tapahpunja Swami described the arrest, and how (he heard) Radhanath Swami got his bail money from New Vrindaban:

We [Tirtha and I] were arrested in a bank parking lot in Kent. We had stopped there to change the wad of small bills into bigger bills more fit for travel. I was held in the local Kent jail on a bogus charge, carrying a concealed weapon (a Barlow pocket knife).

The Cleveland devotees got in touch with Radhanath Swami to arrange for bail money, approximately \$7,500 cash. There is nothing unusual about being released on a cash bail. I instructed the devotees to ask Maharaja for the bail.

It so happened that Radhanath Swami was traveling to Oberlin, Ohio, for a regularly scheduled cooking class. He and Kirtanananda Swami drove to Dharmatma's house and Dharmatma handed over my bail money. Radhanath Swami delivered the funds to the Cleveland devotees as planned and I was bailed out.⁸⁷⁴

Regarding Tapahpunja's statement above: two points should be noted. First, his story about the source of the bail money contradicts Dharmatma's story. Who told Tapahpunja this story? He wasn't there at New Vrindaban when Radhanath got the money for his bail; he was in jail at the time. It seems Tapahpunja, in this e-mail, attempted to confuse the author and at the same time protect Radhanath Swami, by saying that Bhaktipada and Radhanath came to Dharmatma's house to get his bail money.

Dharmatma has already unequivocally testified that Bhaktipada and Radhanath came to his house only a few days after Sulochan's murder. Tirtha and Tapahpunja were arrested five days after the murder, and Tapahpunja was bailed out eight days after the murder. No, Tapahpunja's bail money did not come from Dharmatma; it came from somewhere else, perhaps the New Vrindaban accounting office.

Second, due to the testimony of Radhanath Swami, Tapahpunja and Dharmatma, now it becomes clear that Radhanath Swami was involved in *two* money transfers: (1) going with Bhaktipada to the sankirtan house three days after the murder on Sunday, May 25th, to get money for Tirtha to purchase air tickets to India, and (2) about four days later on Thursday, May 29th (exactly one week after the murder), receiving the bail money from an unidentified source and delivering it to Cleveland ISKCON to get Tapahpunja out of jail.

Knowing this, we can now examine in more detail Radhanath Swami's claim that he went to Dharmatma's house to get bail money for Tapahpunja. However, in Radhanath's statement to the Grand Jury quoted earlier, Radhanath is trying to confuse the issue. He cleverly neglects to mention that he received money on two occasions: first, from Dharmatma to deliver to Tirtha in Ohio for his escape, and second, as much as five days later, from an unknown source to deliver to Cleveland ISKCON for Tapahpunja's bail. He is trying to make us think he only received money once: from Dharmatma seven or eight days after the murder for Tapahpunja's bail. Dharmatma, however, clearly remembers Radhanath coming with Bhaktipada only a few days after the murder.

Who is lying: Dharmatma or Radhanath? To answer this question, we must ask ourselves another question: "Who has the most to lose if the truth is revealed?" Dharmatma concluded, "Radhanath Swami won't like all this coming out. Too bad. I had to be responsible for my transgressions [and go to prison]. He should do the same."⁸⁷⁵

KULADRI "VERY, VERY FRIGHTENED"

When news of Tirtha and Tapahpunja's arrest reached New Vrindaban, Kuladri left in great anxiety and flew to New York City, where he stayed with Adwaitacharya at the New Vrindaban satellite center at 1025 Manhattan Avenue in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. We can imagine Kuladri's first thoughts on hearing the news: "Tirtha and Tapahpunja, arrested!

Will law enforcement come to New Vrindaban to arrest me and the other conspirators? Are they coming for me right now? They might be here any minute. I better get out of here, pronto!”

An investigative report in the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive reported, “May 1986: Devananda witnessed Villa’s response. . . . Villa was very jittery. He booked a flight on People’s Airlines and flew off to New York City to see Adwaita.”⁸⁷⁶ Adwaita recalled in more detail, “Kuladri flipped out after Tapahpunja and Tirtha were arrested.”⁸⁷⁷ “On the night [they] were arrested, Kuladri left New Vrindaban in a bit of anxiety and stopped by my place in New York for a day or two.”⁸⁷⁸ Janmastami collaborated: “Kuladri was *very, very* frightened by the time it was coming to ‘reaction time’ because he knew that he and Radhanath were in very deep doo-doo.”⁸⁷⁹

TAPAHpunja FLEES THE U. S.

Tapahpunja Swami was held for three days on a charge of carrying a concealed weapon—a hooked-blade utility knife—but the charge was dismissed. Soon after, he disappeared for four years. Rukmini dasi (Cynthia Shaffer) in Cleveland thought that Tapahpunja Swami had disappeared because he was embarrassed because their clandestine romance had been discovered. A private investigator noted, “Shaffer stated that shortly after his release [from jail], the fact that she and Sheldon were having an affair became known. She said that Sheldon, who is a swami and supposed to be celibate, had a hard time handling the effects of the affair becoming public knowledge, and left the country. She said that she has not seen him since.”⁸⁸⁰ Rukmini confirmed that she had a “sexual relationship with Tapahpunja.”⁸⁸¹

After returning to the Cleveland temple from the Kent jail, Tapahpunja decided that he and Rukmini should get married. Rukmini recalled, “He [Tapahpunja] became more open with me. He revealed his mind a lot to me about the trouble, the stress, the pressure he had been under. Tapahpunja and I discussed getting married and setting up a household.

I didn't tell anyone because I was embarrassed. We talked about leaving the country and just making a new start somewhere before we revealed our relationship to Bhaktipada. . . . We talked about South America, and Australia, and possibly India.”⁸⁸²

A few days after consulting with Rukmini, Tapahpunja Swami flew to Ireland where he tried to hide at the ISKCON temple on Inishturk (Inis Rath) Island in County Mayo, wearing a white dhoti and going by the name “Ganga dasa.” Eventually the temple president's wife (Robin Brinkman) recognized him, and her husband asked him if his presence there had anything to do with the murder of Sulochan. Tapahpunja boasted: “I engineered it.” The Inis Rath Island temple president, Prthu dasa (Peter Brinkman), remembered in detail:

In the beginning he [Tapahpunja] was wearing army clothes, surplus army green-olive kind with stitched-on pockets. . . . Later he was wearing white, [a] white dhoti. . . . He was working very well in the garden. . . . I saw he was a good worker. . . . He wanted to introduce something new in the community and he was good manpower, and a man tends to think in these terms. But then she [my wife] came and mentioned there was . . . a photo in the *ISKCON World Review* that he actually was not “Ganga” at all, that he was actually a sannyasi. And I remembered that photo. . . . So that really hit me then. So here is a man who has white—he presents himself under the wrong name, his name is Tapahpunja Swami. I clearly remembered there was a photo in *ISKCON World Review* in reference to this Palace Charities food distribution . . . program, and so then I became highly alerted when I realized that. . . .

I immediately asked him to come in my office. And as soon as he sat down, I presented to him that, “You [are] presenting yourself under the wrong name, you are from New Vrindaban. I know that you must be involved with the killing of Sulochan,” because that [the murder] was on everybody's mind in our movement, this murder case. . . . I must have taken him by surprise, because he immediately said, “Yes, I engineered it.”

I was very surprised that he would say that, and so immediately I said to him, “Since when do we take the law in our own hands?” He said, “It was completely Vedic.” . . . When I heard, “It was completely Vedic,” I was kind of really fed up with the situation. . . . He said, “He [Sulochan had] offended Bhaktipada.” . . .

I didn’t want to jeopardize the standing of our [ISKCON] community. I saw visions of local police coming in, and being all over the newspaper. . . . I asked him to leave immediately. . . . He left immediately. . . . I asked where he would go, and he mentioned something about Australia. ⁸⁸³

After departing from Ireland, “Ganga dasa” flew to Australia, where he kept in contact with Rukmini by telephone. She secured a visa to visit Australia, granted on June 30, 1986, but never made the trip, because, she explained, “I had never been out of the [United States] country and, to the best of my knowledge . . . he wanted to go over and try to set up, establish himself before I came over to meet him. . . . I was a little bit reluctant because I wasn’t sure at the time I wanted to move and live out of the country. And we both discussed and decided it would be best to wait a little bit.” ⁸⁸⁴

From Australia, Tapahpunja flew to India, and later to Malaysia, where he went by the name “Kuruksetra dasa.” He was finally apprehended on June 14, 1990 in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur by U. S. Marshals from Hawaii and brought back to the United States to face trial. ⁸⁸⁵

TIRTHA ALLEGEDLY OFFERED DEAL

During Tirtha’s first few weeks in jail, he claimed at least six federal agents plus the Marshall County sheriff allegedly offered him a deal: if he implicated Swami Bhaktipada and the other conspirators of the murder plot, he would get a greatly reduced sentence (if not total immunity), and his wife, son and stepson would be enrolled in the Federal Witness

Protection Program. His family would be taken care of, and Tirtha could join them safely and anonymously after he was released from prison. The New Vrindaban article titled “Get the Swami” elaborated:

[Umapati Swami], a priest [and counselor] for Thomas Drescher, said that Drescher confided in him that for three days in June, 1986, immediately after his arrest, at least six agents attempted to make him say something false against Bhaktipada. The sheriff told him, “We’ll have you and we’ll get all the others too. Once we are able to get the Swami, the rest of ‘em will fall like dominoes.”

“Their threats, their desperate and adamant mood was disgusting,” related Drescher. “They offered me total immunity if I would put Swami Bhaktipada behind bars.”

“We know you are the key to the whole thing,” Sheriff Bordenkircher would say. “I can arrange for a hell of a deal. How about seven years for two murders? You just put the Swami and the rest of the leaders behind bars, and you’ll be out in no time. You’ll go to a federal prison, and you’ll get the Federal [Witness] Protection Program. Think of your family.”⁸⁸⁶

Despite the tempting offer, Tirtha refused to implicate his spiritual master in the murder. Tirtha wrote, “If I need to, I will put all of it [my wife, my son and my freedom] aside to protect my beloved Gurudeva. I have already made that decision and nothing anyone can do will alter it. They can offer to set me free, arrange for other prisoners to beat or kill me, even hurt my family. I only know that Srila Bhaktipada is my lord and master.”⁸⁸⁷

Tirtha considered real heroism to be eternal loyalty to Bhaktipada. He explained, “The test is in the tough times. Do we weaken because we are punished or mistreated, or do we remain determined, convinced of Krishna’s mercy, of His divine plan? Believe me, the real hero will be any who stick it out to the very end with Srila Bhaktipada. If we have to die for his mission, then it will be an honor. We are fully protected if we just rally behind His Divine Grace Srila Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada.”⁸⁸⁸

TIRTHA TAKES FULL RAP

Tirtha refused to implicate Bhaktipada and the other conspirators in the murder, just as six years earlier he refused to implicate New Vrindaban when he was arrested and convicted for the manufacture of methaqualone. He explained, “I could have accepted a deal for ten years if I would have implicated the ‘Swami,’ but then I would have become the villain.”⁸⁸⁹ Tirtha protected Bhaktipada: “I’m not going to bear false witness against an exalted spiritual leader. I have no knowledge of any illegal activity by the Swami.”⁸⁹⁰

As discussed earlier, Tirtha was truthful, at least in this regard: he never talked to Bhaktipada about the murder plot. But what about the other members of the conspiracy? What about Tapahpunja, Janmastami, Kuladri, Hayagriva, Radhanath, Dharmatma, Gorby and Krishna-Katha? Would he also protect them, the actual conspirators who encouraged, planned, and secured the funding to assassinate Sulochan? Would Tirtha protect them? Yes, Tirtha also protected the members of the murder conspiracy. He said, “They’re trying to use me to attack New Vrindaban. They’re going to try to prove a conspiracy between myself and New Vrindaban to kill someone. They aren’t going to find it. I consider myself a political prisoner.”⁸⁹¹

Tirtha may have remembered Bhaktipada’s promise six years earlier, “If Tirtha takes the whole thing, and no other boys get caught, then he’ll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime.”⁸⁹² But privately Tirtha wrote a personal letter to Bhaktipada apologizing for any inconvenience he might have caused the community. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Swami Bhaktipada said Tirtha wrote him from jail to apologize if he had caused the commune any difficulty. The guru said he responded with a short note advising Tirtha ‘to chant the name of God and to depend on God’s help and mercy.’”⁸⁹³

In spite of Tirtha’s tough talk, he suffered great emotional anguish after losing his freedom. He revealed his suffering in a 2005 essay for his website titled “Exile.”

To be so suddenly and permanently dragged away from wife and children, my car, clothes, possessions and freedom. How terribly it wracked my heart, pounding and seeming to break inside my chest.

Perhaps two months after being taken to jail [around July 1986] I telephoned the devotees at Columbus, where Narasimha-Guru [Martin Lyons, a godbrother from England] answered my call. In a sudden gush I began crying, pouring out my heart to him, asking him how I could possibly continue on like this. In a kind and most compassionate way he softly spoke, telling me that those things were now gone, all in the past. It served no purpose to lament unduly for their passing. It was only my attachment for those things that caused such pain in my heart. What could possibly be gained by clinging to their memory and remaining so attached?

Somehow his words, though blunt, were coming from a place within his own heart. Somehow, hearing him speak like that served to soothe my soul. It was at that very moment I knew that I must give up my useless lamentation and move forward in my life, however miserable it might seem at the time.⁸⁹⁴

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIRTHA AND RADHANATH SWAMI

The first devotee to visit Tirtha in jail was the “most kind and compassionate” Radhanath Swami. This was not surprising, as Tirtha and Radhanath Swami had (and may still have) a very close relationship from 1983 to at least 2007, when Radhanath began distancing himself from Tirtha in prison. What were the circumstances which placed Tirtha and Radhanath in close proximity?

It was because of Tirtha’s exile from New Vrindaban in 1983. After Tirtha and his accomplice Daruka murdered Chakradhari on the night of June 10, 1983, Tirtha was banished from living at New Vrindaban. Tirtha moved to Ohio and eventually rented a home for his wife and young son and stepson at a trailer park in Ravenna, about five miles east of Radhanath’s preaching center in Kent. Tirtha became friendly with the newly-initiated sanniyasi, who had recently established several

preaching centers and college vegetarian cooking classes in that state. Tirtha assisted his friend and mentor by driving Radhanath to preaching centers in Ohio.

Due to his submissive service mentality, Tirtha developed a very close friendship with Radhanath, and years later remembered, “During that time [after my 1983 banishment from New Vrindaban] I had occasion to chauffeur Maharaja on numerous occasions, sometimes on trips lasting the entire day. Whenever I would drop him at his destination I felt that I should be staying with him [instead of with my wife and son], feeling that this was a very special time in my life. Truly it was. Just being in such close proximity with Radhanath Swami gave a much needed boost to my flagging Krishna consciousness.”⁸⁹⁵

Tirtha assisted Radhanath Swami in other ways; once he had thought about renting a house in Columbus for his family which could double as a New Vrindaban preaching center. When Tirtha talked to his sannyasi friend, Radhanath smiled and said, “You could be the temple president.” Tirtha recalled:

At the time I was thinking of moving to Columbus, planning to rent an apartment or house. Thinking in this way, Maharaja asked if the place I found could double as a temple/preaching center. That sounded good. I’d be living right in the temple with devotees. As a final nudge of encouragement, and with a twinkle in his eye, Maharaja said, “You could be the temple president.”

In my heart I felt Maharaja was being a bit facetious, trying perhaps to gauge the sincerity of my mood. I promised to do my best to find a suitable building for our needs. I wanted to do whatever I could to assist him. But [I replied], “Sorry. I’ll have to pass on the president’s spot.” At that we looked at one another and laughed heartily. We were beginning to understand one another’s heart.⁸⁹⁶

Now that we understand the affection Tirtha had (and has) for Radhanath Swami, we can further examine Radhanath’s previous statement to the

Grand Jury, “I was not aware of what Sulochan was doing in regards to New Vrindaban.” This statement now becomes suspect, for four reasons:

(1) Radhanath knew a lot about Sulochan and his grievances against Bhaktipada. In October 1985, he flew to California to meet with Berkeley ISKCON residents about the possible acquisition of the Berkeley temple as a New Vrindaban satellite center. He was in Berkeley about a week, and during that time, Puranjana personally spoke with Radhanath about Sulochan for four or five hours, as described earlier in Chapter 4. Subsequently, Radhanath also spoke extensively on the phone with Atreya-Rsi, the GBC for Berkeley, and discussed the possibility that Jamuna and her children could move to Berkeley so that Sulochan could have access to his sons.

(2) Tirtha likely spoke to Radhanath Swami about the murder plot. Tirtha, by nature, lacked self-confidence. His constant need to throw his weight around was not a symptom of self-esteem; it was a symptom of lack of self-esteem. He needed constant encouragement and reassurance from those he respected, as evidenced by his statement quoted earlier: “I would feel a lot more assured if I could meet with Bhaktipada himself just briefly and he just said, ‘Just do like this and do like that.’ I would feel confident then that I was doing the right thing.”⁸⁹⁷

Tirtha displayed his lack of self-confidence three months earlier in February, by calling Tapahpunja, Kuladri, Gorby, Devananda or Radhanath nearly every day for encouragement, when he traveled with Janmastami in California, networking with Los Angeles devotees and examining mine shafts. As we read earlier, Janmastami claimed, “Tirtha said ‘Who can I take my instructions from?’ and I told him ‘Radhanath.’ Radhanath seemed to be the only one with enough brains to keep his mouth shut. After that he [Tirtha] talked to Radhanath or Devananda [daily on the phone.]”⁸⁹⁸

Radhanath (and Devananda) became Tirtha’s spiritual mentor and confessor, as Tirtha could no longer speak to Kuladri nor Tapahpunja. It is ludicrous to assume that Radhanath had no idea why Tirtha was calling

him daily on the phone from California during February 1986, when Tirtha, in the company of Janmastami, were making important contacts to assist them in the assassination of Sulochan.

(3) It is highly likely that Radhanath Swami was privy to the confidential discussions in late October and November, 1985, which Tirtha spoke about earlier, when the conspiracy to murder Sulochan was hatched. We know that Radhanath was positively at New Vrindaban during those tumultuous days, because on October 29th, he presented the morning *Srimad-bhagavatam* class (two days after Triyogi's assault). His lecture was published in *New Vrindaban News* (October 31, 1985). In addition, according to Yogadeva's recollection, Radhanath was at Allegheny General Hospital eight days later, on November 6th, when Bhaktipada awoke from his coma. Radhanath was undoubtedly at New Vrindaban and Pittsburgh constantly at this time.

Why would Tapahpunja and Kuladri not invite him to attend—indeed, *insist* he attend—these very important meetings? At the time, Radhanath was loved by all and universally regarded as the second-most spiritually-advanced New Vrindaban resident, next to Bhaktipada. His input would be most welcome. Radhanath would have canceled his cooking classes and preaching engagements, if he thought he could help protect Bhaktipada by attending these discussions and offering his suggestions. Radhanath loved Bhaktipada, as did all the faithful Brijabasis. Bhaktipada was “Number One” in our lives.

(4) Of course, items one through three are circumstantial evidence, but how can we ignore Kuladri's conversation with Dharmatma on the morning of the murder? During it, he named the three most-vociferous leaders of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan. Dharmatma explained, “I had a discussion with Kuladri [the morning of the murder]. He was quite disturbed. He mentioned . . . how it [the murder] shouldn't have been done like that. And that how Radhanath, Hayagriva and Tapahpunja were pushing like crazy for this to happen, and how he [Kuladri] had told them not to do it.”⁸⁹⁹

Radhanath, on the other hand, insisted he knew nothing about the plot to murder Sulochan. He claims that he never spoke to Bhaktipada about it, and he never spoke to Tapahpunja, or Kuladri, or Hayagriva, or Tirtha, or Janmastami about “destroying the demon.” He claimed he hardly ever came to New Vrindaban; he was always far away “traveling and preaching.” He was not “privy to things.” Radhanath fervidly proclaimed his innocence during an October 2008 telephone conversation with a former gurukula student, Saunaka-Rsi:

The whole time I lived at New Vrindaban I was never involved in decision making or management. For the first seven years I was a pujari up on a . . . [ridge top],⁹⁰⁰ and I . . . never even came down to [the Bahulaban farm] where the devotees lived. . . . I was just with the brahmacharis. All I did was milk cows and took care of the deities. I was isolated.

And then when I came down from that [Vrindaban farm] I was asked to do college preaching so I was just traveling and I’d come to New Vrindaban maybe a couple of days a month, so I was never involved in any management there. I was in many ways just like the regular devotees. I was not very privy to things, but because when I was traveling and preaching (I was a sannyasi), somehow or other, people assumed I must have been involved in it . . . the decision making [regarding the murder of Sulochan].⁹⁰¹

Radhanath’s claim that he was “never involved in any management” or “was not very privy to things” regarding New Vrindaban is extremely easy to disprove. As described just a few paragraphs earlier, he was (1) intimately involved in diplomatic relations between New Vrindaban and at least one other ISKCON temple, and he also (2) helped mediate the conflict between Bhaktipada and Sulochan. Radhanath continued to expound on his “innocence” during his phone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi:

If you were to ask anybody who actually was involved in the decision making [of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan], they’ll say I had nothing to do with it. I never went to any meetings. Kirtanananda Swami never discussed anything with me. . . . I would just tell him how my

college preaching was going and that was our only dialogue (laughter). That's when all the stuff [Sulochan's murder] happened.⁹⁰²

However, one person who was intimately “involved in the decision making” of the murder of Sulochan claimed that Radhanath was indeed involved. Radhanath was one of the principal actors in the drama and had preached that devotees must do “whatever it takes” to protect the spiritual master. During a 1989 interview with a private investigator (quoted earlier in Chapter 8), Kuladri was asked:

Q. Let's go back now to Richard Slavin talking and making these preachings [to do whatever is necessary to protect the Swami]. Is there any question in your mind . . . whether Kirtanananda knew that Slavin was preaching . . . [that] the devotees had to do whatever it took to protect their Swami, who was a representative of God? Did Kirtanananda know that Slavin was making these preachings?

A. You know, I would say yes, because Radhanath Swami, Richard Slavin, was always talking with Kirtanananda because he represented Kirtanananda. He would invite people to take initiation from Kirtanananda. He was opening temples for Kirtanananda, so he was always in communication with Kirtanananda, and his preaching would always reflect Kirtanananda's desire.⁹⁰³

RADHANATH SWAMI VISITS TIRTHA IN JAIL

In any case, Tirtha was delighted (and humbled) to no end when his idol Radhanath Swami became the first devotee to visit him in jail. Tirtha recalled:

When I was first arrested and put in jail, it was Radhanath Swami who first came to see me. He spoke to me in a most kind and compassionate manner, explaining that my life was now completely in Krishna's hands. Speaking with him through the thick security glass, I was ashamed and embarrassed to be in such a predicament. He told me

to concentrate on Krishna and nothing else. Only Krishna could help me now. Before leaving he gave me copies of the all-in-one *Srimad-bhagavatam*, *Caitanya-caritamrita*, and *Bhagavad-gita*. Reading these books anew would mark the beginning of my new life in prison, and a new era of consciousness, not as a convict, but as a devotee. . . .

When I next spoke with Radhanath Swami he said that I was most fortunate, for Krishna was showing me great mercy by ripping everything away so abruptly. Perhaps if it didn't kill me it would make me much stronger. Die before you die. Surely this is what death is like for the soul too attached to home and hearth. Indeed, it surely felt like death, with everything I held so dearly, now gone in an instant.⁹⁰⁴

Radhanath Swami confirmed, "I visited Tirtha while he was in jail and we only discussed religious issues and never talked about his charges."⁹⁰⁵ Radhanath also preached to Tirtha by sending inspiring and poetic handwritten letters through the mail. One October 1989 letter noted, "Without a goal worth dying for we have nothing worthwhile to live for. Any shallow creature can speak these words. Very few most fortunate souls have the courage and integrity to engrave these words within the heart of hearts and remain faithful in the face of life and death."⁹⁰⁶

Radhanath continued to keep in touch with Tirtha for at least twenty years. In a September 9, 2003 handwritten letter to the author from prison, Tirtha named four people who regularly wrote to him, "The times during the past ten years have been difficult for me—remaining so isolated from the devotees. Only a very few devotees have remained in touch with me or offered me their association. Malati, Radhanath Swami, Chandramauli Swami, Loka, and occasionally a few others. Visits are very rare. . . . I've come to terms with my situation and have learned not to be bitter or morose. I can't do anything to change how people feel."⁹⁰⁷ In another letter to the author a week later, Tirtha admitted, "Radhanath Swami . . . is my closest friend."⁹⁰⁸

GOVERNMENT'S PRINCIPAL WITNESS NEARLY KILLED BY GAS EXPLOSION

The day following Tirtha's arrest, a huge explosion at Randall Gorby's house, allegedly caused by him illegally tapping into a gas line, nearly killed him. An FBI agent testified: "Mr. Gorby had suffered some trauma and shock as a result of being blown through the roof of his house. He was in intensive care ward at Ohio Valley Medical Center in Wheeling. He had first-, second- and third-degree burns over forty percent of his body. Doctors at that time did not expect him to live." ⁹⁰⁹

Gorby remembered: "On the 28th of May I was at home. That morning, I was going to go back to the West Virginia State Barracks in Wellsburg where I was giving statements to them at the time, and Trooper Knight had called me and woke me at 9:00 in the morning. I got out of bed and started to light a cigarette and my home totally disappeared. It was leveled to the ground. I was in critical condition for seven weeks, in intensive care, and in a coma for the month of June up until the center of July." ⁹¹⁰

Gorby was to be the principal witness for the prosecution. The *Wheeling News-Register* reported, "Authorities have listed no cause for the explosion, but said Tirtha helped lay the natural gas line into Gorby's home." ⁹¹¹ Gaura-Shakti, one of the devotees involved in the surveillance of Sulochan and a friend to Randall Gorby, said: "On three different occasions, Gorby approached me because he wanted me to help him or actually do the work for him, of running a gas line into his house, tapping off the gas main around through his front yard, to get free gas." ⁹¹²

Bimbadhara (William Jones) claimed that Gorby had asked his advice regarding bypassing the natural gas meter to get free gas. An investigator reported, "Jones says that in around April of 1986, Gorby approached him in the mechanic barn at New Vrindaban. Gorby asked Jones if he knew how to arrange the gas meter on his (Gorby's) house so that the meter would not register and therefore, he (Gorby) would not have to pay for natural gas. Jones told Gorby that he knew how to do it by avoiding the meter. Jones told Gorby that you just tap the gas line before the meter, bypass the meter and tap back into the gas line to the

house and install a valve. . . . Gorby then asked Jones if he would be willing to help him bypass the meter. Jones told him no, that he did not want to get involved in something like that. Gorby then asked him if he knew anyone who could help him and Jones told him that he did not.”⁹¹³

Gorby suspected that perhaps Janmastami could have rigged the gas line and filled his house with gas. An FBI investigator reported, “Gorby was asked if he knew who Janmastami [was]. At that name, Gorby became very agitated and stated that Janmastami was a killer, that he had allegedly killed fifty people and that he could definitely do the kind of job that could have caused Gorby’s house to explode.”⁹¹⁴

Janmastami responded, “I do not believe for a second that Gorby believed anything like this. He may have said it, but where would he have gotten so much info on me? We never spoke before the Sulochan thing, although I had seen him helping P. B. at the brick factory. Tirtha might have told Gorby something he misconstrued, but I more likely think the FBI (who, I alone contend, was working with Gorby already to ‘take down’ New Vrindaban). ‘Why would the FBI concoct such stories about you?’ is a question I have been asking myself since the first time they came to my door, back in 1968. Never pleasant!—our meetings with those fellows!”⁹¹⁵

GORBY FOUND DEAD

Gorby recovered from the blast, was enrolled in the Federal Witness Protection Program, and secretly relocated to Elkins, West Virginia, a city of about 8,000 residents in Randolph County about 160 miles southwest from his former home in Bethany. However, four years later in July 1990 he was found dead in his pickup truck at Bear Haven Recreation Area about ten miles east from his home in Elkins, West Virginia. Police authorities labeled it a suicide; they said that Gorby had asphyxiated himself by running a hose from the tailpipe to the cab of his truck; he died from “acute carbon monoxide intoxication.”⁹¹⁶

The *Wheeling News-Register* reported, “The body of 68-year-old Randall Gorby was found dead in his pickup truck by an off-duty Randolph County police officer in a wooded area 10 miles east of Elkins. . . . State Trooper J. A. Wise of the Elkins detachment of the state police said this morning foul play is not expected in the case. . . . A hose was found running from the exhaust pipe of Gorby’s pickup truck to the truck’s inside. Wise said he believes Gorby had been dead since last Thursday [July 19, 1990].”⁹¹⁷

The City of God Examiner, a New Vrindaban newspaper, noted, “The Associated Press called here yesterday to get our comment on the suicide of Randall Gorby. It appears that his offenses have caught up with him.”⁹¹⁸ Tirtha, who was in Los Angeles awaiting his trial for the murder of Sulochan, commented, “In this [suicide], his final cowardly act, the true character of a frustrated and misguided man was revealed.”⁹¹⁹

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

Mother Purnamasi, however, suspected that foul play was involved. She said, “They [the police] said Gorby’s death was suicide, but . . . [shortly after Gorby’s death] I was in Cameron [West Virginia, a small town with a population of less than 1,000 people on Route 250 about 16 miles south of New Vrindaban] talking to Jim Kupfer.”⁹²⁰ He told me that the day before Gorby died, he had come through Cameron. Gorby was afraid for his life and told Kupfer (a distant relative) that someone was following him; that someone was after him. Is this the mentality of someone about to commit suicide?”⁹²¹

For his entire life, Randall Gorby had never considered suicide. An FBI interviewer noted, “Gorby was asked if he had tried to kill himself in the explosion that destroyed his home. Gorby emphatically stated that he did not try to kill himself; that he had never at any time entertained thoughts of ending his life.”⁹²²

Who would have wanted Gorby eliminated, and why? Just two months before Gorby's death, on May 24, 1990, a federal grand jury returned an eleven-count indictment against Bhaktipada; the trial was scheduled for March 1991. Gorby was the government's star witness, and in addition, he was the only non-devotee who knew the names of all the murder conspirators, as he (and Hayagriva) had advocated murdering Sulochan from the very beginning, in September 1985.

Anyone who was involved in the conspiracy to murder Sulochan would have wanted Gorby dead; but especially those conspirators who had been neglected or ignored by the prosecution and might get away scot-free. Kuladri wouldn't have cared about Gorby fingering him; the prosecution gave Kuladri complete immunity in return for his honest testimony on the witness stand. Dharmatma wouldn't have cared, because Dharmatma was indicted for "Scam-Kirtan"—selling copyrighted logos illegally. Tirtha and Tapahpunja were both penniless and in jail. Hayagriva had died from natural causes in 1989. Who could it have been?

If Gorby had been murdered, as Paurnamasi suspects, it seems that whoever ordered and paid for the hit had learned their lesson: don't trust devotees to do a job which requires a professional. On another note, could it be possible that the government had ordered the assassination of Gorby? Janmastami thinks so. Gorby was, after all, the only person outside of law enforcement who could have testified that the government had attempted to encourage New Vrindaban management to assassinate Sulochan. If Gorby ever decided to turn against the government, it would look very bad for the prosecutor's case.

BHAKTIPADA MEETS WITH CONSPIRATORS IN BOMBAY

During July, 1986, Bhaktipada traveled to India, spending most of his time in Bombay and Vrindaban. He had an important meeting in Bombay with Radhanath Swami, Tapahpunja Swami, and Janmastami. They had to get their story straight in case they were subpoenaed to appear in court.

Bhaktipada's servant and chauffeur candidly spoke about the secret conversation he heard from the passenger's seat of Bhaktipada's private car. One of Bhaktipada's American disciples, who served as his chauffeur and director of purchasing at New Vrindaban, Priyavrata dasa (Frankie Lyons), recalled:

I was sitting in the passenger seat of a car; Bhaktipada sat in the driver's seat. In the back seat was Janmastami, Tapahpunja and Radhanath. They were trying to decide what story they should present to the authorities if they were subpoenaed to testify before a grand jury. They wanted to make sure that they all had the same story. It would be very bad for their alibi if they spoke different things, if they weren't perfectly consistent.

At one point, Bhaktipada stopped and asked me, "Priyavrata, I understand you're from a Mafia family. How would you have gotten this job done?" I replied without hesitation, "I would have hired a professional; someone with experience; someone with credentials; someone discreet, who wouldn't blab about it to everyone he met. Not someone like Tapahpunja."

After I spoke, Bhaktipada scornfully glowered at Tapahpunja, who shrunk in the back seat like a naughty child getting scolded by an angry parent, and chastised him, saying: "You're useless, Tapahpunja! You messed everything up! It's all your fault! You're to blame for all this!"⁹²³

It seems that Bhaktipada was using Tapahpunja as a scapegoat; all the conspirators were equally guilty, especially those who preached to Tirtha that "the demon must be destroyed." The plot to eliminate Sulochan was orchestrated by devotees who were very much inexperienced in arranging a professional murder. Tapahpunja agreed, "In my reflection on the whole incident, there was no fine-tuned, orchestrated 'plot' to stop Sulochan. Yes, there were a lot of private conversations, a lot of anger, a lot of fear, bravado and loose talk, but there was no grand plan."⁹²⁴

NEW VRINDABAN LEADERS ABANDON THE SINKING SHIP

After this meeting with the conspirators in Bombay, Radhanath abandoned his preaching centers and cooking classes in Kent, Cincinnati, Columbus, Oberlin, and Athens, Ohio, as well as in Morgantown, and Parkersburg, West Virginia, and Meadville, Pennsylvania, which he had spent years developing. He began spending nearly all of his time in India. He rarely returned to the United States, except for brief visits.

Other members of the conspiracy also left New Vrindaban. Janmastami remained in India hiding out in Tikli and Kuruksetra. Janmastami explained: "After the whacking [of Sulochan] in Los Angeles I was picked up off the streets of Philly by the FBI. This was in mid-June 1986. I came back to the festival [at New Vrindaban] (July 4, 1986) and was ordered to go to India."⁹²⁵

As noted earlier, Tapahpunja at first hid out in Ireland. When his identity became known, he flew to Australia, where he opened a savings account at the Commonwealth Savings Bank in North Sydney on July 4, 1986, with a deposit of \$13,533. Later, he received funding from a New Vrindaban resident: a \$4,765 wire transfer sent by Madhava-Ghosh.⁹²⁶ This was allegedly to purchase wool scarves for Ghosh's New York City wholesale business. In 1989, Ghosh spoke to a private investigator who reported:

Meberg [Madhava-Ghosh] . . . says that he and Sheldon . . . went into business together in New York City. He said that the business was importing and selling wool scarves. . . . Meberg says that . . . after the affair that Sheldon was having with the girl in Cleveland became known, Sheldon left the States to try and get his head together. He said that in late 1986, he received a phone call from Sheldon, who was in Australia. He said that Sheldon said that he was going to try and find a new source for wool and wanted Meberg to send him some money so that if he found a good deal he could buy it right away.

Meberg said that he did not think that Sheldon was really interested in finding any textiles. He said that he thought that Sheldon was

probably broke and alone with nobody else to turn to. Meberg said that he told Sheldon that he would send him some money. Meberg said that he obtained \$4,000 dollars from a bank account he had and wired the money to a bank in Australia. He said that he has not heard from Sheldon since, and certainly has not received any woolen items. Meberg said that he would do the same thing all over again and would hope that if the roles had been reversed that Sheldon would have done the same for him. ⁹²⁷

After receiving the money from Madhava-Ghosh, Tapahpunja flew to India, where he met with Bhaktipada, Radhanath and Janmastami. He also met with Rukmini, who had flown to Bombay to marry him. She explained, “I flew to Bombay on September 20th of 1986. Tapahpunja did not meet me at the airport, but I met him about twenty-four hours later. . . . I was going to marry him. . . . I remained in India about eight days.” ⁹²⁸

There was a lot of talk about Tapahpunja and Rukmini’s scandalous affair. One Brijabasi recalled, “The first time I knew of her [Rukmini] was when we returned from a trip to India and I saw her in the temple, and some of the other women in the temple pointed her out to me, and said, “That is the one!” which meant that there was lots of talk about her affair with Tapahpunja.” ⁹²⁹

Despite her affection for Tapahpunja, Rukmini decided not to marry him. She explained, “I didn’t marry him, because after being there [in India], I just decided I didn’t think I could live in India. It was very, very rough on me. He was disappointed. He wished I would stay on. We discussed and decided we would wait.” ⁹³⁰

The romance between Rukmini and Tapahpunja, however, was not destined to last. In the late 1980s or early 1990s she came to live at New Vrindaban. From around 1990 to 1992 she played percussion in the temple orchestra under my direction. She was a good musician. It was obvious (to me) that she needed a husband. She left New Vrindaban, I think around 1992. I heard she returned to the Cleveland area, probably to her

parents, and met a non-devotee man from Twinsburg in Summit County, Ohio. The two married and had children.

After leaving India, Tapahpunja settled in Malaysia, where he once again donned his sannyasa garb and resumed using his name “Tapahpunja Swami.” He served at Bhaktipada’s temple in Penang. During this time, he had an illicit relationship with a Chinese woman. Sacimata dasi (Shirley Prins), a New Vrindaban “fringe” devotee who visited Malaysia in 1987 and 1988, recalled: ⁹³¹

We stayed [in Malaysia] for about two months, and then did a little more traveling to other places, and returned there in January of 1988. . . . Tapahpunja was planning the entire temple there. He was performing all of the programs. He was taking care of the deities, he was cooking daily for people, and poor people that would come in off the streets, plus doing programs in public. . . . He was passing out leaflets every day on the street to encourage more people to come. Every function possible that takes place at a temple, he was performing. He was using the name “Tapahpunja Swami.”

At the time we were having really large Sunday programs, and there was a particular Chinese woman who was a teacher. And she would take, on occasion, her entire student body to the temple for the Sunday feast. She was very favorable to the movement and was taking Krishna consciousness very rapidly. And we had the situation, me and my husband, to see there was more to the relationship between Tapahpunja and her than just mainly spiritual. . . .

We observed that they were making body contact one evening in the temple and proceeded to try the next day to speak to Tapahpunja about it, but he was totally upset and paranoid, and didn’t really want to open up to me and my husband. I also observed him [and her] arriving home late a couple of nights, after midnight, together. They were seen to have private *Bhagavad-gita* classes in a closed room from time to time, so it was quite obvious there was something going on. And as we pursued the matter to try to help Tapahpunja and open up as a friend,

he, in anxiety, split the temple one night completely, and we had no idea of his whereabouts. We were really shaken up. . . .

I filed a missing person report because we were worried. It [Malaysia] is a Muslim country, and he had been passing out leaflets briefly that week. . . . We even had to come to the beach one day, three days after we filed the report, and identify a dead body that was washed up on the shore because the man was bald and they [the police] thought maybe it was Tapahpunja. . . .

He did come back a few days later, but never really; he didn't even want to live at the temple. He was so ashamed because none of the devotees that lived at the temple knew any of that [affair] happened, and we were there and knew. So we had so much anxiety.⁹³²

Tapahpunja, after being apprehended by U. S. Marshals, returned to the U. S. and served time in prison. Upon his release, he came back to New Vrindaban and married a Prabhupada disciple who had lived at New Vrindaban in the early 1970s—Kamalavati dasi (Elicia Heller). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, I had many friendly talks with Tapahpunja and Kamalavati during my visits to the community.

Besides Radhanath, Janmastami and Tapahpunja, other important New Vrindaban managers also left the community, some never to return: Dharmatma and Parambrahma moved to Alachua, Florida, Dulal-Chandra moved to North Carolina, and Sundarakar moved to Townshend, Vermont. Kuladri moved to Tucson, Arizona; then to Marietta, Georgia.⁹³³ Around 1990, he lived in Slidell, Louisiana,⁹³⁴ and later he moved back to his hometown: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Hayagriva also left the community around this time, but he was always coming and going from the United States to India, Mexico, Thailand, and back. Umapati Swami left New Vrindaban a few years later, in 1988. Even Bhaktipada stayed at New Vrindaban less frequently and seemed to me to spend more time in India than usual. Without exception, those New Vrindaban spiritual leaders, managers and hit men who might have been involved in the conspiracy to murder Sulochan left the community.

CALIFORNIA ISKCON CONSPIRATORS JUMP SHIP

Ramesvara Maharaja left ISKCON in 1986, soon after Sulochan's murder. He resigned after he was discovered having an amorous relationship with an underage gurukula girl. One of his former disciples recalled, "In 1986 was when Ramesvara, the zonal guru for Los Angeles, resigned his position and left ISKCON over his inappropriate contact with a minor-aged gurukula girl. He was also under a cloud of suspicion for drug trafficking, allegations that he helped facilitate Sulochan's murder, and a 1977 murder in Newport Beach." ⁹³⁵

Krishna-Katha, Ramesvara's security guard and Tirtha's accomplice in the murder, also left ISKCON. The Los Angeles Police Department allegedly suggested that he move away for his own safety, reportedly to Brazil where his girlfriend lived. Nori J. Muster explained, "[After] K. K. agreed to cooperate [with law enforcement]. . . the police recommended he join his girlfriend in Brazil for his own protection until the trial. K. K. was given immunity and testified in two trials, one against the hit man Tirtha, and one against the guru, Kirtanananda." ⁹³⁶

Later, Krishna-Katha moved to Hawaii where he found employment as a private security officer. Eventually he returned to California, to the town of Santa Paula (about 65 miles northwest from Los Angeles) and completed a police academy course. After graduation, he applied for a position as a police officer at the Santa Paula Police Department. Although his prospective employer conducted a background check on the new candidate, nothing suspicious was discovered. He was hired in 1993 and served until 1998. ⁹³⁷ He retired from the police department after five years because of a disability; a back injury. ⁹³⁸

In 2001, a Santa Paula newspaper discovered that Officer Breier had been an accomplice in the murder of Steven Bryant fifteen years earlier. This caused great embarrassment to the Santa Paula police department. ⁹³⁹ Since then, Breier has established a successful career as a private security specialist and technology consultant. He is the owner/operator of a security company in Palm Springs, California. In his leisure time, Jeffrey Breier enjoys family events and outdoor activities such as jet skiing, off road racing and hiking. ⁹⁴⁰

NEW VRINDABAN MANAGER HIRES EXPENSIVE ATTORNEY

Several New Vrindaban managers were subpoenaed to appear in court. Some hired expensive lawyers to represent themselves. One worked out a deal with the government in return for important testimony. Sergeant Thomas Westfall noted, “Gorrick, Villa, Fawley and Reid had pleaded guilty to Federal charges.”⁹⁴¹

Kuladri contacted the law offices of Rothman Gordon Foreman and Groudine in the prestigious Grant Building in downtown Pittsburgh. The firm agreed to represent him for \$125 per hour and to begin working after he paid a \$10,000 retainer. The firm explained to him, “Unfortunately, you have been implicated in some very serious matters. As I told you [during our earlier conversation], I think we will be able to work everything out to your benefit in the long run. However, litigation is time consuming and expensive. . . . I have quoted you a retainer of \$10,000 which is a minimum fee to be applied against my hourly rate of \$125.00 per hour. . . . You will be also responsible for out of the pocket expenses such as long distance phone calls and mileage.”⁹⁴²

Kuladri’s attorney was well worth the money; Rothman Gordon Foreman and Groudine worked out a sweet deal with the prosecutors which practically gave their client full immunity in return for his honest testimony. “Number Two,” who had worked with great determination to insure that the “demon” would be destroyed, avoided prison entirely. Kuladri explained, “It [my plea bargain] provides that I plead guilty to one count of mail fraud and that the Government will recommend probation for me, and that anything I said will not be used against me.”⁹⁴³ At another time, Kuladri said that he “has been given immunity by the Federal Government.”⁹⁴⁴ Kuladri would never be prosecuted for his involvement in the Sulochan murder conspiracy.

TIRTHA SADDLED WITH PUBLIC DEFENDER

In the scramble for survival, Tirtha was neglected. No one hired an expensive lawyer for Tirtha; he had to depend on a public defender for his defense. Tirtha had performed the supreme sacrifice and now he

was practically forgotten and abandoned. He thought he would get the death penalty in California. In a letter to the author, Tirtha explained: “I thought we’d all stick together. But it’s true: the rats started to escape from the sinking ship. People were not as devoted and dedicated as I assumed. It showed to be a house of cards. . . . My point is: all these guys were up to their eyeballs in the plots and sub-plots. They were the ones promoting and encouraging all of it. They were giving the guidance and counseling for me. We were aspiring to be their servants. We were like putty in their hands. The people who disagreed were banished, ridiculed, spat upon, beat up or killed.”⁹⁴⁵

Tapahpunja was also left to fend for himself (at least until 1990 when he was finally arrested and New Vrindaban hired one of the best up-and-coming criminal law experts at the time: Greta Van Susteren).⁹⁴⁶ Tapahpunja’s mother, Irene (Sheldon) White, complained to New Vrindaban’s legal advisor Tulsi (Dick Dezio), “I love my son and want him back in the States and therefore I implore you to keep him as well as me informed of his legal position at this time. His many letters to ‘so-called’ friends there have remained unanswered!! Hearing from you in letter form or through phone would be appreciated. I will no longer stand for the complete ignorance all of you have shown toward my son and if necessary may take matters into my own hands. You all have ignored him long enough!”⁹⁴⁷

New Vrindaban, it seemed, only cared about Bhaktipada’s legal defense. All resources were directed to Bhaktipada’s legal fund. This was, however, to be expected. Only the pure devotee, self-realized master, “Jagad-Guru,” Swami Bhaktipada, was indispensable; all others were expendable.

GBC LEADERS CONCERNED ABOUT BAD PUBLICITY FOR ISKCON

ISKCON leaders were understandably concerned about the bad publicity created by Sulochan’s murder and the investigation of New Vrindaban. An emergency meeting of the North American GBC in San Diego was

scheduled for August 18-19, 1986, and Bhaktipada promised to attend. *New Vrindaban News* reported, "Expectations are that the current controversy in ISKCON [the murder of Sulochan, New Vrindaban publishing books by Prabhupada (*Dialectical Spiritualism*), Bhaktipada (still) using the title "Founder/Acharya," New Vrindaban opening satellite centers in Canada, India and Malaysia, Bhaktipada bringing a dog into ISKCON temples, etc.] may be cleared up (or stirred up)." ⁹⁴⁸

Bhaktipada did not attend the meetings in San Diego, but he kept in touch by telephone. A spokesman for the GBC called him from San Diego and asked him if he would resign from the GBC if he was indicted by the Grand Jury in order to help "clear ISKCON's name." Bhaktipada agreed to resign if he was indicted. ⁹⁴⁹ Nori J. Muster (formerly Nandini), who served under Mukunda in the ISKCON Public Relations Office in Los Angeles, confirmed:

In August [1986], the Governing Body Commission met in San Diego to discuss deviant gurus. They suspended Bhavananda and gave him a list of guidelines. He was to attend the morning program, shave his head regularly, read Prabhupada's books, and not watch TV. On the list of recommendations, which they expected Bhavananda to sign and follow, was the requirement "do not travel with Bala," his male companion.

The next resolution concerned Kirtanananda. He also received a set of guidelines, and the GBC telephoned him in New Vrindaban to extract his promise to resign if named in indictments for either of the murder cases [of Sulochan or Chakradhari]. Mukunda gave me a press release about Kirtanananda's promise, which I typed and mailed out. ⁹⁵⁰

However, when Bhaktipada was indicted, he refused to resign. Ravindra-Svarupa remembered the emergency GBC meeting in San Diego:

The GBC is getting pretty worried. In San Diego in August 1986 there's a North American GBC meeting. And they deal with problems of Bhavananda, Ramesvara, and Kirtanananda. . . .

The GBC body accepts Kirtanananda Swami's assurance that he will take voluntary suspension of his GBC duties upon being indicted by a Grand Jury. In America, the system is, before you get charged with a crime, there's a thing called a Grand Jury, twenty people or so, who hear the prosecutor's case and give the okay [to press charges]. This is the English system that America follows. . . . There was a Grand Jury investigating Kirtanananda. In fact, I got subpoenaed to talk about it. . . .

When he [Kirtanananda] was indicted—accused of these crimes—he didn't resign, even though he said he was going to. So they [the GBC] took several statements to show that they're very worried about Kirtanananda, again that the "Founder-Acharya" title be only used for Srila Prabhupada. Dogs will not be allowed inside any ISKCON temple. They asked him to stop any further publication of the writings of Srila Prabhupada without the agreement of the North American BBT trustees. He was publishing BBT literature on his own. Really what he had done, if you see these, the other thing is that basically he had now his own movement going. He was going anywhere he wanted, opening his own Bhaktipada temples, he was not at this point answerable or answering to the GBC at all. He was under investigation by the government, and they [the GBC] were really worried about him.⁹⁵¹

NEW VRINDABAN LAYS OFF 187 EMPLOYEES

Sulochan's death effectively set off an avalanche of intensive government investigations by the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service, the Los Angeles Police, the West Virginia State Police and the Marshall County Sheriff's Department, which resulted in formidable and continuous legal pressure against Bhaktipada and the New Vrindaban community which continued for a decade. Marshall County Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher was quoted in the newspapers saying: "This is the beginning of the end of New Vrindaban as we now know it."

On September 11, 1986, the New Vrindaban community announced the layoff of the entire 187-member work force of payroll employees in “an attempt to include the entire [non-devotee] community in the unfair, extravagant investigations of the community.” Toshana-Krishna, a community spokesman, claimed the layoffs were not based on economic necessity, but on principle: “We are doing very well financially,” he said. “This has been one of our best years yet. . . . [But] we are not separate entities out here. . . . The employees are part of the community and should feel the brunt of the problems we have also.”⁹⁵²

New Vrindaban News, on the other hand, indicated that the layoffs were an economic necessity; to garner financial resources for legal defense. *New Vrindaban News* reported, “As everyone knows by now, New Vrindaban has laid off its entire hired work force. This action is an effort to garner necessary financial resources for legal defense in these investigations. New Vrindaban would like to thank its employees for their understanding and support. It is hoped that this action will end in two weeks, and that workers will return at this time.”⁹⁵³

The New Vrindaban employees never returned, save for a select few, such as Betty Hickey, the Director of Gardens at Prabhupada’s Palace. Due to her dedication and expertise, the Palace Rose Garden became accredited—on June 28, 1988—by All-America Rose Selections, a nonprofit association of rose growers dedicated to the introduction and promotion of exceptional roses.⁹⁵⁴ Bhaktipada was especially fond of his rose gardens, and explained, “Roses are just like babies; they need constant attention.”⁹⁵⁵

GRAND JURY MEETS

On September 15, 1986, a federal grand jury met to investigate a possible connection between New Vrindaban members and the death of Sulochan. William Kolibash, the U. S. attorney for the North District of West Virginia, said, “It’s as much in the Krishnas’ best interest as anybody’s. If there’s nothing going on, let’s find out.”⁹⁵⁶

Bhaktipada welcomed the investigation: “They are welcome to investigate as much as possible. It can’t hurt us. If we’ve done nothing wrong, there is nothing to hide. An investigation will only show that we are what we say we are—religious people who have no other business but to serve God.”⁹⁵⁷

During November 1986 the North American temple presidents met in Chicago and requested the GBC to expel Bhaktipada from ISKCON. Ravindra-Svarupa remembered, “The next thing that happened that year [1986] was we had a meeting of the North American Temple Presidents in Chicago in November. At that time, I became president of this organization. . . . In the Chicago meeting we added the North American Prabhupada Disciples to our group. . . . We asked the GBC to remove Kirtanananda.”⁹⁵⁸

SULOCHAN’S THREE-YEAR-OLD SON DROWNS

Sulochan and Jamuna’s three-year-old son Nimai accidentally drowned in a New Vrindaban lake while playing with other youths on November 23, 1986.⁹⁵⁹

Lokavarnattama dasa (Lawrence Burstein), a successful New Vrindaban business man who specialized in illegal enterprises, explained, “I was there when they pulled that small boy from the lake. He had wandered from his mother with another playmate, and fallen from a platform into the water. I carried him to the ambulance and watched as a team of physicians tried feverishly for hours to revive his lifeless body. The next day I brought his saddened mother to the funeral parlor to make arrangements for her son’s burial. This was indeed a mystery for all of us in New Vrindaban; how the Lord could take such an innocent helpless child from our midst. It was a lesson. How frail and helpless children are, and how great is our responsibility as parents to protect them.”⁹⁶⁰

When asked to speak about the boy’s drowning, Bhaktipada quipped: “From a philosophical point of view, we could say that there was some bad karma in the family.”⁹⁶¹

It's Persecution, Pure and Simple

TIRTHA WENT ON TRIAL for the July 10, 1983 murder of Chakradhari (Charles Saint-Denis) at the Circuit Court of Preston County, West Virginia. The trial began on December 2, 1986. On the day preceding the first day of the murder trial, on December 1st, the Marshall County Prosecutor, Thomas White, orchestrated a publicity stunt: he invited news media to New Vrindaban while the West Virginia Medical Examiner and police officials, armed with a search warrant, exhumed a human body from an unmarked grave about four feet deep on New Vrindaban property. *The Intelligencer* reported, "On December 1st, the skeleton of what was believed to be that of a 22-year-old white male was found in a wooded area." ⁹⁶²

Sergeant Thomas Westfall said the unidentified body, referred to by authorities as "Joe," had been dead for seven to ten years and died from a "trauma" of unknown cause. ⁹⁶³ New Vrindaban spokesmen denied that the body belonged to Saint-Denis. The *News-Register* reported, "Krishna leaders have been adamant that the body could not be Saint-Denis. They quoted a search warrant as saying the body was that of a white male known dead during the period 1977-1978." ⁹⁶⁴

The identity of the body was never determined, ⁹⁶⁵ although old-time Brijabasis from the mid-1970s remembered the young bhakta brahmachari who died after falling from a cable car fastened to a cable crossing the Kesi-Ghat valley from the Old Vrindaban Farm to McCreary's Ridge, a "short-cut" to the Palace-then-under-construction. Janmastami recalled:

All I know is what Jayamurari told me. There was, once-upon-a-time, a "Cable," or "Trolley," that ran across the valley from the Palace to Vrindaban Farm. It was an ill-conceived venture that included pulling an iron cable across the valley, and then putting a cable car on the wire, thus sending brahmacaris from one place to the other in a matter of seconds. (The hike, on foot, down the steep slope from the Old Vrindaban Farm and the subsequent climb up the opposite slope to McCreary's Ridge could take 20-30 minutes.)

One unforeseen problem was pulling your weight (and the weight of the basket) back up the second half of the journey, and this one new bhakta was alone and unable to pull himself up and fell a hundred feet to his death trying to escape from the cable car. The old broken fallen cable laid in the valley until Kasyapa finally gathered it up when they dozed the road over to the Big Greenhouse. No one knew anything about the bhakta, or any next of kin, so he was unceremoniously buried (known to Vrindapati and all the rest of the Vrindaban Farm). Vrindapati later ratted it out to the cops, hoping to cause NVC trouble (which it clearly did). I think that it happened around 1974-1975. ⁹⁶⁶

On December 5, 1987, the jury of the Circuit Court of Preston County pronounced Tirtha guilty of murder, although Chakṛadhari's body had not yet been found. ⁹⁶⁷ Marshall County Prosecutor Thomas White admitted, "We were worried about the decision right up until the last minute. We could only find one other case in West Virginia where the prosecution got a conviction without a body. We didn't have an eyewitness, a body, body parts or even blood. But, we did have several people who heard Drescher confess to killing Saint-Denis." ⁹⁶⁸

Jury foreman Timothy Shrout, prosecutor Thomas White, and defense lawyer Robert McWilliam agreed that the key testimony came from four people who said Drescher bragged to them of how he had killed Saint-Denis. The witnesses included two former senior aides at the commune, Parambrahma (Paul Ferry), Dulal-Chandra

(Howard Fawley), a police informer, and Dr. Nick Tsacrios, the unlicensed physician at the New Vrindaban clinic and the new husband of Chakradhari's former wife and lover Ambudhara (Deborah Gere), who served as a nurse at the clinic. ⁹⁶⁹

The jury deliberated three hours and 45 minutes before announcing its verdict. Jury foreman Timothy Shroul said the verdict against Drescher was a "tough decision" but added, "No one had to be swayed." He said the jury deliberated for almost four hours because "we wanted to make sure we had our facts straight and understood what had been said." ⁹⁷⁰ Thomas White explained, "Drescher's conviction was only the second time in West Virginia history that a man was found guilty of murder when the state could not produce the victim's remains." ⁹⁷¹

Bhaktipada claimed that Tirtha's trial was unfair because of religious discrimination, "It's very strange. How a jury can be beyond a shadow of a doubt when there is a very reasonable explanation [that Saint-Denis had left on his own accord]. The whole trial smacks of conspiracy and prejudice. I wouldn't be surprised to see [Saint-Denis] walk in today. I don't think Drescher would have gotten that kind of trial if he would have been Presbyterian or Methodist." ⁹⁷²

On December 15, 1986, Tirtha was sentenced to the maximum sentence: life in prison without parole, as West Virginia has no death penalty.

DARUKA REVEALS LOCATION OF CHAKRADHARI'S BODY

About a month after Tirtha's conviction, his murder accomplice, Daruka, pleaded guilty at his trial in Fairmont, West Virginia, on Monday, January 5, 1987 to voluntary manslaughter as an accomplice in the killing of Cakradhari. Daruka was allowed to plead to a lesser charge because he was not the principal killer. He agreed to lead the police to the body as part of his plea bargain. On January 6th, Daruka showed investigators the place where he and Tirtha had buried Cakradhari's body under a creek nearly four years earlier. ⁹⁷³

The *Moundsville Daily Echo* reported, “[Prosecutor Thomas] White said the body was found in a muddy creek bed in a remote area of the 4,000-acre Krishna compound. . . . ‘In the past summer, we had done extensive excavations in the area and we were about ten feet away from the body at one point where we were digging,’ White said. The body was found at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, about 18 inches under the creek bed, White said. The body had been doubled over and dumped in a small hole.”⁹⁷⁴

Daruka’s four-page plea agreement was signed by himself, his attorney Jolyon McCamic, the prosecutor Thomas White, and David Jividen for the United States Attorney’s Office.⁹⁷⁵ Daruka remembered, “I pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter. . . . Originally, it was first degree murder. . . . [I was given a deal] to give a truthful testimony in regard to other claims and because there was less evidence against me. . . . [I also agreed to] give information in regard to their investigations and testimony in return for immunity from prosecution on this and that information.”⁹⁷⁶

Daruka explained, “I told my attorney to approach the prosecutor, that I would give them the body [of Chakradhari] and I had some information on an arson. . . . [They agreed to the deal in] January [1987].”⁹⁷⁷ Daruka was sentenced to five years in prison.⁹⁷⁸

TIRTHA ALLEGEDLY THREATENS SUICIDE

Early in January, 1987, while being held at the Marshall County Jail prior to his transfer to the West Virginia State Penitentiary, Tirtha allegedly threatened to commit suicide. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Reports indicated that Drescher threatened to commit suicide in the Marshall County Jail. He subsequently was placed on a 24-hour ‘suicide watch.’ . . . Authorities said the inmate told people he had no intentions of serving even one day of his prison sentence.”⁹⁷⁹ Tirtha’s alleged suicide threat, however, made his time in jail even more difficult; to protect his life he was allowed to “wear nothing but his jockey shorts,” according to Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher.⁹⁸⁰

Sheriff Bordenkircher claimed that Tirtha's lack of clothing was necessary because of his suicide threat. "[It is] for his own protection. It is our job to keep him as safe as best we can. Therefore, Drescher has been stripped to his jockey shorts and placed in a cell with a bunk with no mattress. A mattress can be torn apart and strips of cloth used to hang oneself." ⁹⁸¹

Umapati dasa, Tirtha's counselor, told the media that Tirtha was being kept in a cold cell with an open window in his underwear. Umapati claimed, "Tirtha has been stripped down to his underwear and left in a cell with a bed of only springs, no mattress, and a window that is left open. He's looking very sickly . . . [and] might catch pneumonia without his clothes." ⁹⁸²

Regarding the allegations of Drescher freezing or catching pneumonia, Bordenkircher replied, "It was impossible for Drescher's cell window to be open because the cell has no window. When I left work Thursday, the temperature in Drescher's cell was 80 degrees. Drescher has been seen by the jail physician and is in good physical shape. He's in good shape—he just doesn't like it [in jail]." ⁹⁸³

TIRTHA ALLEGEDLY OFFERED IMMUNITY FOR IMPLICATING THE SWAMI

Umapati claimed that Sheriff Bordenkircher and Chief Deputy Hummel offered Tirtha "many deals if he would simply testify against Swami Bhaktipada. They told him, 'You may as well testify against him, because we're going to get the Swami one way or another. You may as well give him to us.'" ⁹⁸⁴ Umapati claimed the sheriff and the deputy offered Tirtha "complete immunity from prosecution, any kind of deal he wanted, if he would simply testify against Swami Bhaktipada. . . . They wanted to implicate him [Bhaktipada] in the murder of Charles Saint-Denis." ⁹⁸⁵ Bordenkircher responded by saying that Umapati was "a blatant liar." ⁹⁸⁶

In a letter to the *Moundsville Daily Echo* about two weeks later, Tirtha claimed he was subjected to torture at the Marshall County Jail. Tirtha explained, "During my nearly eight months of confinement at the Marshall

County Jail, I was subjected to many different types of harassment, punishment, and torture at the hands of the jail administration, in hopes of obtaining my cooperation and of getting a 'confession' from me. The sheriff, Don Bordenkircher and his chief deputy, J. C. Hummel offered me many lucrative deals ranging from seven years in prison to total immunity, if only I would help them in the bid to 'get the Swami.' Their obsession to destroy Swami Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban and my refusal to bear false witness would become the testing grounds for my faith in Krishna and their ingenuity to harass and try to keep me off balance.”⁹⁸⁷

A few months later, Tirtha filed a \$50,000 lawsuit alleging he was mistreated at the Marshall County Jail from May 1986 until January 1987. *The Intelligencer* reported, “Bordenkircher has called Drescher an ‘absolute liar.’ He said . . . the suit was ‘horse apples.’”⁹⁸⁸ On January 14, 1987, Tirtha was transferred to the nearby West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville, conveniently located about twelve miles from the RVC temple/lodge complex.⁹⁸⁹

TIRTHA BECOMES A NEW VRINDABAN FOLK HERO

At first, the community distanced itself from Tirtha, calling him a “fringe” devotee, but later reconsidered after he proved his loyalty to Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban. Again he honored his name, “Servant of the Holy Place of Pilgrimage,” just as he had seven years earlier when he was incarcerated in an Ohio prison for the manufacture of methqualone. Tirtha showed his worth by refusing to “falsely” implicate his spiritual master in the murder of Chakradhari during the December 1986 trial, despite police harassment and cruel and inhumane treatment, such as being stripped to his shorts and allegedly left for days at a time in a cold cell with an open window in winter. Tirtha’s counselor, Umapati dasa, visited him frequently in prison, and Tirtha began preaching to the other inmates. In time, Tirtha induced a fair number of inmates to chant Hare Krishna, attend his prison functions, and even take initiation from Bhaktipada.

Tirtha then became a “folk hero” to the New Vrindaban devotees. He showed himself to be an excellent writer, and wrote two autobiographical accounts of his experiences in prison which were published by friends at New Vrindaban: *Meditations on the American Gulag* and *Desperation of the Angeles*, inspired by his experiences in the Marshall County Jail, the West Virginia State Penitentiary, and the Los Angeles County Jail. Tirtha became a “folk hero” not only in New Vrindaban, but also in India, primarily due to the preaching of his friend, Radhanath Swami. This was revealed in a personal letter dated October 1, 1989, from Radhanath in Pune, India, to the incarcerated murderer/author in prison, in which Radhanath glorified Tirtha’s book *Meditations on the American Gulag*, “Your beautiful book is THE MOST POPULAR BOOK amongst your godbrothers and godsisters in India. It is even more sought after than any other book.”⁹⁹⁰

In the mid-1990s, Tirtha in prison resurrected the defunct *Brijabasi Spirit* and became its editor, although community management later issued a statement saying his publication had nothing to do with New Vrindaban.

THE FBI RAID

Fifty Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service, state and local police agents raided New Vrindaban’s administrative offices, sankirtan house, and printing press building at 7 a.m. on January 5, 1987 and filled three semi trailer trucks with computers, financial records, filing cabinets, cash, and bumper stickers and baseball caps bearing the names and logos of professional and college sports teams used by the traveling “pickers” to collect donations. Between 1981 and 1985, sankirtan “pickers” had collected 12½ million dollars. *Land of Krishna*, a New Vrindaban publication for the North American Indian community, reported with characteristic subjectivity, exaggeration and fact-distortion:

Monday. Dawn is breaking over the peaceful hills. A strange convoy emerges from the morning fog—two tractor trailers, six police vans, five unmarked cars, and a dozen police cars. They stop in front of a three-story wooden building on a hill. No one is there yet. It's too early. Three helicopters circle overhead. Suddenly the doors of the cars and vans open and fifty armed uniformed policemen and troopers run out. Some of them set up a road block, while others run up the stairs and break open the doors of the building. IT'S A RAID!

Communist China? Busting the Mafia? A grade-B movie? No. Guess again. It's the FBI searching the Hare Krishna community for trademark violations. From the wooden building, now renamed "Command Post," the pre-dawn strike spreads out to nearby targets: the community press [where hundreds of thousands of bumper stickers and hats were illegally printed with copyrighted logos], a family residence [Dharmatma's sankirtan house, the headquarters of New Vrindaban's multi-million-dollar-a-year panhandling operation], three uninhabited trailers, and a warehouse [where tens of thousands of stickers and hats were stored]. The officers seize important items pertaining to the alleged crime: a weight-reducing exercise machine, a desktop calculator, personal computers without data storage, printers without memory.

New Vrindaban accountants rush to the scene. "Open up the safe," the Feds order, "or we'll blow it open." The accountants open up the safe and the Feds take everything inside—cash, checks, checkbooks. Then they take everything on the shelves, and finally they take all the computers. The accountants run after them. "Wait a minute!" they shout. You're taking all our records. How will we pay our creditors? How will we pay our workers?" "It's not my problem," says the Feds. Then the Feds load up the vans with seized hats and bumper stickers. At 5:30 in the afternoon, they drive away.⁹⁹¹

An Associated Press sports writer, Kelly P. Kissel, reported on the raid with a little more professional objectivity than the New Vrindaban propaganda publication, *Land of Krishna*:

Sports paraphernalia seized at a Hare Krishna community allegedly is part of a black market industry that drains millions of dollars from trademark owners, prosecutors and syndicators say. Sports caps, bumper stickers and other items bearing the logos of professional sports teams and colleges were taken during a day-long raid Monday at the New Vrindaban community in West Virginia's northern panhandle. . . .

Major League Baseball lost millions of dollars to counterfeiters before it "finally awakened to the problem" six months ago, said MLB spokesman Rick Levin. [U. S. Attorney William] Kolibash said the alleged link to New Vrindaban was discovered three weeks ago when Krishna members selling items outside a New England Patriots game were stopped. Representatives of United Features Syndicate, Inc., which controls the rights to Peanuts and Garfield comic characters, seized stickers bearing the syndicate's logos, and those selling the items were traced back to West Virginia, Kolibash said.

"I hesitate to give a figure (on United Feature losses), but licensing nationwide is a multi-million dollar program," said Rachel Angeline, the contracts and approval administrator for the syndicate. . . . Temple president Devamrita Swami [characteristically tried to downplay the significance of New Vrindaban's multi-million-dollar-a-year sankirtan operation when he] said a member of the community "had some kind of business selling sports hats."

Kolibash said the operation was run by Dharmatma dasa, who Krishna officials said was away from the community Tuesday. However, Phil Gere [Prsadhra], a devotee who worked in the sports item business, said: "We buy the hats and put the stickers on here. Then we have about forty or fifty people that go to the different games and sell them. It's a fairly substantial enterprise." . . .

John Flood, the director of legal affairs for NFL Properties Inc., said, "We have a substantial problem with trademark infringement. Counterfeiters come out of the woodwork and sell your products without paying licensing fees," Flood said, adding that he spends \$1 million a year to fight black market goods.⁹⁹²

During the raid, a number of New Vrindaban residents who worked in the accounting office, including Madhava-Ghosh (Mark Meberg) and Ilavati (Evelyn Sheffey), and the security guard Madhu-Mangala (James Phillips), and others, assisted by unlocking doors, desk drawers and cabinets so that the police would not have to break them to gain access. One unnamed devotee attempted to warn (or perhaps frighten) the police officers, in so many words, that their lives would likely end in a “bloody display” of horror by Lord Nrsimhadeva because of offenses to the Holy Dhama. Special Agents Thomas F. Burgoyne, Jeffrey M. Banwell and Supervisory Special Agent James E. Defazio noted in an FBI transcript dated January 9, 1987:

At approximately 3:30 p.m. on January 5, 1987 . . . a short white male dressed in a robe type attire with a hood was observed in the parking lot area [near the accounting office] chanting and mumbling words while at the same time holding a picture in a frame which appeared to be approximately ten by 14 inches in dimension. This individual was holding the picture above his waist, and approached Burgoyne noting that Burgoyne was wearing a jacket with the initials “FBI.” This “chanter” held the picture directly in front of Burgoyne and started to make gestures shaking the picture at Burgoyne, at this point SA Burgoyne noted the color picture depicted a creature sitting in a chair type structure with another figure laying on the creature’s lap. This creature displayed a lion’s head and claws or talons, and the scene portrayed the creature digging its talons into the intestinal area of the figure laying on its lap creating a bloody display.

The hooded “chanter” then asked Burgoyne that he probably wanted to know what this picture meant, and went on to say that this was the form that their God assumes when he becomes upset or words to that effect. This individual indicated that this was the type action that his God undertook when people tried to persecute him. SA Burgoyne replied to the “chanter” that was very nice, and that he should take the picture over to a parked vehicle in which SA Jeffrey M. Banwell, and Supervisory Special Agent (SSA) James E. Defazio were preparing

to leave the parking lot area. This “chanter” subsequently went over to Special Agents Banwell and Defazio, and again began chanting his chant and shaking his picture. He accordingly stopped the chant and reiterated the meaning behind the picture to Defazio and Banwell. ⁹⁹³

I remember the raid, which occurred during a monthly sankirtan festival when all our “pickers” were back on the farm. All of us sankirtan devotees were careful to hide our paraphernalia, such as stickers and hats, and when we left the community, we went by the back way, the dirt road which passed Richard Rose’s “goat farm” to Wheeling Creek and Elm Grove, instead of by the paved macadam road (“McCreary’s Ridge Road,” also known as “Palace Road”) which passed Bahulaban where the FBI raid was taking place.

New Vrindaban’s attorney, James Lees, exclaimed, “The government has no right to go poking around in stuff that isn’t any of their business.” ⁹⁹⁴ Bhaktipada claimed that the raid was a “Gestapo technique” by the federal government to “get rid of the cults.” Bhaktipada said:

It’s obviously a Gestapo technique. That’s a strong word but that’s really what it is. It’s Gestapo. And the reason is they are trying to get rid of the cults. They say we are a cult, and they want to get rid of us; just like they ran Dr. Moon into jail on a relatively small infraction. I’ve heard there was a federal decision against the cults.

The raid was very strange; strange in the sense that they had a warrant for a relatively minor infraction, whether it’s true or not. Even if it’s true, it’s a civil offense—at most \$10,000. But what do they do? Under the guise of that, they came here, almost in the middle of the night with fifty federal officials. That’s sounds very strange, doesn’t it? ⁹⁹⁵

Bhaktipada explained: “Obviously this was just a ploy to do something else. They just used this as an excuse to seize our records. If you ask me, I don’t think they’ll find a thing.” ⁹⁹⁶ Bhaktipada continued: “The truth is they went fishing. . . . Our lawyers say we didn’t even break a civil law. Even if we did, it’s not criminal.” ⁹⁹⁷

Bhaktipada preached, “Under similar circumstances would federal agents kick in doors and ransack a Catholic cathedral? . . . Is the crime of genocide being perpetuated against this religious group? Is your church next? . . . A growing number of Christian churches and ministries in the United States are under a similar ordeal.”⁹⁹⁸

Bhaktipada claimed New Vrindaban residents would have to seek welfare assistance because the community’s checks and cash had been confiscated. Bhaktipada said: “I’m going to have to send women and children in for emergency relief.”⁹⁹⁹ Bhaktipada complained, “Our financial department is kaput. We can’t write checks, issue paychecks or payroll. We can’t even buy food. The kitchen informed us that we only have food for about three days. For three years we have been distributing food in the Ohio Valley. We have distributed 50,000 meals, now we may have to ask for a little help ourselves.”¹⁰⁰⁰

The director of New Vrindaban’s Department of Public Relations, Gadadhar dasa (Joel Chalson), waxed philosophically, “They [the government] can take the whole community away. We can live under the trees—we can still preach. We don’t care.”¹⁰⁰¹

The West Virginia branch of the American Civil Liberties Union considered investigating the circumstances of the federal raid after New Vrindaban leaders met with ACLU state president Roger Forman. Umapati dasa claimed, “They are definitely interested [in conducting an investigation]. It’s an obvious case of people being deprived of their constitutional rights.” ACLU officials requested documentation of the raid and asked to speak to witnesses. Umapati said the ACLU officials told him the raid was “obviously a case of religious harassment.”¹⁰⁰²

A newspaper in West Virginia’s capital asked if the raid may have been an act of “special treatment” for “an unpopular religion.” The *Charleston Gazette* editorialized:

Trademark violations? Those usually are a matter of civil litigation, not police raids.

Perhaps the saffron-robed, head-shaved Krishnas have been breaching trademarks in their stickers, but we're disturbed by this thought: Under similar circumstances, would federal agents kick in doors and ransack a Catholic cathedral? Or a Methodist, Presbyterian or Baptist church? Or a Jewish synagogue?

Or was an unpopular religion given special treatment? ¹⁰⁰³

Employees at New Vrindaban were also concerned. The Palace Workers Coalition petitioned, "We feel that our job security is being dangerously threatened by what has primarily been accusation based on speculation with prejudiced overtones. The reality for us (the workers) has been two layoffs in the past three months, one lasting two weeks, the other still ongoing, which after Monday's storm-trooping by the FBI and State Police, may last indefinitely." ¹⁰⁰⁴

Bhaktipada claimed he wasn't afraid of anything. During a press conference, he explained, "I am not afraid of anything. . . . We are not worried about anything. A devotee of the Lord has no worries. Actually, he is called 'fearless.' We have no worry about anything. We are simply God's servant. If he wants to give us all facility, that's all right. If he wants to give us no facility, that is all right also." ¹⁰⁰⁵

NEW VRINDABAN CHILDREN ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To protest the FBI raid, Bhaktipada threatened to close the New Vrindaban school and dump 150 children into the Marshall County public school system. The New Vrindaban school was closed, but only forty children enrolled in the public schools. ¹⁰⁰⁶

Limestone Elementary School principal Bill Hall went out of his way to make the Krishna children feel welcomed. He said, "We didn't expect any problems. We've got excellent kids here and an excellent community." Days before the Hare Krishna children arrived, Principal Hall discussed the arrival of new students with the student body. Hall said, "Sure, we talked a little bit [with the student body], we stressed the importance of

acceptance [of the new students].”¹⁰⁰⁷ Five years later, in 1992, the author taught at Limestone Elementary School and other schools in Marshall County, as a substitute music teacher. At that time, many New Vrindaban children were still enrolled in the public school system.

Although the adults at New Vrindaban understood that their children were going to public school because of the financial crunch, the children were told that they were being sent to public school because the community was “expanding its preaching.” The *Junior Brijabasi* reported, “New Vrindaban children are going to public schools. Why? Because, under Srila Bhaktipada’s instructions, we are expanding our preaching. Not just adults preach. Kids can tell people about Krishna too!”¹⁰⁰⁸

Some of the children were frightened during their first days at public school, but they got over it. One girl, Laksmi Weisner, the daughter of Sudhanu and Lajjavati (George and Lynn Weisner), recalled, “I was a little scared at first, but when I saw everyone was friendly, I felt better. A girl asked me if the Palace of Gold was bad, because she had heard that from other people. I laughed and I told her that, of course, it wasn’t bad. It’s a beautiful palace that Bhaktipada built for his spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Other children, however, were less fortunate. Rama-Lila Waterman, the daughter of Garga-Rsi and Mudhakari (David and Maria Waterman) recalled, “As children we could not understand why people hated us, why in school we were shunned and prejudiced against. Imagine being in John Marshall High School as a ‘Krishna Critter’ kid.”¹⁰¹⁰

Unfortunately, many New Vrindaban teenagers at John Marshall High School did not receive much support from their parents nor from the community. This was, however, business-as-usual, as evidenced by the customary lack of support and funding given to the New Vrindaban gurukula, its teachers and staff.

One Marshall County non-devotee mother remembered helping some of the New Vrindaban children get home after extracurricular events at the high

school. Jayne Flanagan Wingrove recalled, “Some very nice kids came out of this [New Vrindaban] community. . . . I spent years of learning to love the ‘young men’ of New Vrindaban, yet never, ever met a parent. Every kid that we spent hours with at school events (John Marshall High School) and after school events, were well mannered and appreciative of everything they were a part of. They were highly intelligent, extremely talented, athletic individuals, but never had a parent there to support them, or even give them a ride. We made many, many trips, some very late at night, to get them home safely.”¹⁰¹¹

BHAKTIPADA’S FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOM TOUR

Bhaktipada vigorously preached his gospel of persecution of the innocent by big government and began an extensive yearlong “First Amendment National Freedom Tour” in which he visited dozens and dozens of cities, spoke to millions of radio listeners and television viewers, and appeared on nationally-syndicated television shows such as CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, Larry King Live on CNN, the Sally Jesse Raphael Show, and West 57th Street on CBS. *New Vrindaban News* reported on the first month of Bhaktipada’s tour:

On Monday, December 9 [1986], Srila Bhaktipada spoke on the Bob Larson “Talkback” radio show, the largest Christian radio talk show in the country. . . . On Tuesday, Bhaktipada traveled to Columbus, Ohio, for a TV talk show and a radio show. The next day he went to Cincinnati for a two-hour live radio talk show. After Cincinnati, Bhaktipada will go to Madison, Wisconsin. . . .

On Saturday, December 14, Srila Bhaktipada will speak at the World Parliament of Religion in Washington, D. C. He will address the meeting of about 200 people for half an hour on the subject, “Chanting—Yoga for the Modern Age.” . . .

The next day, Bhaktipada will be on the “Ed Graham Show,” a live radio call-in show . . . in the Washington D. C. area. That evening, he will be on the “Fred Fisk Show,” another live, call-in talk show carried in the D. C. area. . . .

Then on Tuesday evening, Srila Bhaktipada will appear on the "Larry King Show," one of the biggest TV talk shows carried nationwide on Cable Network News (CNN). After this, Bhaktipada will travel to Florida to visit Malini [New Vrindaban's elephant] and her caretakers.

On Wednesday, Srila Bhaktipada will speak by phone on a live, call-in radio show from Washington State, "KSLY-Radio with Richard Clear." . . . Srila Bhaktipada will be in Florida for this. Then, on December 23, Srila Bhaktipada will be in New York for the "Owen Span Radio Show," one of the biggest radio shows in the country. It is a two hour show. . . . This is one of the top ten rated radio shows in the country.

On January 5, Bhaktipada is scheduled to be on the "Pittsburgh Today Show," on KDKA-TV. . . . On January 6, a radio show from Bakersfield, California near Santa Barbara will have Bhaktipada on . . . via telephone.¹⁰¹²

New Vrindaban established a toll-free telephone number to make it easier for people who heard Bhaktipada speak on his Freedom Tour to order books. Bhaktipada offered a free *Christ and Krishna* to anyone who called the number: 1-800-108-RAMA.¹⁰¹³

The *Brijabasi Spirit* reported, "Srila Bhaktipada's Freedom Tour is distributing *Christ and Krishna* books over the phone, by referring the audience to an 800 number. So far, the results are fantastic: on CNN (Cable Network News), the only national noon-time news, Bhaktipada spoke for five minutes; afterwards, 220 people called for the free book. . . . Bhaktipada is now talking about starting his own radio show in a big city, and says that these smaller shows are a stepping stone in that direction."¹⁰¹⁴

Bhaktipada's publicity director and press agent, Gadadhar, reported on Bhaktipada's Freedom Tour in the *Brijabasi Spirit*:

Bhaktipada was always very interested to know the size of the show's audiences; sometime he would make a rough calculation of how many

people he spoke to on that day, then mention it on a show the following day: “Yesterday I spoke to 500,000 people.” “Yesterday I spoke to 750,000 people.”

He was always illustrating the point that so-called negative publicity is taken by Krishna’s devotee as an opportunity to serve the Lord in a very wonderful and grand way. At one point, I realized that Bhaktipada was on sankirtan, going from city to city doing the “Media Pick.” I mentioned it to him and he said, “Yes, this is media kirtan.” “You’re beating the big mrdanga,” I said. “Yes, it is the biggest mrdanga.”

As always, Bhaktipada is setting the standard for preaching and establishing himself as the real leader of us all. Who among us can say they have ever reached from 250,000 to three million people a day? ¹⁰¹⁵

Often, interviewers or radio audience callers challenged Bhaktipada and tried to defeat him. Gadadhar remembered, “It’s easy to get Bhaktipada on practically any show where there is some juicy controversy. . . . The host sets up a controversy, then goes into the audience to get responses, followed by phone calls. Our Krishna conscious defending champion [Bhaktipada] was in a mood just like a prize fighter. Sometimes before going on these shows, [Bhaktipada’s chauffeur] Priyavrata massages him a little on his arms and shoulders and says, ‘Go get ‘em, champ!’ On these shows, Bhaktipada is unquestionably in a fighting mood.” ¹⁰¹⁶

By all accounts, Bhaktipada’s Freedom Tour succeeded in making his name better known amongst the American public. A March 1987 issue of the *Brijabasi Spirit* reported, “As a result of Bhaktipada’s Freedom Tour, over 60 million people have seen and heard about the Palace on national TV and radio during the last few months. Consequently, the scheduled bus tours are already way up from last year. Guess it’s just all that good—ah—bad publicity.” ¹⁰¹⁷ The June issue of *Land of Krishna* reported, “Six months into his tour, and with appearances on over 90 radio stations and 60 TV programs, Srila Bhaktipada has reached over 90 million people.” ¹⁰¹⁸

Bhaktipada claimed that the efforts of federal prosecutors to destroy him only gave him more popularity and facility to preach to larger numbers of people. Bhaktipada explained, "Their motive is to harass us. They want to get rid of the community. Instead, they are giving us publicity." ¹⁰¹⁹ The New Vrindaban community also purchased a half-page advertisement in a Sunday edition of the *Wheeling News-Register*. "We're just trying to make people aware that we're not a criminal community," a spokesman said. ¹⁰²⁰

Bhaktipada expanded his tour overseas and visited Ipoh, Malaysia on March 29, 1987. Tapahpunja Swami (who, at the time, was hiding from U. S. Federal Marshals in Malaysia) explained, "Over 250 well wishers greeted His Divine Grace Srila Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada on his first visit to Ipoh. To the accompaniment of a thunderous kirtan, Bhaktipada was escorted into the Ipoh temple room where he was offered a foot bathing ceremony, guru-puja, and offering of flower petals from the assembled guests. . . . The following day, Bhaktipada's itinerary included meetings with newspaper reporters, darshans with his Malaysian disciples, a visit to one of Ipoh's famous cave temples, and an evening speaking engagement where he addressed a gathering of prominent Indian families. And then, almost before we had time to fix our eyes on His Lotus Feet, he sped off back to India." ¹⁰²¹

Some, however, regarded Bhaktipada's freedom tour as a step to move away from ISKCON and establish New Vrindaban as an independent movement. Mukunda Goswami, a spokesman for ISKCON, interpreted Bhaktipada's media tour as a "preparation for Bhaktipada's breaking away to form his own sect." ¹⁰²²

DIRECT MAIL MARKETING TO INDIANS

To compliment Bhaktipada's appearances on television and radio, New Vrindaban inaugurated an aggressive direct-mail campaign targeted toward Indians in North America. The community had an impressive

mailing list of tens of thousands of Indian families. The message New Vrindaban shared was: the United States government was persecuting Hinduism. Why else would they viciously attack New Vrindaban and accuse a peace-loving holy man (Bhaktipada) of ordering the murder of a dissident devotee? The direct-mail pieces, designed by Bhavisyat dasa (Burton Smith, later known as Balarama Swami), were slick and requested money for legal defenses.

New Vrindaban also purchased full-page ads in Indian newspapers, such as *India West*, warning American Hindus that New Vrindaban ISKCON was under attack, and they might be targeted next. One appeal explained:

New Vrindaban ISKCON Targeted For Attacks. YOU May Be Next!

America—the land of the free, the home of the brave—especially if you’re white and Christian. But if you’re Hindu and accept Krishna as Lord, you may be in big trouble. Right now, today, everyone who belongs to the Indian community in the United States is facing a dangerous crisis!

Yes, it’s true. In the last twelve months, it has become obvious that New Vrindaban is being attacked by local, state, and federal officials who have no knowledge of Indian religion and tradition. They are blatantly trying to stop the pious activities of New Vrindaban, by legal means or otherwise.

Of course, it’s not *just* New Vrindaban they’re after, but anything they think is weird or foreign (such as Hinduism). You can understand how bad this anti-Hindu prejudice is if you have seen the movie “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.”

This movie was a vicious attempt to defame all pious Indians. And now that the movie is finished, the newspapers and TV people are turning their anti-Hindu attack to New Vrindaban and the Palace of Gold. “Here is Indiana Jones’ *real* Temple of Doom,” they say, hoping to convince the American public that the pure religion of India is nothing more than drug abuse, child-molestation, murder, and whatever

other dirty things they can dream up. It's gotten so bad that we never know what crazy story they'll put in the newspapers next.

Let's show these so-called officials that there's more to New Vrindaban than just a few hundred devotee residents. Let's make it clear that there are thousands of devotees (such as you) who cannot and will not tolerate this abuse of their religious heritage. Let's stand up together and demand an end to the harassment. Then, and only then, can we worship in the peace and security that our Constitution promises us. ¹⁰²³

The *India West* advertisement also listed eighteen alleged attempts of harassment of the community by the government and media between June 1973 and January 1987. Readers of *India West* were asked to sign a petition and mail it to New Vrindaban.

PETITION

We, the members of the Indian (Hindu) community of the United States, denounce the harassment perpetrated by the federal, state and local governments against the members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Krishna consciousness is the prominent pillar of Hinduism, and these acts therefore constitute an affront to our religion.

We denounce the blatant violations of the human rights of the members of the New Vrindaban Community in West Virginia, which is our most important place of pilgrimage in the Western world. This community has become the target of federal, state and county officials who have no knowledge of the Hindu religion or its traditions. These officials have repeatedly demonstrated their intent to destroy New Vrindaban by any means at their disposal.

We denounce the shameless and vicious attempts to defame the Founder-Guru of the community, His Divine Grace Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada, whom we consider an exemplary holy man in our tradition. Nothing, it seems, is too low for these so-called law enforcers, who have vowed "to get the Swami, somehow or other."

We demand that the American government, traditionally the guardian of religious freedom and human rights all over the world, extend its protection to the Hindu minority in New Vrindaban and in the United States as a whole. New Vrindaban is our place of pilgrimage in the United States, and we demand the protection of our religious right to visit there, live there, and worship there in peace.

REMAINS OF FOUR BODIES UNEARTHED AT NEW VRINDABAN

Early in March 1987, four buried bodies were exhumed and investigated by the West Virginia State Medical Examiner. *The News-Register* reported, “The first two bodies to be exhumed are those of two individuals whose graves were [accidentally] uncovered by a bulldozer which was digging near a lake on Krishna property a few months ago [in the autumn of 1986].”¹⁰²⁴ The head of one body was missing. Marshall County Prosecutor Thomas White stated that if the head is not found “very shortly” he will have volunteers dig in the area from where the body was exhumed.¹⁰²⁵

Two of the bodies belonged to (1) Mathura dasa (Mike Reid), a sankirtan “picker” who died from carbon monoxide poisoning while sleeping in a van parked in an Ohio truck stop during a below-freezing night in January 1985, and (2) Sankara dasi (Sylvia Walker), the wife of Danakeli (Dan Walker) and mother of five children, including Chaitanya-Mangala, who died on January 25, 1985, due to complications from heart surgery and cancer. These two bodies had been buried in unmarked graves near the aviary.

In the autumn of 1986, a bulldozer operator—a non-devotee employee—accidentally unearthed one of the bodies. The authorities were called and the bodies were reinterred at the original burial site after it was determined that neither had met with foul play. The Marshall County Prosecutor, Thomas White, insisted that New Vrindaban create a single cemetery instead of burying bodies haphazardly across their

property. Community officials agreed with the proposal, which included laying the bodies in plots with identification markers.

The two remaining bodies which were exhumed and reinterred in the official New Vrindaban cemetery belonged to the four-year-old boys (3) Radheya Yudhavasara—the son of Chakradhari and Kusumapida (Charles Saint-Denis and Cathy Olrech), and (4) Rohini—the son of Daruka and Vrsni (Daniel and Brenda Reid). The boys had accidentally suffocated three years earlier on April 19, 1983 in an abandoned refrigerator behind the nursery. ¹⁰²⁶

BHAKTIPADA EXPELLED FROM ISKCON

On March 16, 1987, during their annual meeting at Mayapura, India, the ISKCON Governing Body Commission expelled Bhaktipada from the society for “moral and theological deviations.” They claimed he acted in defiance of ISKCON’s policies and also attempted to establish himself as the sole spiritual heir to Prabhupada’s movement.

Resolution of the Decision of the GBC dated Monday, March 16, 1987,
13:30 p.m.

1. Whereas Kirtanananda Swami, by his words and deeds has systematically obscured and minimized His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada’s pre-eminent position as the Founder-Acharya of ISKCON;
2. Whereas Kirtanananda Swami in word and deed rejects the Governing Body Commission as the ultimate managing authority in ISKCON, and by doing so is dismantling Srila Prabhupada’s vision of unity;
3. Whereas Kirtanananda Swami is, in defiance of the GBC policy and over the GBC’s protest, establishing in North America, India and Malaysia, temples and institutions controlled by himself alone, thus creating a movement separate from ISKCON;

4. Whereas in word and deed Kirtanananda Swami, while acting independently of ISKCON authority, systematically misrepresents ISKCON to the public, the media, and the government, and thereby brings ISKCON into jeopardy;
5. Whereas, as indicated by GBC investigations, numerous serious illegal acts have occurred within his jurisdiction;

The ISKCON Governing Body Commission thereby expels Kirtanananda Swami from ISKCON and thereby removes all his rights of responsibilities related to ISKCON. The ISKCON GBC further issues a notice of non-participation forbidding Kirtanananda Swami to participate in the functions of ISKCON.

Signed by:

Sridhar Swami, Regional Secretary

Maha-Mantra dasa, P.R.O.

During the early-morning worship service at New Vrindaban, Umapati dasa denounced the expulsion of Bhaktipada. *The Arizona Republic* reported, “Umapati interrupted the daily five a.m. service—where bouncing devotees chant Hare Krishna—to read a resolution denouncing the excommunication. ‘We declare the expulsion null and void,’ Umapati declared. ‘Everyone in agreement raise your hands.’ Amid muffled cheers, all of the nearly 100 devotees did so. Umapati smiled and said, ‘Hare Krishna.’”¹⁰²⁷

Ravindra-Svarupa spoke about Kirtanananda on the Larry King Live CNN television show: “We worked very hard to expel Kirtanananda from the Hare Krishna movement. We found him a separatist, ambitious, arrogant, duplicitous. He was running his own movement. He was like a loose cannon on deck, and meanwhile more and more crimes were coming to light. . . . He’s the fly in the ointment. He claims to be the heir of Prabhupada’s movement.”¹⁰²⁸

Despite his expulsion, Bhaktipada was inwardly pleased; he was tired of the constant criticism from ISKCON and wanted out.

(Sulochan had predicted this a few years earlier; that Kirtanananda would start his own movement.) He created his own society: the Eternal Order of the Holy Name, League of Devotees International and the Worldwide “Cities of God.”

Soon he began “De-Indianizing,” or “Christianizing” the prayers and music for the temple services, and the attire and appearance of the devotees. The prayers sung during the three daily worship services were translated into English from Sanskrit and Bengali; the tunes were rewritten and accompanied by western instruments in a European classical style; new initiates received English names such as “Purity,” “Peaceful” and “Equanimity,” instead of Sanskrit names; male and female devotees wore Franciscan-style hooded robes instead of dhotis, kurtas and saris; senior women who wished to renounce were awarded sannyasa; japa was chanted in English and silently in the mind; and a more inclusive “interfaith” approach was emphasized in preaching and community living (1986-1994).

“DIAL OM FOR MURDER”

The April 9, 1987 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine published a detailed article by John Hubner and Lindsey Gruson titled “Dial Om for Murder” which related stories of drugs, sexual abuse and bodies buried helter-skelter at New Vrindaban. The article also claimed that Bhaktipada authorized the murders of Chakradhari in 1983 and Sulochan in 1986. In the article Sulochan was portrayed as a manic martyr; a passionate reformer who threatened to expose Bhaktipada’s sins and therefore was assassinated to silence him. The authors gathered most of the information for the article from testimony by former New Vrindaban residents, Marshall County Deputy Sheriff Sergeant Thomas Westfall, as well as ISKCON director of public affairs Mukunda Goswami and GBC chairman Ravindra-Svarupa.

In an attempt to counter the negative publicity, a meeting was held in the men’s prasadam room (mess hall) at the RVC Temple during

which Kuladri spoke about the defamation of the community by *Rolling Stone* and urged residents to write letters of protest to the periodical. Kuladri also coached us on what to say in our letters. Although I did not read the article (most of did not read newspapers, magazines, or watch television because we were told it would “pollute” our minds), I dutifully wrote and mailed a letter to *Rolling Stone*. The magazine published a handful of letters about “Dial Om for Murder” in the May 1987 issue, including my letter which appeared in the section which the editors titled “Krishna Killers.”

“Dial Om for Murder” was a masterpiece of sensational fiction. The truth: Swami Bhaktipada is the martyr, a Christ-like holy man, and not Steve Bryant. Printing a story about New Vrindaban based on testimony from envious former residents is like portraying the Marine Corps from the viewpoint of deserters.—Hrishikesh Das, Moundsville, West Virginia

Bhaktipada said he was not worried about bad publicity. He claimed that even bad publicity was good publicity. Bhaktipada explained, “There’s no difference between famous and infamous. As P. T. Barnum said, ‘The only bad publicity is no publicity.’”¹⁰²⁹

SNOOPY’S REVENGE

On June 24, 1987, attorneys for 26 major league baseball teams and United Features Syndicate, which represents “Peanuts” cartoon creator Charles Schulz, filed a suit against the New Vrindaban community for illegally using their trademarks in a multi-million-dollar nationwide pan-handling operation. United Features requested \$50,000 in damages for each violation. The 26 baseball teams requested a total of \$27 million in damages. The two suits charged that the community infringed upon their copyrights by distributing caps, buttons and other souvenirs emblazoned with their logos in return for donations.¹⁰³⁰ Named as defendants were sankirtan leader Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma) and Bhaktipada.

Bhaktipada retorted, "Isn't it strange that the government is spending so much time and money to defend Snoopy? I can't imagine this happening if we were a Catholic or Presbyterian church. Our lawyers said we have committed no violations. If you don't sell, if you give out the material in the process of collecting donations, there is no violation."¹⁰³¹

Bhaktipada claimed that prosecutors had threatened to shut the community down and turn Prabhupada's Palace into a casino, despite the fact that Prabhupada's Palace *was not* one of the properties eligible for forfeiture. The Palace was built *before* New Vrindaban began making money from the copyright scam. But most Brijabasis did not know this. We just accepted Bhaktipada's wild and exaggerated claims at face value. One reporter from a Wheeling newspaper wrote, "This could financially break them." Bhaktipada replied, "I don't think they can do anything to us. You sue a beggar and you catch a louse. We're beggars."¹⁰³²

After all the negative repercussions from the copyright infringement case, sankirtan Laksmi collectors were sent overseas to the Far East, where, dressed in Buddhist robes, they could do or say pretty well any damn thing they pleased to collect money without worrying about implicating New Vrindaban in more legal problems. The picking was lucrative in Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Japan and other countries. One sankirtan devotee wrote, "The economy in Malaysia is undergoing what they call a double recession but we do fairly well in Singapore, daily between Singapore \$500 to \$1,000. The exchange rate is U. S. \$1 to Singapore \$1.95. In Malaysia we manage a daily collect of \$300 to \$700 and the rate of exchange is only U. S. \$1 = Malaysia \$2.75."¹⁰³³

TIRTHA'S WIFE LEAVES HIM

After Tirtha's arrest, his wife, Suksmarupini, found herself in dire straights. If her husband was not executed after a murder trial, he would undoubtedly spend the rest of his life in prison. She had two young children and she needed a man that she could count on. Shortly after Tirtha's arrest in

Kent, devotees took her to the Cleveland temple, where she stayed for a few days. She came to New Vrindaban early in June, 1986, accompanied by my godbrother Ananda dasa, who joined ISKCON in 1980 and was initiated by Bhaktipada a year later. During a private darshan, Bhaktipada told Ananda to “take her away.” Ananda, who asked me not to reveal his legal name, recalled:

After Tirtha’s arrest in Kent, devotees brought Suksmarupini to Cleveland, where she stayed for a few days at the temple. She and I then drove together to New Vrindaban from Cleveland, where she put her two boys in the New Vrindaban gurukula. We had a private darshan with Bhaktipada during which he asked me to “take her away,” to “get her away from the community.” He directed me to see Dulal-Chandra in accounting, who gave us several thousand dollars in cash and instructed us to drive to Scottsdale, Arizona, where a fully-furnished house was waiting for us. I had no idea who owned the house. We lived there about six months.

In Scottsdale, she did the “pick” and I served as her driver. She was an expert shoplifter. She’d steal expensive items from department stores and return them for cash. She made thousands and thousands of dollars that way. She was an experienced thief. She told me she used to do that when she lived with Tirtha. She was quite proud that she had paid off their Isuzu Trooper, and another vehicle, by shoplifting. ¹⁰³⁴

When Tirtha first heard that his wife was with a new man (and less than a week after his arrest), he was so angry that he asked Janmastami to “whack him.” Janmastami recalled, “This guy [Ananda] moved in with Tirtha’s ex, Suksma, after Tirtha was arrested, and used to drive around in Tirtha’s Isuzu. Tirtha even once talked to me on the phone from the Marshall County Jail, about this guy ‘stealing his wife,’ him losing control of her, and the proper reaction for such behavior (he asked me to whack the guy), but they (Suksma and her new man) were all the help Tirtha had on the outside for a while, so that plan never went too far in Tirtha’s fertile little brain. I wasn’t going to whack him anyway.” ¹⁰³⁵

Ananda continued his story about living with Suksmarupini, her leaving him allegedly to go to truck driving school, a visit from the FBI, and his flight to California to avoid a possible future confrontation with Bhaktipada's enforcers:

After about six months in Scottsdale, Suksma and I came back to New Vrindaban so she could see her children. She decided to take them out of the gurukula. After that, we rented a house in Warren, Ohio, and she went back to the "pick" and shoplifting. Again, I served as her driver. During our travels, we visited my father who lived in Seattle, Washington. After a while doing the "pick," she told me that she wanted to become a professional truck driver, so she went off to a truck drivers' school. She wouldn't let me go with her, she told me to stay at the house. I thought that was weird.

While she was away learning how to drive a big rig, a couple FBI agents came to our home in Warren. They wanted to know what I knew about the murder of Sulochan. I didn't know much, but I spoke to them about Tapahpunja from my time with him in Cleveland and Kent, Ohio, and I told them what Suksma told me about Tirtha. On a few occasions she had revealed to me that before the murder, she knew that Tirtha was going to kill Sulochan. She also knew that Tirtha had murdered another devotee at New Vrindaban, Chakradhari, a few years earlier.

After my meeting with the FBI, I got a little paranoid. I wondered, "If Bhaktipada ever discovers that I spoke to the FBI, perhaps someday a New Vrindaban enforcer might show up at my house and shoot me dead." Although Suksma and I had been living together more than a year, I decided to leave her. I felt that I had been "used" by Bhaktipada to spirit Suksma away from New Vrindaban to a place where law enforcement could not easily find her.

I abandoned the house in Warren and moved to Santa Rosa, California, where I stayed with my friend Kardama (Christopher Bailey)—a former New Vrindaban gurukula student—and his wife, Devahuti. I talked to my father on the phone during this time. He told

me that about two weeks after Suksma and I visited him, he received a telephone call from an unidentified woman who told him that if he ever wanted to see his son again, he had to pay \$50,000. He thought the voice sounded like Suksma's.

After hearing this, I really began to regret my involvement with Suksma. Did she really go to truck driving school, or was that simply an excuse to get away from me to extort \$50,000 from my father? I regretted my involvement with Bhaktipada and with New Vrindaban. In 1988, I enlisted in the Army, perhaps because I still feared retribution from Kirtanananda's henchmen, and I thought I'd be safe in the military. I was injured in Iraq in 2010 and retired in 2014. ¹⁰³⁶

TIRTHA BECOMES A SWAMI

In June 1987, Bhaktipada, accompanied by an entourage of seven senior New Vrindaban preachers, lectured at the West Virginia State Penitentiary. During his talk, Bhaktipada preached to the prisoners and praised Tirtha. He said, "Actually you have a great opportunity for making spiritual advancement in here. You have the realization that you are locked up in a prison, but factually everyone in this material world is imprisoned—all locked up tightly. You know you are in a miserable condition, so you can become very serious to make a solution to the problem. Just like Tom [Tirtha] here. He has become very serious and is making great spiritual advancement. I've never seen him so Krishna conscious." ¹⁰³⁷

Tirtha is "preaching up a storm," confirmed Tirtha's counselor, Umapati dasa. "He has attracted a lot of interest among prisoners who want to know about Krishna consciousness." ¹⁰³⁸ Bhaktipada asked Umapati Swami (who had taken sannyasa from Bhaktipada on May 12, 1987) to initiate Tirtha on his behalf into the renounced order. Tirtha spoke to news media about his forthcoming initiation, which he claimed, would "erase his past." *The Intelligencer* reported:

Drescher Will Erase His Past? Hare Krishna devotee Thomas Drescher says he will go through a religious ceremony next week that erases his past and should permit him to be freed from his life sentence in prison for murder. "They should set me free and allow me to preach," Drescher said Friday [July 17th] from the West Virginia Penitentiary. "With this ceremony, you become socially dead. For a Krishna, it means, 'Whatever he was, he no longer is.'"

However, Marshall County prosecutor Thomas White said the ceremony wouldn't result in Drescher's release. "It's totally foreign to any jurisprudence I know of," he said. "It's little more than a laughing matter." . . .

Drescher said the title of "Swami" will be added to his Krishna name. "One becomes fully renounced of material encumbrances. You have to cut off all previous ties with your wife and family," he said. "You must rely solely on Krishna." . . .

White said Drescher's comment that his past will be erased through the ceremony could be construed as a ploy to avoid extradition to California where he is wanted for the May 1986 murder of Krishna dissident Steven Bryant. ¹⁰³⁹

Four days after the publication of *The Intelligencer* article, Umapati Swami, serving as a ritvik priest, initiated Tirtha on Bhaktipada's behalf into the sannyasa order at the West Virginia State Penitentiary on July 22, 1987. The *Wheeling News-Register* reported, "Thomas Drescher, serving a life sentence after being found guilty of killing another Krishna devotee . . . took the order of sannyasa in a religious ceremony inside the maximum-security prison. Wood was burned and seeds were tossed into the blaze during the ceremony directed by a minister from New Vrindaban. . . . Drescher's Krishna name was changed to 'Tirtha Swami,' thus increasing his rank among devotees and forces him to end all ties with his family." ¹⁰⁴⁰

Bhaktipada claimed that Tirtha deserved to become a swami. United Press International reported, "Bhaktipada says Drescher went from a

‘fringie,’ one who strayed from Krishna tenets, to a ‘good devotee’ since being imprisoned a year ago, and deserved becoming a Swami.”¹⁰⁴¹

ISKCON leaders, on the other hand, bitterly criticized the awarding of the sannyasa ashram to a convicted murderer. ISKCON Public Affairs spokesman Mukunda Goswami said to a reporter from *Hinduism Today* that sannyasa is traditionally given to a person of “spotless reputation,” and giving sannyasa to a convicted murderer “tends to make a mockery of the institution of sannyasa.”¹⁰⁴²

During an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Ravindra-Svarupa said, “We are all a little outraged. . . . It’s upsetting. It’s shocking.”¹⁰⁴³ During an October 2008 telephone conversation, Radhanath Swami laughed about Tirtha becoming a swami, “The whole thing was completely crazy (laughter). . . . I in no way support[ed] any of it.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Curiously, seventeen years later, when Tirtha renounced his Swami title, he explained, “I consulted with Radhanath Swami on it and he said I was still a sannyasi, just to defer from the external portion.”¹⁰⁴⁵

In a letter to the author, Tirtha Swami explained, “I thought it [taking sannyasa] would be appropriate, since I was facing the death penalty in California and thought I would likely be executed. My intent at the time was to plead guilty and explain it was for a cause. So in my mind, I wanted to renounce and it was suggested that I take sannyasa, as my life was likely coming to an end.”¹⁰⁴⁶

Bhaktipada, however, later regretted asking Umapati Swami to give Tirtha sannyasa, and said it was not his idea. He said Umapati Swami recommended him. Bhaktipada back-pedaled, “I really didn’t recommend his elevation to sannyasa. . . . But after he was incarcerated there was a big change in the man and he was now in a position of renunciation. . . . Giving up sinful activity, like meat eating, illicit sex, intoxication, gambling. He was not engaging in these things when he was in jail. And if he had had a change in heart, and/or if he demonstrated actually that he wanted to change his heart, it would be a

worthwhile attempt. . . . Umapati Swami recommended to me this should be done. I said, 'Very well, then you do it.'" ¹⁰⁴⁷

Umapati Swami, on the other hand, claimed that initiating Tirtha into the order of sannyasa was Bhaktipada's idea, not his. Umapati Swami explained, "Just the opposite. Kirtanananda wanted it. I had some reservations, but I decided to do it because if I didn't do it he would get someone else to do it anyway. Maybe he testified in court that it was my idea, but it was his." ¹⁰⁴⁸

Later, after Umapati Swami rejoined ISKCON, he felt "foolish" for giving Tirtha sannyasa. Umapati said, "When I left New Vrindaban and rejoined ISKCON, I did discover that it [awarding sannyasa to a convicted murderer] caused quite a bit of consternation and upset. I felt a little foolish. I was a little sorry that I had done something that had caused so much distress to so many devotees." ¹⁰⁴⁹

In any case, offering such a great honor to a man who just one year earlier had been universally regarded as a "fringie"—one who is unable to strictly follow the regulative principles—is certainly, as Mukunda Goswami explained, a "mockery" of the sannyasa ashram. It is not hard to see through this ruse: Bhaktipada recommended awarding this recognition to Tirtha as an incentive to keep him quiet, to take the full rap himself and not implicate any of the other conspirators. The tactic worked for seven years and bought considerable time for the conspirators.

During the February 1988 GBC meetings in Mayapura—one year after Bhaktipada's expulsion from ISKCON—the New Vrindaban community was also expelled from ISKCON.

MONKEY ON A STICK

The authors Hubner and Gruson expanded their "Dial Om for Murder" article in *Rolling Stone*, and Harcourt Brace Jovanich published a 414-page

book in November 1988 titled *Monkey on a Stick: Murder, Madness and the Hare Krishnas*. The book made it onto *The New York Times* bestseller list.¹⁰⁵⁰ Nori J. Muster, a former public relations assistant to Mukunda Goswami at Los Angeles ISKCON, explained the significance of the title, “The book’s title referred to a cruel practice among Indian farmers of impaling a crop-raiding monkey and setting it out like a scarecrow to warn its fellows away. Prabhupada had told of the practice. He could not have foreseen that his organization would become a field in which one of his own disciples [Sulochan] would be killed for pointing out corruption.”^{1051 1052}

New Vrindaban retaliated by publishing a three-page article titled, “Monkey On A Stick: Dispelling the Lies,” in the January 1989 *New Vrindaban Worldwide*. The article claimed that the book was “a spurious, malicious attack on a religion new to America, . . . fiction masquerading as a ‘true crime story,’ . . . mad, rife with exploitation, murder, drugs and child abuse. . . . The end result of this genre of propaganda is a climate of bigotry and intolerance in America against the Hare Krishna religion, the wider Hindu community, and all religious movements new to America.”¹⁰⁵³

New Vrindaban Worldwide attempted to prove that (1) the attacks on New Vrindaban were a natural extension of the long history of religious persecution in America, (2) the authors of the book were connected with the anti-cult movement, and (3) New Vrindaban was attacked because:

1. It is the oldest and largest Hare Krishna community in America,
2. Prabhupada’s Palace has begun to turn around the Krishna movement’s negative “airport” image,
3. Bhaktipada is making Krishna consciousness more attractive and understandable to Westerners by adapting certain facets of the community to a more familiar Judeo-Christian style,
4. Hinduism is under attack by the anti-religious movement,
5. The “City of God” project attempts to unite religions, and
6. Its interfaith program is active and expanding.¹⁰⁵⁴

BHAKTIPADA INDICTED

On May 24, 1990, a federal grand jury returned an eleven-count indictment charging Bhaktipada with racketeering: conspiring to murder two devotees—Chakradhari and Sulochan, running a fraudulent charity scam, mail fraud, and the kidnapping of Hayagriva's eldest son in 1979. Also named in the indictment were Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja); Steven Fitzpatrick (Sundarakar); New Vrindaban Community, Inc.; Govardhan, Inc. (also known as the Govardhan Dairy, Inc.); and the Cathedral of Healing, Inc.

Bhaktipada was in India with Radhanath Swami when he heard the news of his forthcoming indictment. He announced, "No one has to pray that I don't go to jail. Pray that wherever I am, I can preach Krishna consciousness. Either way the verdict goes, I'm victorious. Therefore, how do you know which outcome to pray for? Shouldn't we be just as ready to go to jail as to stay out? 'The cup that our Father gives us, should we not drink it?'" ¹⁰⁵⁵ Radhanath spoke about Bhaktipada's self composure and his own anxiety in a lecture published in the *City of God Examiner*:

I was disturbed in my mind. . . . He [Bhaktipada] looked at me and said, "Do you not think that Krishna is in control? . . . Do you not think that everything Krishna does is perfect? . . . Krishna is perfect and He is in control, so why do I have to worry? We are His devotees. Krishna promises He always protects His devotees. How He protects His devotees, that is for Him to decide. That is not our position to decide. This is the perfect plan of Krishna. Krishna is all good and everything He does is all good." . . .

Then I asked him, "Since you are going to be indicted when you go back, why don't you stay here [in India] and do some preaching?" He looked at me quoting Jesus Christ, "The cup that my Father giveth me, shall I not drink?" . . .

Srila Bhaktipada told me that his disciples who loved him could pray like this, "My dear Lord, my Guru Maharaja is teaching me how to surrender. Now let me surrender everything. He is surrendering his

life for my sake, tolerating all kinds of abuse. If I have any gratitude, let me surrender. Whatever spiritual results I attain through my surrender, I want to offer for the protection of my spiritual master.” He told me if one of his disciples surrenders fully, it is worth going through crucifixion. ¹⁰⁵⁶

Bhaktipada returned to the United States on May 25, 1990, and received his indictment. He appeared on the Larry King Live television show on Wednesday, June 6, 1990, in an attempt to generate positive publicity for his case. However, local response to Bhaktipada’s appearance on the CNN broadcast was mostly negative, as reported in the *Wheeling News-Register*:

“I think he [Bhaktipada] was answering the questions in such a way to avoid them as much as possible. But after watching the whole program, I would have to say that it looks a little suspicious to me. Even his followers said he was lying and that he had caused a lot of commotion in their ranks.”—Gary Martin of Glen Dale Heights

“I think he’s dumb. Who’s going to believe that he didn’t do that because he was beaten in the head and was in a coma for so many days? Who’s he trying to fool?”—Phyllis Woods of Glen Dale

“I think he’s full of it. There’s too much going on out there not to be something to it. If anybody else did everything they say he did, they’d be hanged. They’d be in jail the first day.”—anonymous Marshall County woman ¹⁰⁵⁷

Bhaktipada’s arraignment was held on June 7th. He pleaded not guilty to five racketeering counts, including conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and six counts of mail fraud. U. S. Magistrate David Core released Bhaktipada on an unsecured \$250,000 bond after a half-hour hearing. As part of his bond, Bhaktipada surrendered his passport to the court; he was ordered not to leave the United States.

Bhaktipada appeared relaxed and mixed jokes and philosophy after the hearing. He saw the charges as “a blessing from God. Let’s say it’s

a struggle that involves the forces of good and evil. Spiritual warfare is eternal. I see this as a blessing from God.”¹⁰⁵⁸ *The City of God Examiner* reported:

Srila Bhaktipada was arraigned in the Federal District Court in Elkins last Thursday on fallacious charges. Accompanying him were RVC Maharaja and Ranaka to post New Vrindaban property as surety on Bhaktipada's bond. Judge Core decided that no property or cash had to be put up for a bond. The bond would remain unsecured. . . .

The list of charges was about 75 pages, but Jim Lees waived his right to hear the charges. The Judge said to Srila Bhaktipada, “Do you realize that if you are convicted of these charges that you face life imprisonment and forfeiture of all New Vrindaban property?” Srila Bhaktipada said, “Yes.” The judge then asked how he pleaded. Srila Bhaktipada looked fearless, replying “innocent” to all charges. . . . Srila Bhaktipada is looking forward to a good battle in the court room.

Srila Bhaktipada was taken in for finger printing by a Federal Marshal. He didn't come out for a long time, but when he did, he was laughing with the Federal Marshal. He made friends with him and gave him a Palace brochure.¹⁰⁵⁹

WHO WAS BEHIND THE PERSECUTION?

Bhaktipada consistently denied responsibility for any wrongdoing, and claimed that he knew who was actually responsible for the persecution of the New Vrindaban community. At different times he claimed that a slew of six different antagonists were trying to put him in prison: (1) an unnamed “political figure” in West Virginia, (2) the anti-cult movement, (3) the United States government, (4) Consolidated Coal Company, (5) a secret Illuminati organization of powerful world financial leaders, and (6) ISKCON.

(1) At one time, Bhaktipada insisted that a “political figure” wanted to use the case against him for personal gain, such as winning the election

for West Virginia governor. He claimed, “This has become some sort of a vendetta with him.”¹⁰⁶⁰ At first, Bhaktipada refused to identify the person, but later said it was William Kolibash, the U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of West Virginia.¹⁰⁶¹

(2) At another time, Bhaktipada said that it was the leaders of the anti-cult movement who opposed him. “This anti-cult movement is spear-headed by the so-called psychiatrists and psychologists. They want control over everyone for their own private interests. . . . For instance, there are hundreds and thousands of cases every year of people who are put through electric shock. . . . They do it on innocent people, and the reason is because these tests destroy the brain. It turns one into a zombie.”¹⁰⁶²

(3) Bhaktipada contended that the charges against him stemmed from the United States government’s wish to remove him and his followers from the 4,000 acre New Vrindaban community and turn Prabhupada’s Palace into a casino. “They made me an offer: stay away and turn the property over, and they’d drop the charges. Who stands to gain from that?”¹⁰⁶³

Bhaktipada said the indictment was a ploy to seize the community. He said, “Why else would they offer to drop the charges [against me] if I turned over the land? . . . I’m innocent. I’m going to plead innocent. I’m going to fight this.”¹⁰⁶⁴ Prosecuting attorney William Kolibash insisted no deal was offered to Bhaktipada. Kolibash said, “It’s simply not true.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Kolibash claimed he did not offer to drop the charges if the land was turned over to the government, however, he was seeking the forfeiture of the New Vrindaban property which had been purchased with proceeds gained from the community’s illegal fund-raising activities.

Kolibash claimed, “All 4,000 acres of the New Vrindaban Hare Krishna complex, along with the buildings on it, could go onto the auction block if a jury agrees it was used for illegal activities or gotten with illegally-gained money. . . . the 4,000 acres and any buildings on the property excludes the Palace of Gold, but includes the property of the persons or organizations named in the indictment. . . . All real estate interests of

Tapahpunja, Sundarakar, Bhaktipada, the New Vrindaban Community, Inc. and the Cathedral of Healing is the possible object of seizure.”¹⁰⁶⁶

(4) Another time Bhaktipada claimed that the Consolidated Coal Company was behind the court cases because they allegedly owned the mineral rights under the New Vrindaban properties and wanted the devotees off the land so they could mine the coal. The company operated the nearby Shoemaker Mine, and during quiet mornings at Prabhupada's Palace and the temple, we could actually hear the rumbling of the giant ventilation fans on the next ridge east of the community. “They can't mine it as long as we are there,” Bhaktipada claimed.¹⁰⁶⁷

(5) Another time Bhaktipada claimed that the community was targeted by secret organizations of “powerful financial interests” who controlled the “global economy” and “world governments.” The *Brijabasi Spirit* reported, “Here [during a Tulsa, Oklahoma television show], Srila Bhaktipada dropped some bombs about the great conspiracy against religious freedom, being directed by powerful financial interests who control the global economy and influence government policies all over the world. Srila Bhaktipada explained these are demoniac forces belonging to powerful secret clubs who meet and decide world policy, and whose members take up positions in government to direct attacks on progressive and religious movements [such as New Vrindaban].¹⁰⁶⁸

(6) And yet another time Bhaktipada claimed that ISKCON wanted the land. He said that ISKCON was cooperating with the federal government so that they could own and occupy the New Vrindaban land after the land was forfeited to the government. Ravindra-Svarupa denied any truth to the allegation: “All I know is that I haven't been approached by the federal government on anything like that. This has been really hard for a lot of people. It's almost like a civil war, brother against brother.”¹⁰⁶⁹

Despite Ravindra-Svarupa's protestation, there was, indeed, talk within ISKCON about acquiring the New Vrindaban land if the properties were

forfeited to the government. At the North American GBC and Temple Presidents Meetings in Los Angeles (May 3-5, 1991), it was resolved:

[Regarding] Prabhupada's Palace

4. That the North American GBC authorizes a letter of intent to be filed with the U. S. District Court in West Virginia presenting ISKCON's claim to the New Vrindaban properties subject to government forfeiture. (Yes-32, No-1, Abstain-1; GBC unanimous)
5. That a steering committee is hereby established to decide whether or not to pursue claims further in Federal Court; the decision will be made after studying the viability of the government's case.

The members of the committee shall be:

Ravindra-Svarupa dasa (Chairman) [William H. Deadwyler, III]

Mukunda Goswami [Michael Grant]

Hridayananda Goswami [Howard J. Resnick]

Dulal-Chandra dasa [Howard Fawley, who had left New Vrindaban and rejoined ISKCON]

Gadadhara dasa

Mrgendra dasa [Harvey Mechanic, who had also left New Vrindaban and rejoined ISKCON]

Amarendra dasa [David Lieberman]

Badrinarayan dasa [Robert Morrill] (Yes-26; GBC unanimous) ¹⁰⁷⁰

Bhaktipada prophesied: "When the facts come out in court, you'll see that this whole thing is a scam. You'll see that. I'm as sure of that as I am of anything. God has a great purpose for this." ¹⁰⁷¹

INDIAN ASTROLOGER CLAIMS BHAKTIPADA "WRONGLY ACCUSED"

Bhaktipada's wealthy disciple in Bombay, Nathji (Dr. Narendra Desai), consulted an Indian astrologer who divined that Bhaktipada was "wrongly accused" by "baseless charges." *The City of God Examiner* reported:

The planets are arranged in such a way that he [Bhaktipada] is an *Avatari Purusa*, or empowered incarnation of the Lord. The Sun, Mars

and Jupiter are in their own houses and Mercury is in exaltation. Due to the aspects on the Sixth House, there will be many enemies and disease, but these will be conquered over. . . . His enemies are very powerful and want to kill him, but they don't succeed due to the influence of the Sun and Jupiter. The conjunction of Mars and Rahu indicates that he will be wrongly accused of murder and bad character, but the charges are baseless. He is very brave, and will stand against all charges.

He is *Antaryami*, meaning that he can see the hearts of all people, due to his connection with the Supersoul. He can give advice for every person. He can achieve great performance as a *Siddha Purusa* or liberated person. However, there will be a test in every endeavor. He also has *Vaca Shakti*, meaning that everything he says will come to pass. When a critic comes to him, he is flattened by the second or third question. His speech is very controlled. He is *Isvara Parayana*, meaning he depends completely on God. He can accumulate huge funds for spiritual purposes.

His family of birth is noble and principled, but he leaves home due to a difference of religious conclusion. His father is well known. There is no possibility of marriage. He is a self-realized soul since 1965-1969. He will make great progress after his 53rd year [1990]. There will be difficulties and trials up to his 52nd year [1989]. His 53rd year will be like a new birth. He will become a world famous personality, and recognized by his god-brothers, who will apologize for their misbehavior. He is not a fraud.¹⁰⁷²

BHAKTIPADA'S 53RD BIRTHDAY PARTY

On September 3, 1990, the Brijabasis celebrated Bhaktipada's 53rd birthday with a vyasa puja festival and initiation ceremony in which seven new disciples received spiritual names. *The City of God Examiner* reported, "Some of the wonderful gifts [given to Bhaktipada] were a parrot given by Peaceful Swami [Dennis Moreau, formerly Devananda Pandit from Toronto], a money tree by Compassionate Swami [Roselyn Fejes, formerly Rasayatra dasi, a big sankirtan 'picker' from Cleveland], a beautiful song

composed by Hrishikesh [the author] in glorification of Srila Bhaktipada and sung by the glee club. Pradyumna [an Indian devotee, the former national table tennis and badminton champion of India, who married an American devotee, Lilavati dasi (Marlene Hodas)] dressed up as Krishna complete with bluish complexion. . . . Srila Bhaktipada was the biggest Laksmi collector for the day. He collected more in one day than most devotees collect in one year.”¹⁰⁷³

The following day Bhaktipada traveled to Elkins, West Virginia, in the company of his attorney-disciple Tulsi (Dick Dezio) and Tapahpunja Swami for a 3½ hour meeting to help determine whether attorney James B. Lees, Jr. from Charleston, West Virginia, who studied at West Virginia University (Morgantown: class of 1974) and Wake Forest University (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: class of 1977), would be permitted to represent Bhaktipada during the forthcoming trial. *The City of God Examiner* reported, “On September 4th, Srila Bhaktipada, Tulsi and Tapahpunja Maharaja went to Elkins for the beginnings of the modern-day battle of Kuruksetra. The battle was to decide whether Jim Lees could represent Srila Bhaktipada or not. . . . The prosecution states that there is a conflict of interest, because formerly Jim Lees represented both Kuladri and Dharmatma in different cases, and therefore, has privileged information.”¹⁰⁷⁴

The Judge stated that he would not make a final decision until he watched video tape interviews with Kuladri and Dharmatma concerning the subject. He eventually approved of James Lee’s appointment as Bhaktipada’s attorney.

“RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION”

Bhaktipada explained that trials and tribulations were part of Krishna’s plan to glorify his devotees. Bhaktipada said, “Krishna has a plan to glorify his devotees. In the beginning the plan appears to be like a trial or tribulation. But that’s just a test. How a devotee responds to that is the basis of his glorification.”¹⁰⁷⁵

During one of his visits to New Vrindaban years earlier, Prabhupada explained, “New Vrindaban will go through three phases: first they will laugh at you; then they will hate you; then they will adore you.” Bhaktipada claimed that currently the community was in the second phase of public perception, but he predicted that soon they would enter the third stage and all their legal problems would dissolve. During a lecture at an Interfaith Festival at New Vrindaban, Bhaktipada explained:

When Prabhupada came here, he told me that, “New Vrindaban will go through three phases: first they will laugh at you; then they will hate you; then they will adore you.” We went through the first phase; they laughed at us. We didn’t have much trouble the first few years because they thought we would soon fade away. I believe the man who gave me the original lease (Richard Rose) on the Vrindaban farm did so with the idea that we wouldn’t last the first winter. And when we lasted, I think he began to think about getting the property back. He’s been trying ever since.

There was a bar up there where the store was, and the locals would get drunk on the weekend and they would shout vile and obscene things at us. They would drive by and take shots at us with their guns, but still it was mainly in the mood of laughing at us.

That went on until about 1985 when we started to attract a lot of attention. We had a great groundbreaking ceremony for the . . . [Temple of Understanding].¹⁰⁷⁶ Congressmen came and we were materially in the limelight with all kinds of favorable articles in the papers. They began to get scared. From laughing at us they saw that this was very serious, and so at that time began a period of persecution which is still going on.

But that will soon end. Actually due to the influence of New Vrindaban, the whole [West Virginia] State government is coming down, I am told.¹⁰⁷⁷

Bhaktipada philosophically mused that whether or not he was free or in jail mattered little because his devotional service would continue

uninterrupted. He said, “Because we are eternal parts and parcels of Krishna, we always have devotional service. That is the one thing that cannot be taken away. Even if they put me in jail, I can still do everything that I’m doing now. Nothing will change. Why should I fear men who in essence can do nothing?”¹⁰⁷⁸

Professor Larry Shinn, president of Berea College of Berea, Kentucky, and author of the books, *Two Sacred Worlds: Experience and Structure in the World Religions* and *The Dark Lord: Cult Images and the Hare Krishnas in America*, described the denials of Bhaktipada and his managers and the sincerity of the New Vrindaban residents during this trying time:

During my final visit to New Vrindaban [in 1989], I was struck by the denial on the part of Bhaktipada and some of his chief lieutenants to all the charges of illegal conduct that were brought against them, even though some of them [the criminal charges] had been corroborated by legal prosecutions that had already established guilt. There was a certain arrogance and righteousness that came through the denials and pious statements by Bhaktipada that struck me as all too common in the history of religions, wherein religious leaders have been given so much autonomy and power that they lose sight of the very religious tradition they espouse.

I was also struck during that visit by the absolute sincerity of the devotees in the community, most of whom had little to do with the illegal activities themselves. Consequently, even in New Vrindaban where a murder had occurred involving ex-devotees, illegal drug trafficking was documented and even the basic economic activities were tainted by illegal selling of trademarked goods, the vast majority of the devotees had little knowledge of the extent or seriousness of these activities.¹⁰⁷⁹

It appears obvious that Bhaktipada, by accusing anyone and everyone of conspiring against him without a shred of evidence, was grasping at straws. Realizing that the end of his reign was fast approaching, he tried to put up a bold, brave front for his few remaining supporters, as his house of cards came tumbling down.

BRIJABASIS BLINDED BY GREAT EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT

Despite pointed accusations and legal tribulations, Bhaktipada was able to convince many of his followers that he was being persecuted by anti-religious bigots in government for his spiritual acumen and not because of any alleged illegal or immoral actions on his part. Bhaktipada explained: “Jesus Christ said to expect it. . . . Every real active devotee of God will be persecuted—always has been, always will. That’s the way you know whether he’s doing his job. . . . Remember, not only was Christ crucified, but every one of his disciples were put to death as well. Still, the message lived on.”¹⁰⁸⁰

New Vrindaban residents believed the prosecutor’s charges were fabricated. Where others saw overwhelming and damning evidence against Bhaktipada, we saw rumors and lies. Bhaktipada was our beloved spiritual father, by definition a pure devotee of Krishna, and we could not comprehend that he could ever do any wrong. Our vision had been tinted by rose-colored glasses, by the “eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love,” by deranged devotion.

A Unitarian minister came to live at New Vrindaban during the Interfaith Era, and observed the Brijabasis’ blind allegiance to their master. In a feature article about New Vrindaban published in the weekly newspaper, *In Pittsburgh*, Rev. George David Exoo noted, “For the devotees, Bhaktipada’s every word was a source of childlike marvel and glee. Every dictum, no matter how capricious (or just plain wrong), was considered to be divinely inspired, therefore absolute. The devotees would say, ‘Even when he is wrong, he is right.’”¹⁰⁸¹

Why could an impartial observer see what we could not? As discussed earlier in Chapter 6, this is because of the great emotional investment we had placed in our spiritual master. Investment leads to deep commitment, and deep commitment leads to more investment and deeper commitment. When the emotional investment and commitment which is generated by intense love becomes deep enough, the rational mind automatically rejects evidence and reason which challenges our

cherished beliefs. In order to break through the impenetrable iron curtain in the mind created by great emotional investment, true believers must be exposed to an equally great amount of evidence (unassailable proof) which contradicts their cherished beliefs. And even then, there will still be some who refuse to believe the evidence.

Recent advances in neurological science help explain exactly why a person afflicted with great emotional investment (love) loses his or her ability to think clearly and critically. As scientists map out the regions of the brain and discover which areas are responsible for particular activities and emotions, such as love, hate, and logical thinking, interesting correlations are revealed. For instance, when the region in the brain for love is activated, the region for logical thinking is simultaneously deactivated. Anna Fels, a psychiatrist and faculty member at Weill Cornell Medical College, explained, "Love is accompanied by the deactivation of areas [in the brain] that generate reasoning and judgment. As any poet can tell you, the critical faculties of an infatuated person are lost or at least attenuated." ¹⁰⁸²

In addition, New Vrindaban residents who had great emotional investment and love for Bhaktipada were hampered not only by the natural functioning of our brains which reduced our reasoning abilities and judgment, but also by our Vaishnava training. At New Vrindaban, as in all of ISKCON, we were trained to shut our ears when we heard criticism of the spiritual master. Prabhupada said many times that one cannot criticize the spiritual master. "A devotee should not be disturbed by the activities of his spiritual master and should not try to criticize him. A devotee should be fixed in the conclusion that the spiritual master cannot be subject to criticism and should never be considered equal to a common man. Even if there seems to be some discrepancy according to an imperfect devotee's estimation, the devotee should be fixed in the conviction that even if his spiritual master goes to a liquor shop, he is not a drunkard; rather, he must have some purpose in going there." ¹⁰⁸³

Vaishnavas are not unique in this practice. In most religions, the facts on which the true believer bases his conclusions must not be derived from his experience nor observation, but from holy writ. The Stoic philosopher, Epictetus (AD 55-135), noted the tendency exhibited by the early Christians in the Roman Empire to ignore logic and evidence that contradicted their beliefs. “So tenaciously should we cling to the world revealed by the Gospel,” Epictetus mocked, “that were I to see all the Angels of Heaven coming down to me to tell me something different, not only would I not be tempted to doubt a single syllable, but I would shut my eyes and stop my ears, for they would not deserve to be either seen or heard.”¹⁰⁸⁴

For the true believer, to rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason is heresy and treason. It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible. What we know as blind faith is sustained by incredulity and skepticism. The fanatical Japanese soldiers marooned in the jungles of the Philippines refused to believe, for nearly thirty years, the evidence of Japan’s defeat in World War II.¹⁰⁸⁵

The fanatical communist refused to believe any unfavorable report about the USSR nor was he disillusioned by seeing with his own eyes the cruel misery inside the Soviet promised land. Similarly, the fanatical New Vrindaban residents refused to believe that our beloved spiritual master was nothing more than a conditioned soul exhibiting the four defects of human frailty: (1) making mistakes, (2) being illusioned, (3) cheating, and (4) having imperfect senses.

DEVOTEES BELIEVE ALLEGATIONS ARE “RUMORS AND HEARSAY”

Bhakti-Rasa Swami (Brooke Brody, formerly Buddhi-Yoga dasa), a traveling sankirtan “picker” and public relations assistant, said: “I know personally that most of the charges that they brought against Bhaktipada were completely untrue. I know that because I’ve been with Bhaktipada all of this time.”¹⁰⁸⁶

Sacimata dasi (Shirley Prins), a “fringe” devotee who lived just outside the community with her husband Sacipita (James Prins), said: “The charges were really ridiculous. If you’ve been here and know all of the people and know what they said about him [Bhaktipada], you know there’s no way they could have been true.”¹⁰⁸⁷

Murti Swami (William Walsh), an architect who studied with Frank Lloyd Wright and served as director of the New Vrindaban planning department, said: “In this country it’s become fashionable to assassinate the character of your opposition. And so he [Bhaktipada] was subjected to character assassination. That’s all.”¹⁰⁸⁸

Manakumari devi dasi (Marcia Ferry), the wife of Parambrahma, explained, “It’s like a pockmark on the moon. The moon is very bright and beautiful. What are you going to do, complain about a few pockmarks?”¹⁰⁸⁹

Isani dasi (Ellen Schramm), head of the jewelry department, said: “I’ve known Srila Bhaktipada for over twenty years and the one overwhelming desire in his life is to serve Krishna. It would be impossible for him to conceive of killing someone, or having someone killed. That’s not in his character.”¹⁰⁹⁰

Paramahansa-Krishna Swami (Phillip Julius Jones),¹⁰⁹¹ a former disciple of Hamsadutta Maharaja, the former president of the Berkeley ISKCON temple, the director of Palace Publishing and a New Vrindaban spokesman, said: “Our doors are open every day. We have people coming and going all the time and over the years, through twenty-five years of history, there have been some people who have committed some crimes. There’s no question about it. But it’s distressing to see this community branded. . . . It’s not fair.”¹⁰⁹²

Garga-Rsi (David Waterman), the Palace manager, explained, “I’ve lived here sixteen years and watched devotees become stronger in their faith and more dedicated to carry on the mission that Srila Prabhupada

gave us and which Bhaktipada is carrying forward. This spirit won't change even if Bhaktipada gets indicted or has to go to jail." 1093

Narasimha-Guru (Martin Lyons), Bhaktipada's gardener and the former head of the Athens, Ohio, preaching center, said: "I see it as a conspiracy. I feel I can trust my own intimate knowledge of the man more than I can trust the rumors and hearsay." 1094

Sankirtan (Andy Frankel), the head of New Vrindaban's theater department, said: "The persecution is going on because of envy . . . of the success our community has had." 1095

Jayamurari Swami (Joseph Moffitt), head of the community's plumbing and heating department, believed the court cases were a divine message of self-purification: "I think Krishna has waited too long to cleanse us. It got real loose around here. You could go into garbage and find remnants where people were eating meat." 1096

During an interview with a writer from the *Los Angeles Times*, Visvaretha dasa (William Henry), New Vrindaban's director of public relations and media affairs, pointed to a long list of Bhaktipada's impressive accomplishments and books, including his book, *The Joy of No Sex*, and questioned, "Can someone who does this [writes spiritual books] also be those other things [child molester and murder conspirator]?" 1097

Gopalasyapriya devi dasi (Diane Alpert White), a sankirtan "picker" and the wife of Damodara dasa (Alan White, who served as the president of New Vrindaban from 1996 to 1998), claimed, "Bhaktipada is so pure. He doesn't care anything for himself. He doesn't care what people say about him." 1098

Madhava-Ghosh (Mark Meberg) described another rationale behind the Brijabasis' staunch faith in Bhaktipada: "You are well aware of the many stories circulating about Srila Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban. Point by point arguments are useless just as when Krishna entered the wrestling arena of Kamsa, everyone perceived Him according to their

consciousness. Facts can always be interpreted many ways. When Srila Prabhupada visited New Vrindaban, he told us to just do what Kirtanananda says. On that basis, I am simply trying to stay here and serve. I really haven't an option. Wherever the twists of logic lead, I can only cling to Srila Prabhupada's instruction." ¹⁰⁹⁹

Sister Piety (Mary Lou Sherwood), a retired public school teacher from New Castle, Delaware, who rented an apartment at the community to be close to her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren, said: "Bhaktipada is one of the most honest people I ever met in my life." ¹¹⁰⁰

Bhaktipada concluded: "It's persecution; pure and simple." ¹¹⁰¹

Trials and Tribulations

ON AUGUST 13, 1987, AT a hearing in Marshall County Circuit Court, Judge Steven Narick ordered that Tirtha be extradited to Los Angeles to face a charge of first-degree murder for the death of Steven Bryant, despite the testimony of four devotees—Varshan Swami (John Mowen), the head of New Vrindaban heavy equipment; Karusa (Kerry Roth), the president of Columbus ISKCON; Tattva (Thomas Riedman), the mahout (trainer/keeper) for Malini, New Vrindaban’s elephant; and Aravinda (Alex Georgiadis), the head of New Vrindaban landscaping—who claimed they saw Tirtha at the Festival of India in Columbus, Ohio, on the day of the murder. Prosecuting Attorney Thomas White said of the Krishna testimony, “I believe it is fabricated.”¹¹⁰²

Prosecution witness Leroy Orozco, a homicide detective with the Los Angeles police department, testified that Drescher had rented a car from the Ugly Duckling Car Rental company from May 20th to May 22nd, which proved he was in Los Angeles during the murder.¹¹⁰³

Tirtha Swami spoke to the press, “I think this is just going to increase my faith in Krishna. . . . I’m not worried about going to California. Wherever I go, my business, my mission, is the same—to preach.”¹¹⁰⁴ On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1988, Tirtha was extradited from West Virginia to California and the next day in Los Angeles Municipal Court, he pleaded not guilty of killing Sulochan.¹¹⁰⁵

In Los Angeles, Tirtha faced many difficulties, and compared his time in the West Virginia Penitentiary as looking “real good.” He explained, “They [officials at the Los Angeles County Jail] haven’t complied with the order to give me a vegetarian diet yet, so I’ve been fasting and drinking milk and orange juice, when we have it. It’s hundreds of times worse here than it was at the West Virginia Penitentiary. They never put their hands on you there or verbally harassed you, either. Facing the gas chamber doesn’t bother me that much. I just wish they would honor the judge’s order to give me a vegetarian diet, so I can eat something. . . . I miss my one-man cell at Moundsville, where I spent hours working on a book about my life on my personal computer. I’m in a four-man cell with six men in it. Two of us sleep on the floor. This place makes life at Moundsville look good, real good.”¹¹⁰⁶

Tirtha eventually secured, by court appointment, the services of a competent criminal lawyer, Madelynn Gail Kopple, who began assisting him on March 30, 1989.¹¹⁰⁷ *The Dominion Post* reported:

After waiting 18 months for the trial to start, Bryant’s father, Jack, a 70-year-old retired teacher, said he and his wife are eager for Drescher to be tried in their son’s slaying. “They’ve been dragging their feet on this, it’s been just one thing after another,” Bryant said. “We don’t want to make too many comments. We still have a grandson at New Vrindaban and his mother is still there. We get to have him for a month every summer and we don’t want to upset the apple cart.”

Drescher said he only recently has been able to obtain a vegetarian diet, despite a court order and months of filing complaints with jail administrators. He also said he nearly died in January after jail employees made him wait 17 hours before taking him to a hospital after his appendix burst.

“I was living on orange juice and milk for a while,” Drescher said. “But they want to keep this murder charge and me alive because of the charges against Bhaktipada.” . . . Drescher’s attorney, Madelynn Kopple, of Los Angeles, said an appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court is planned.¹¹⁰⁸

IS THERE PROOF BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT?

Tirtha's trial for the murder of Sulochan was finally held in Los Angeles in November and December 1990. Tirtha's attorney, Madelynn Kopple, continually pointed out that the murderer was not her client, but was Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), whose spiritual master had ordered, "Sulochan needs a new body." Tirtha claimed that he thought Breier was the murderer, but he also heard through the New Vrindaban grapevine that Janmastami had allegedly bragged about killing Sulochan. Tirtha explained:

I wasn't in Los Angeles when Sulochan was killed. I did fly in, then rented a car from Ugly Duckling . . . and drove to San Francisco to visit with an Army friend I was in Vietnam with. I never mentioned it because I didn't want to drag him into it. At the time he was a big heroin dealer, and putting his name in the mix would have been awkward. In my trial under cross examination, the rental car clerk waffled on identifying me, and couldn't explain how the rental car could have so many miles on it and still place me at the scene of the crime. The car was left in San Francisco and a week later was anonymously dropped off at LAX with beaucoup miles on it. It was an anomaly the prosecution couldn't explain. . . .

I really don't know who did [murder Sulochan]. Janmastami was happy to brag about killing Sulochan to K. and a select group. He wanted to continue to ingratiate himself with K. All I know is that he [Janmastami] said he did it. I always assumed Breier [Krishna-Katha] did it, since he was also ordered to neutralize Sulochan by Ramesvara, or so he said. During my trial it was revealed that right after Sulochan was killed, he changed the barrel on his .45, but replaced it with the wrong type of barrel. So when the cops went to test fire it for a ballistics comparison, they discovered it wasn't the right barrel for his gun. He then admitted he'd swapped them out, no explanation given. . . . In any case, I wasn't there when Sulochan was killed. So I have no personal knowledge of who did it. ¹¹⁰⁹

A former New Vrindaban devotee also suggested that Janmastami, not Tirtha, pulled the trigger on May 22, 1986. During a July 2017 telephone conversation with the author, one former Brijabasi claimed:

I worked for John [Janmastami] for about twelve years, on and off. From 1980 or 1981 to about 1992 or 1993. In the early 1990s I worked for him selling flowers in Washington D. C. One time in the shop I overheard him discussing Sulochan's murder with a visiting New Vrindaban devotee, it might have been Madhava-Ghosh, I don't exactly remember. John was talking as if he was with Tirtha at the moment of the murder. I don't remember the details of the conversation, but I recall he said something to the effect that he and Tirtha walked up to Sulochan's van together and they were both standing there by the driver's window. They said a few words to Sulochan. Then, as I recall, John said he pulled the trigger and shot two bullets into his head.

After hearing this, I came closer to the two and interrupted, "I thought Tirtha shot him." John looked at me with a surprised and hurt expression. His face indicate that he was offended by my comment. He replied, "Why would you think that? Tirtha couldn't shoot a rat."

Later, the FBI talked to me about Sulochan's murder. I think they suspected John was involved and they knew I was very close to him. I did not tell them anything. I kept my mouth shut. I just told them, "You know more than I do." They let me go and I never heard back from them. ¹¹¹⁰

This is extremely interesting. Is it possible that Janmastami shot Sulochan and not Tirtha? Perhaps, or perhaps not. Tirtha personally testified in court that before he flew to LAX on May 20, 1986, he telephoned Janmastami in Philadelphia and invited him to come to California but Janmastami said he couldn't come out for a few days. Tirtha said he was "making excuses."

We know that Janmastami was upset by the lack of secrecy in the conspiracy. He complained about Tirtha, about Kuladri and Tapahpunja talking too much about it. He was greatly concerned about

his own security. Perhaps he decided to fly to California without telling anyone. We know that after the murder Tirtha took the rap. Tirtha protected Bhaktipada and the members of the conspiracy. Did Tirtha also take the rap for Janmastami, even though the two of them did not always get along? In a 2004 letter to the author, Tirtha admitted, "As for Janmastami, . . . I kept [him] . . . shielded from murder conspiracy charges." ¹¹¹¹ Two years later, Tirtha wrote again to the author, "The only reason Janmastami was not prosecuted and sent to prison was because I shielded him from the authorities." ¹¹¹²

Also interesting in this regard is Tapahpunja's recollection of the day following the murder. On March 22, 1990, he spoke by telephone from Malaysia to a private investigator in the United States, who noted, "Sheldon said that on the night that Steve Bryant was killed, he was in Columbus, Ohio. He said that he had been invited to speak at the Festival of India program on the Ohio State University campus. Sheldon said that he saw Drescher at the festival [the day following the murder]. Sheldon did not hear of Bryant's death for a couple of days. He said that on that day he saw Drescher and told him of Bryant's death. He said that Drescher expressed puzzlement over who had killed Bryant." ¹¹¹³

In his conversation with a private investigator, Tapahpunja claimed that when he talked with Tirtha at the Festival of India in Columbus, Ohio, Tirtha "expressed puzzlement over who had killed Bryant." If this is true, then perhaps Tirtha did not shoot Sulochan. Is it possible that Janmastami actually was the hit man who pulled the trigger? Or could it have been Krishna-Katha, as attested by Madelynn Kopple during Tirtha's 1990-1991 murder trials, who was the actual murderer?

Thomas Westfall, a Marshall County deputy, claimed it was Tirtha. When I asked him if he ever heard anyone say that Sinkowski could have pulled the trigger, he replied, "Nope, and most importantly Drescher never made that claim either in the, now, many times that he told the story of how he killed Saint-Denis and Bryant. I was in the court room when he described killing Bryant. Los Angeles Police Department had a

witness and only Drescher was seen in the Los Angeles area by members of the Los Angeles temple. No.”¹¹¹⁴

When I spoke to Janmastami by telephone about this, he denied that he was the murderer or that he had bragged to anyone that he had killed Sulochan. “I did not kill Sulochan. What benefit would that have been for me, to brag about killing someone? It would have been extremely stupid for me to do that, if I had killed him.”¹¹¹⁵

Krishna-Katha also denied that he pulled the trigger. During an August 2017 telephone conversation with the author, he explained, “I did not kill Sulochan. I was not there when he was murdered. I’m not proud of my participation in the events which lead to his death—and that was a scary time in my life—but I truly did not think Tirtha was going to kill Sulochan; I thought he was merely trying to scare him. I’m telling the complete truth. I was not booked by the police, just questioned. The police recognized that I told the truth, and subsequently I testified in court in West Virginia and in California. I got full-blanket immunity.”¹¹¹⁶

It appears, however, that Krishna-Katha’s statement above may be suspect in three regards: (1) “I truly did not think Tirtha was going to kill Sulochan; I thought he was merely trying to scare him,” (2) “I was not there when he was murdered,” and (3) “I’m telling the complete truth.”

First, Krishna-Katha’s own March 15, 1991 testimony in Martinsburg, West Virginia, contradicts his (1) statement, during which he admitted that he knew the surveillance was simply a prelude to murder. As noted in Chapter 10, Krishna-Katha remembered his first meeting (February 7, 1986) with the two New Vrindaban hit men, “Tirtha and Janmastami said . . . they wanted to kill Sulochan, and they suggested a few different ways . . . various ways of killing him. One of the methods was to obtain some heroin and give an overdose injection and then dump the body. . . . Beating him to death, throwing him in a river. . . . We discussed . . . disposing of the body in some abandoned mine shafts that were in the Apple Valley area. . . . We looked at mine shafts.”¹¹¹⁷

Second, Nori J. Muster's recollection in Chapter 10 which describes a conversation she had with Krishna-Katha at the Los Angeles temple wherein he allegedly admitted that he secretly witnessed the murder, contracts his (2) statement. During my August 2017 phone conversation with Krishna-Katha, when I mentioned Muster's recollection of her May 1986 conversation with him in which he said he witnessed the murder, he answered, "Women sometimes tend to exaggerate."¹¹¹⁸

In addition, Thomas Westfall of the Marshall County Sheriff's Department claimed that someone known to the Los Angeles Police Department had seen Tirtha murder Sulochan. In an e-mail to the author, he explained, "LAPD had a witness."¹¹¹⁹ It is extremely likely that this witness was Krishna-Katha. In retrospect, is it possible that Krishna-Katha was not "telling the complete truth" when he claimed to the author, "I'm telling the complete truth?" His story has obviously changed considerably during the passing of the last three decades.

Despite the speculation of some, and Tirtha's own obfuscating letter quoted on page 449 during which he attempted to throw the author of the trail, there is no shadow of a doubt that Tirtha killed Sulochan. He himself admitted killing him during the Investigative Grand Jury which commenced at 10:15 a.m. on August 11, 1994 at the Federal Building in Wheeling, West Virginia, in the company of two assistant United States attorneys, Michael Stein and Shari Potter, and twenty-two grand jurors. When asked, "Did you kill Steven Bryant," Drescher responded with an emphatic and clear, "Yes, I did."

A MISTRIAL DECLARED

Jurors for Tirtha's trial in Los Angeles began deliberations in mid-December, 1990, and a month later admitted that they could not come to a unanimous decision. A mistrial was declared after the Van Nuys Superior Court jury deadlocked, eight to four for acquittal. One juror explained, "There was a lot of evidence; it just didn't prove him guilty to me. The case didn't jell."¹¹²⁰

The Associated Press reported, “A mistrial was declared Thursday in the murder trial of a Hare Krishna devotee charged with killing a disillusioned follower. Jurors told Superior Judge Carol Fieldhouse they were at an impasse in deliberations that began in mid-December. The judge declared a mistrial and scheduled a Feb. 1 hearing to set a new trial date.”¹¹²¹

The trial of Tirtha was very important to New Vrindaban because the prosecutor claimed that Bhaktipada had hired Tirtha to kill Steven Bryant for \$8,000, as evidenced from tape-recorded telephone conversations between Tirtha and Randall Gorby. New Vrindaban residents considered this ludicrous. Perhaps Bhaktipada had authorized payments to Tirtha for surveillance, but he would never hire Tirtha to kill Bryant. Tirtha would do such a service simply for the pleasure of pleasing guru; not for money. *The City of God Examiner* published an exhaustive five-page analysis of Tirtha’s murder trial in a special edition (February 13, 1991) which quoted extensively from the defense by Tirtha’s attorney, Madelynn Kopple.

Essentially the defense claimed that most of the prosecutor’s witnesses had accepted immunity from the government in return for their testimony and therefore could not be trusted. Kopple also indicated that the evidence was circumstantial. She claimed that the murder was not committed by Drescher, but by Ramesvara’s disciple Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha) who received an order from his spiritual master that “Bryant needed a new body.”

One of Tirtha’s jurors who voted to acquit him became interested in Krishna consciousness. *The City of God Examiner* reported, “One of the jurors in Tirtha Maharaja’s trial [Kim Stone] was so impressed with Tirtha Maharaja that she decided to become a devotee. . . . During the trial she could understand that Tirtha had not committed the murder and that there was a conspiracy against him. She was one of those who voted for acquittal. She vowed to help him in the next trial. She was coming every day to see Tirtha and take instruction from him in Krishna consciousness. She recently asked for initiation and Srila Bhaktipada sanctioned that Tirtha Maharaja could act as a spiritual medium [ritvik priest] to initiate her [on Bhaktipada’s behalf]. So in the Los Angeles Police Department jail, of all

places, there was an initiation and Tirtha Maharaja gave her the name Ahalya devi dasi, a name for a great personality in the *Ramayana*.”¹¹²²

In August 1991, at the conclusion of Tirtha's second trial for the murder of Sulochan, a jury of six men and six women pronounced Tirtha guilty of first-degree murder and a special circumstance. The verdict made him subject to the death penalty. Ahalya devi dasi, the juror from Tirtha's January 1991 mistrial who had received ritvik initiation from Tirtha, showed up in court and wept as the verdict was read. “They're wrong,” sobbed former juror Kim Stone, wiping tears from her cheeks outside the courtroom. “He's an innocent man.”¹¹²³

Jack and Helga Bryant observed the trial. Tirtha recalled, “Sulochan's parents sat calmly through the trial proceedings. When our eyes would occasionally meet there was a sense of recognition but no negative emotion or hatred on their part. Mrs. Bryant especially seemed to convey a mixed feeling of sadness and forgiveness. Not condemning me for how her son's life ended so tragically. . . . His end coming like the conclusion of a sad, tragic play.”¹¹²⁴ The Associated Press reported:

A Hare Krishna devotee accused of being a cult hit man was convicted of first-degree murder in the 1986 slaying of a sect dissident. Thomas A. Drescher, 42, also was convicted Tuesday of murder for financial gain, making him eligible for the death penalty. Prosecutors claimed he was paid \$8,000 for the killing.

Drescher showed no reaction as the jury's verdict was announced. A previous trial on the charges ended with a deadlocked jury. The penalty phase of the trial was set for Sept. 30. At that time, jurors will decide whether to recommend the death penalty or life in prison without possibility of parole. “We intend to aggressively pursue the death penalty against him,” said Los Angeles County district attorney's spokeswoman Sandi Gibbons.¹¹²⁵

In October, the jury recommended Tirtha receive life in prison without possibility of parole instead of the death sentence which was recommended by

prosecutors. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “The recommendation means that Thomas A. Drescher, 42, escapes the death penalty, which had been sought by prosecutors. Drescher was convicted of murder for financial gain, making him eligible for death in the gas chamber. Sentencing is set for Nov. 8.”¹¹²⁶

On December 4, 1991, Tirtha was sentenced to “life imprisonment without parole.”¹¹²⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Thomas A. Drescher’s sentence was imposed by Superior Court Judge Stanley Weisberg, who followed a jury recommendation that Drescher be imprisoned instead of executed.”¹¹²⁸

Tirtha waxed philosophically, “I am neither bitter nor regretful for anything that has happened. . . . What I did was for the benefit of the devotees and the world. I knew beforehand that in all likelihood, I would have to surrender my life. Still, I did not hesitate. It was an emergency situation. No one else, especially among many who were much more qualified than I, would step up. So it is that I was left with no alternative.”¹¹²⁹

BHAKTIPADA ON TRIAL

Bhaktipada’s trial began on Monday, March 11, 1991 in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in the Eastern panhandle about one hundred miles from Washington D. C. William A. Kolibash served as the chief prosecuting attorney, assisted by Michael Stein and Paul Camaletti. The chief attorney for the defense was James B. Lees, Jr. Kolibash claimed that Bhaktipada had authorized Sulochan’s murder because he was afraid that Sulochan would expose him as a pedophile. If the New Vrindaban devotees discovered that Bhaktipada had fallen from his vows of a sannyasi and molested boys and young men, they would abandon him and he would lose his position of absolute power and preeminence. In such a scenario, his disciples and followers would likely reject him and kick him out of the community.

Kolibash explained, “The prosecution’s theory was that Swami Bhaktipada wanted to maintain his position of authority and his position of power. And he had to have two things: he had to have the undivided loyalty

of his followers and he had to have the money to finance his operation. When Mr. Bryant came out with some of his publications, one of those allegations was the allegation of sexual molestation. Nobody in the community would follow somebody that was involved in that type of activity. So Mr. Bryant's story started to gather quite a bit of credibility, and immediately the Swami felt threatened. So something had to be done with Mr. Bryant. Under our theory of the prosecution, the motive for Bryant's murder was to silence him, to stop this information flow about the sexual molestation going on and about the Swami's actual involvement in that molestation. So it was the established motive for the Bryant murder." ¹¹³⁰

Bhaktipada defended himself, "We have four regulative principles: no meat eating, no illicit sex, no intoxication, no gambling. Why no meat eating? Because we don't kill even animals. Then how could I condone or encourage the killing of a human being? It is preposterous." ¹¹³¹ The prosecution called in sixty-six witnesses; the defense called in about twenty witnesses. *The City of God Examiner* (Sri-Galim/Gary Gardner, editor) reported on the trial:

There were eleven indictments against Srila Bhaktipada. We will not list all eleven charges for it took the judge one and one half hours to read out the indictments. The spurious charges ranged from conspiracy to murder—to kidnapping—to child molestation—to mail fraud—to insurance fraud. . . .

The forces of Maya were arrayed against Srila Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban community just like at the battle of Kuruksetre. We were flatly outnumbered. However, because Lord Krishna is sitting on the side of Srila Bhaktipada, there can only be victory. . . .

The whole plan for the prosecution was to throw as many accusations as possible at the community and Srila Bhaktipada and hope that something would stick. They called up many witnesses that didn't have much relevance to Srila Bhaktipada's case, but who wanted to criticize New Vrindaban as much as possible. We will not list the testimony of the witnesses in this case. No one likes to hear lies and false accusations. . . .

Needless to say there is a conspiracy in this world to stop the Krishna consciousness movement. . . . A lot of lies and deception were used by the prosecution to try to bring down a great devotee of the Lord. Some devotees with weak faith took part in this plan. In the future these devotees may come to regret their mistakes, and therefore, we will not print their testimony which they gave influenced by the illusory energy. ¹¹³²

One senior New Vrindaban sannyasi and spokesman for New Vrindaban, Paramahansa-Krishna Swami, claimed that Bhaktipada was “ripped off by the U. S. attorney and his cohorts.” P. K. Swami claimed:

From the bottom of my heart, and with all sincerity and all honesty, I say this: I sat through three weeks of this whole thing. I heard every single witness. I heard every accusation. I heard every bit of evidence there was against Bhaktipada and New Vrindaban. I can tell you that there is absolutely *no evidence* that Bhaktipada committed any crime. . . .

Bhaktipada was not charged with a single crime. The charge was *conspiracy*. Conspiracy means that if they can come up with only one person who will say, “I talked to Bhaktipada, and he agreed that I can go and do this crime,” then they can get Bhaktipada for conspiracy. And that’s what happened. . . . Bhaktipada was completely ripped off by U. S. attorney Kolibash and his cohorts. . . . ¹¹³³

Paramahansa-Krishna Swami claimed that all the damning testimony against Bhaktipada was fabricated. “The only witnesses they [the prosecutors] presented were ex-devotees who had a grudge against Bhaktipada, or who were in trouble with the law. Many of the witnesses had been indicted by the government and had made incredible deals with the government in exchange for lighter sentences.” ¹¹³⁴

P. K. Swami continued, “We’ve been smeared as being criminal and this and that, but if you look at the facts, it doesn’t bear it out. And yet we get this reputation as being this wild criminal organization. It’s

really unfair. They [prosecutors] have made an incredibly costly effort to get rid of this community. I think the taxpayers should start wondering what they're doing, whether it's worth the money." ¹¹³⁵ Richard Lonsford, a private investigator from Moreno Valley, California, working for New Vrindaban, said that he thought the trial cost the government \$3,000,000. ¹¹³⁶ *The City of God Examiner* reported on the trial:

Many prosecution witnesses were caught lying and some were given immunity to protect themselves from being prosecuted. Many former devotees lied in their testimony in order to receive immunity. . . .

It was obvious . . . that Krishna-Katha [from Los Angeles] committed the murder [of Sulochan]. Ramesvara and Krishna-Katha set up Tirtha and New Vrindaban to take the blame. To cover this up and save themselves, certain members of ISKCON are pointing the finger at New Vrindaban. . . . ¹¹³⁷

At least two ISKCON devotees sat through the trial: Mukunda Goswami (Michael Grant), ISKCON's Minister of Communication and Prthu dasa (Peter Brinkman), the temple president in Ireland who ordered Tapahpunja Swami to leave when Tapahpunja admitted, "I engineered it [Sulochan's murder]." *The City of God Examiner* reported, "Mukunda and Prthu, the devotees of ISKCON, sat in back of the courtroom for most of the trial. They are so foolish to think that the prosecution is going to let them have the New Vrindaban property [if the property is forfeited to the government]. . . . Mukunda and Prthu sat in the back of the courtroom like two vultures ready to devour their prey." ¹¹³⁸

Bhaktipada claimed Mukunda Goswami was a "demon dressed in Vaishnava cloth," during a conversation with Bhakti-Tirtha Swami Krishnapada at the Martinsburg Regional Jail:

Krishnapada: Is Mukunda consciously trying to be negative?

Bhaktipada: You know what Prabhupada told me, "Beware of demons dressed in Vaishnava cloth."

Krishnapada: Well, maybe Mukunda is thinking that he is helping Prabhupada.

Bhaktipada: No, not possible. He is trying to stop us from preaching. . . All the dirt that they are trying to throw at New Vrindaban will fall on ISKCON. We are chanting Hare Krishna. Why are they attacking? It is not necessary. ¹¹³⁹

I was one of the defense witnesses called to the stand on the community's behalf. Defense Attorney Jim Lees asked me my age (35), my marital status (married), if I had children (one daughter almost three years old), my residence (the apartment complex near the temple), my length of residency at the community (since August 1978), my role or function at the community (Minister of Music, organist, choir director, children's choir director, orchestra director and music teacher). James Lees asked if I "played" in efforts to help fundraising. I conveniently omitted mentioned my six or seven years on the "pick," and instead answered that "I play [piano and accordion] concerts in the Wheeling area and I play with a jazz quartet, but that is for my own maintenance." Lees continued questioning me:

Lees: Having a three-year-old there and having been involved in the school system, did you hear allegations of sexual molestation of children in New Vrindaban community?

Doktorski: Yes. I first read about it in the newspaper.

Lees: Based upon your own firsthand information of living there, for those years and as a parent, are you satisfied New Vrindaban is a safe place to bring up your child?

Doktorski: If it wasn't, I would not live there.

During a brief cross examination, Michael Stein asked me only one question:

Stein: How much time has your daughter spent at the ashram, sleeping over at New Vrindaban?

Doktorski: My daughter lives at home with my wife and I. ¹¹⁴⁰

On the stand, I was so intent on defending New Vrindaban and my spiritual master that I conveniently omitted mentioning anything about my six or seven years out on the “pick,” or the rumors I might have heard of child molestation and abuse in the community. My wife and I would never allow our daughter to live in one of the New Vrindaban ashrams; we didn’t trust the system. We considered ourselves fortunate, as around the time of our daughter’s birth, the ashrams at New Vrindaban had shut down and the children began attending public or parochial schools. She would never have to live in a gurukula ashram.

After testifying, I did not stay to listen to the other witnesses, as Bhaktipada had recently asked me to find a harpsichord for the temple orchestra. I discovered an advertisement for a used instrument for sale by a harpsichord collector who lived in a Maryland suburb on the eastern side of Washington D. C., so I drove there to examine the instrument. I thought the two-rank one-manual instrument would be adequate for our New Vrindaban orchestra, and I reported back to Bhaktipada with my findings.

BHAKTIPADA PURCHASES HARPSICHORD DURING TRIAL RECESS

Bhaktipada sat through seven days of testimony which ended on Tuesday, March 19th. At that time, the judge announced that closing arguments would be given on Monday, March 25th. During the recess, Bhaktipada and I traveled to an instrument collector’s home near Washington D. C., where we purchased a harpsichord for the New Vrindaban temple orchestra. An Associate Press writer reported:

His federal racketeering and fraud trial hasn’t kept Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada from his daily duties as the founder and spiritual leader of a West Virginia commune. After seven days of testimony that portrayed him as the guiding force behind child abuse, beatings, kidnapping and murder at the New Vrindaban community, Bhaktipada went out and bought a harpsichord.

“I got it in Washington D. C.,” Bhaktipada said Wednesday as lawyers in his federal racketeering and fraud trial prepared final instructions for jurors in the case. “It’s for the temple orchestra to use during morning services.” ¹¹⁴¹

During the several hours I spent with my spiritual master that evening, Bhaktipada seemed to be more concerned about improving the temple orchestra and getting a good deal on the harpsichord than about the outcome of his trial. He told me, “Everything is in Krishna’s hands. I’ve turned the outcome over to Him. I’m praying to Krishna that I’ll be as ready to hear a guilty verdict as I am ready to hear innocent. Whatever happens, happens with the permission of God.”

BHAKTIPADA CONVICTED ON GOOD FRIDAY

Prosecutors charged Bhaktipada through the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, commonly referred to as the RICO Act, a United States federal law that provides for extended criminal penalties and a civil cause of action for acts performed as part of an ongoing criminal organization. Bhaktipada was convicted on Good Friday, March 29, 1991 on the RICO and mail fraud counts (the jury failed to reach a verdict on the murder counts). New Vrindaban residents considered it auspicious that our spiritual master was convicted on the day commemorating the crucifixion of Lord Jesus Christ.

Paramahansa-Krishna Swami compared Bhaktipada to Jesus Christ, “There are no accidents in Krishna consciousness. Everything is done by the will of Krishna. The fact is that what happened on Good Friday two thousand years ago was repeated in 1991 with our spiritual master. Bhaktipada was falsely accused, tried, found guilty, and crucified in a courtroom by false witnesses. Through it all, Bhaktipada remained totally fixed at the lotus feet of Prabhupada and Krishna. Our faith in Srila Bhaktipada is now stronger than ever.” ¹¹⁴²

The City of God Examiner also compared Bhaktipada to Christ, “If Krishna wanted to save Bhaktipada from the hands of the demons, He could have. That is no problem for Him. However there is a greater plan in mind. What that plan is we cannot tell at this point. The jaws of Aghasura [a demon of the ancient world mentioned in *Srimad-bhagavatam* who appeared as a giant serpent during Krishna’s boyhood pastimes] have closed, but one thing for sure is that Lord Krishna has entered with his devotee, and therefore, there is no need to worry. . . . No one would have thought that the crucifixion of Christ would have worked such great wonders. . . . Something very wonderful will surface from this religious persecution.” ¹¹⁴³

Father Bede Griffiths (1906-1993)—a friend of New Vrindaban also known as Swami Dayananda, a British-born Benedictine monk and priest who lived in ashrams in South India and became a noted yogi—regarded Bhaktipada’s conviction on Good Friday as a “divine coincidence.” He wrote, “Swami Bhaktipada is subjected to inhuman treatment, conspiracy and false witnesses, and was detained just like in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ by a divine coincidence on last Good Friday.” ¹¹⁴⁴

The prosecuting attorneys also noted the coincidence that Bhaktipada was convicted on Good Friday, and allegedly celebrated with a party. Radha-Vrindaban Chandra wrote in his diary, “Easter Sunday: Srila Bhaktipada is still in jail. We heard from a friend in the media that after the trial the prosecutor threw a party at the courthouse, was drinking champagne and chanting, ‘Good Friday, Good Friday: a great day for a crucifixion.’” ¹¹⁴⁵ *The City of God Examiner* also reported on the alleged champagne party, “After the trial was over the prosecution held a champagne party and toasted each other to a great crucifixion.” ¹¹⁴⁶

Paramahansa-Krishna Swami reported on Bhaktipada’s composure and fearlessness as he was escorted to jail by the U. S. Marshals: “When Bhaktipada was declared guilty on all these charges, he was totally undisturbed. When the Marshals took him to the car, he looked at the devotees and just smiled with a look of complete peacefulness and love. Then they took him to jail.” ¹¹⁴⁷

Radhanath Swami also observed the U. S. Marshals escorting Bhaktipada from the courthouse into a waiting car and custody. Radhanath said, “Bhaktipada willingly, lovingly accepted Krishna taking him away. As the U. S. Marshals were taking him from the courthouse to the car, we were standing there. He looked over at us and simply smiled. He was in no anxiety. And when he smiled, I think we all got the message. He smiled and looked at us like, ‘All right, boys, grow up. Now it’s time. Grow up.’”¹¹⁴⁸

New Vrindaban’s publicity director, Gadadhar, emphasized the philosophical viewpoint of Bhaktipada’s imprisonment, “The trial was God’s way of forcing us to grow up. It’s a little like a mama bird kicking a baby bird out of the nest spiritually. Life goes on. The inspiration of Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada is in everyone’s hearts even though he isn’t here. People have been calling from India, all over the world really, reaffirming their faith in Bhaktipada. Maybe we lost the battle but we’re not going to lose the war. We’re going to keep on fighting.”¹¹⁴⁹

Radhanath Swami characteristically emphasized the emotional viewpoint, “We miss Bhaktipada’s love, inspiration and fatherly presence. There may have been some tears, but they are the tears that come from seeing a friend, a father, suffer from injustice.”¹¹⁵⁰ *The Washington Post* reported that Bhaktipada faced a maximum of 90 years in prison and more than \$76 million in fines.¹¹⁵¹

One Brijabasis considered the day of Bhaktipada’s conviction as the “darkest day” in New Vrindaban’s history. Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami wrote in his diary, “Yesterday was the darkest day in the history of New Vrindaban. Srila Bhaktipada was committed to jail by Judge Mehridge. Today I am praying to Krishna to comfort Srila Bhaktipada in his distress. They have not yet taken our land but I expect that soon. . . . Mukunda Goswami and Ravindra were compared by Bhaktipada to vultures.”¹¹⁵²

Bhaktipada claimed that the trial and conviction was a “witch hunt” by the “evil U. S. Attorney.” He said, “This whole witch hunt is the evil of U. S. Attorney William Kolibash. Why? It’s his lust for power and fame. He wants to drive the Hare Krishnas from West Virginia. I think Kolibash sees this as his ticket to the governorship.”¹¹⁵³

Marshall County Sheriff Robert Lightner, who had been elected after Bordenkircher’s term ended, celebrated, “This is a great day for myself and the citizens of Marshall County. I feel it’s been an ongoing battle since 1977 when I first became involved with the Krishnas. They have been a total thorn in our sides, whether it be from a local violation of automobile laws, whether it be child abuse, whether it be harassing individuals in our community, from murder to you name it.”¹¹⁵⁴

Bhaktipada was incarcerated at the Eastern Regional Jail in Martinsburg, West Virginia, where he made a motion to appeal the case; there he waited to see if the judge would allow him to be released on bail, pending the appeal. On June 20th, the Honorable Robert R. Merhige, Jr. announced Bhaktipada’s sentence: thirty years in prison. Devamrita Swami, an important New Vrindaban community spokesman, revealed his optimism in a conversation with a television news reporter, “Bhaktipada had this dream [to build the “City of God”] and we’re pushing it on. We weren’t so much concerned as to whether he was sentenced to one year or a life in prison. The whole thing [criminal charges] is basically a farce, and we’re quite confident it [his conviction] will be thrown out in appellate court.”¹¹⁵⁵

On July 10th, one hundred and three days after his conviction, Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr. released Bhaktipada on \$250,000 bail, pending his appeal, but ruled that he could not return to New Vrindaban. He lived instead in a rented first-floor apartment in a house in Warwood, a neighborhood of Wheeling along Route 2 near the Ohio River about four miles north of downtown. An electronic monitoring device was locked around his ankle.

At considerable expense, Bhaktipada hired the law firm of Alan M. Dershowitz—a well-known criminal law professor at Harvard University who successfully defended celebrated and wealthy clients such as Claus von Bülow, Mike Tyson, and O. J. Simpson—to represent his case. RVC Swami noted, “May 1, 1991: Srila Bhaktipada is still in jail. His appeals lawyer will be Dershowitz from Harvard, with a \$100,000 retainer and \$495/hour.”¹¹⁵⁶

On July 1, 1993, the Fourth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia, overturned the 1991 conviction on the basis of irrelevant testimony being introduced which may have swayed the jury. Bhaktipada announced that he intended not to go back to New Vrindaban and lead the community as he had for the last twenty-five years. He said he wanted to inaugurate a new phase of his life: traveling and preaching exclusively; no more management headaches. Bhaktipada appointed Radhanath Swami as his Successor Acharya for the Eternal Order of the Holy Name, League of Devotees International and the Worldwide “Cities of God,” but Radhanath refused to accept the position.

THE WINNEBAGO INCIDENT

On August 16, 1993, Bhaktipada was released from house arrest and returned triumphantly to New Vrindaban. The reversal of his convictions seemed to prove his claims that the charges against him—kidnapping, conspiracy to murder, mail fraud, racketeering—were simply a form of religious persecution. New Vrindaban devotees greeted their master with ecstatic kirtan and an enormous sign which hung from the roof of the huge greenhouse-under-construction situated down the hill from Bhaktipada’s house: “Welcome Home, Master.”

Bhaktipada, along with a dozen City of God residents and interfaith friends, including Radhanath Swami, attended the Parliament of the World’s Religions centennial celebration which was held in Chicago from

August 28th through September 5th. The event was enormous; six thousand attendees heard 1,300 religious leaders speak at the conference.

On the way back to New Vrindaban from Chicago, during the all-night 380-mile drive, the privacy curtain of Bhaktipada's Winnebago van accidentally opened, and the driver, Sarvabhauma (Steven Travers), observed his spiritual master and a teenage male Malaysian disciple in bed in the back of the Winnebago mobile home engaging in prolonged embraces and kisses in a manner which was more appropriate for the amorous relationship between lovers than for the disciplined relationship between a spiritual master and his disciple. This became known at New Vrindaban as "The Winnebago Incident."

Despite the darkness, the driver had no doubts about what was happening. He could plainly see that this was no innocent demonstration of affection; this activity was sexual in nature. The driver remembered: "I looked in the rear-view mirror and saw Bhaktipada messing around in bed with his young Malaysian disciple. They were kissing and hugging; basically making out."¹¹⁵⁷

The next morning, when the news spread throughout New Vrindaban, the community split into two nearly-equal camps: those who dismissed the story as malicious rumor and continued to support Bhaktipada, and those who believed the story and wanted Bhaktipada out of New Vrindaban. Tensions flared. Bhaktipada, relaxing in his cabin at Silent Mountain (an abandoned limestone quarry the community had purchased near Littleton, West Virginia), smiled at the distraught disciples sitting at his feet and decidedly assured them, "I have not broken any of the regulative principles; there must be a conspiracy against me."

Bhaktipada singled out Devamrita Swami as the primary conspirator. One aggressive Malaysian disciple (with alleged Mafia connections), a leader of Bhaktipada's multi-million-dollar Far-Eastern sankirtan "picking" empire (Ramananda), boldly announced, "Coffins should be procured for the blasphemers who dared to spread slanderous lies about

the spiritual master, Krishna's pure devotee." Bhaktipada's disciple who drove the Winnebago prudently decided to leave the community, never to return. Devamrita and Radhanath Swamis also departed in haste after hearing the threats.

BHAKTIPADA REFUSES PLEA BARGAIN

On March 14, 1994, Judge Mehridge and Bhaktipada's lawyers met in Tampa, Florida. The prosecutors offered a plea bargain: if Bhaktipada agreed to plead guilty to one count and accept a five to seven year sentence, the government would stop their efforts to fine and seize the assets of the New Vrindaban community. Tapahpunja Swami, who was charged with Bhaktipada as a co-conspirator in the Sulochan murder, accepted the offer and received a sentence of five years in prison which he served in Ashland and Lexington, Kentucky. Radhanath Swami faxed a message to Bhaktipada from Bombay begging him to accept the plea bargain. He warned, "Once you go to trial, they will go for blood." Radhanath Swami wrote:

Please forgive me if I have offended you in any way. I am not against you. I love you dearly. Whatever I have done [by leaving your service and returning to ISKCON] is only to try to protect devotees from confusion. I deeply believe we should all simply follow Srila Prabhupada within and without and he will perform miracles.

Besides this, it breaks my heart to think of you suffering if the prosecution has presented a reasonable deal for you. Please accept it. Once you go to trial, they will go for blood. They may never again give you a chance for plea bargaining. What is your chance of winning all charges with a West Virginia jury? Please do not take such a risk. I may not be following you, but I will always love you as a dear friend and godbrother. ¹¹⁵⁸

In his fax to Bhaktipada, perhaps Radhanath thought only of his former siksa guru's welfare, but perhaps he may have also thought of his own. If Bhaktipada accepted the plea bargain, the case would be closed and

Radhanath's involvement in the murder conspiracy might be forgotten; but if the case went to trial, a witness might, during cross examination, inadvertently reveal Radhanath's involvement in the plot.

Bhaktipada replied to Radhanath Swami, "I thank you for your letter. I also love you. I always have loved you and will always love you. We have our disagreements, but the same center. We both try to serve Krishna to the best of our abilities. In the Absolute there is room for variety. That is our philosophy. Otherwise we can agree to disagree." ¹¹⁵⁹

In March 1995, the West Virginia State Penitentiary, which first opened in 1876, was decommissioned. It closed its doors on March 27th by court order after it was determined by the court that the small five by seven foot cells and the living conditions were inhumane by modern standards. Tirtha, along with most of the other prisoners, was relocated 180 miles south of Moundsville to a modern state-of-the-art federal facility: the Mount Olive Correctional Complex in Fayette County.

Today the former State Penitentiary in Moundsville, which Tirtha called home for nearly a decade, has become a popular tourist attraction, billed as the "Dungeon of Horrors," which hosts daily 90-minute tours during which visitors can see the area where men were executed by hanging on the gallows, and the electric chair affectionately known as "Old Sparky." The facility also sponsors scary and exciting events, such as Halloween parties, family nights in the dungeon, ghost adventures, zombie walks, kids' night, and mock prison riots. ¹¹⁶⁰

TIRTHA SWAMI AND TAPAHUNJA TURN ON BHAKTIPADA

After the Winnebago Incident of September 1993, Tirtha Swami remained a staunch defender of his spiritual master, Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada. As editor of the newsletter he called "*Brijabasi Spirit*," Tirtha wrote an article deriding the author—who had spoken against Bhaktipada in a public meeting at New Vrindaban in October and subsequently wrote and distributed a 17-page letter delineating the reasons he rejected his

spiritual master—in the November 1993 issue. But by the summer of 1994, Tirtha had reversed his opinion of his “divine spiritual master,” and had been converted to the author’s opinion: Bhaktipada was a chronic, unrepentant, homosexual ephebophile (ephebophilia is the strong and persistent adult sexual interest in adolescent individuals, typically teenagers), and had been so as early as 1970, if not earlier.¹¹⁶¹

It seems that Tirtha’s mind was turned by Radhanath Swami, who visited him in prison and described the Winnebago Incident. “Right after the Winnebago Incident,” Tirtha explained to the author in a 2008 letter, “Radhanath Swami came to visit me at the old Moundsville prison, to break the news to me. I remember being disappointed, but not shocked, since I’d already heard a few years earlier from several other sources of Kirtanananda’s transgressions with young Mexicans, etc. But because it came from Radhanath Swami it carried much greater weight. . . . Maharaja likely thought it would hit me particularly hard especially since I was in prison for doing his bidding. It didn’t sink in until some days or weeks later. I was lucky in that I didn’t need much convincing of the truth. I knew the truth all along, or at least for some time, but ignored all the signs. I don’t think it was easy for anyone to embrace the full truth of the matter.”¹¹⁶²

Tirtha was “very shaken and hurt” after hearing from Radhanath Swami about Bhaktipada’s chronic, unrepentant, homosexual ephebophilia. In a letter to the author, Tirtha explained, “I had embraced Srila Prabhupada as guru/acharya from the outset—around 1971. I always considered him my spiritual master—or as my first spiritual master. So when K. turned out to be fallen, there wasn’t so much of a transition in that regard. . . . Still, I was very shaken and hurt by what he did.”¹¹⁶³

Tirtha, like the author, stood up for what he believed to be right: Bhaktipada was a pretender; not fit to be guru. Tirtha rejected him as his spiritual master. He also decided that Kirtanananda “Swami” should be evicted from the New Vrindaban environs and sent to prison, like himself.

Bhaktipada's second trial was scheduled to begin on April 16, 1996. This time, however, the prosecutors had a new ally, an eyewitness who finally, after ten years in prison, threatened to testify against his "spiritual master." Tirtha Swami, who was serving life in prison for the murders of Chakradhari and Sulochan, had lost his faith in Bhaktipada, and decided not to withhold incriminating information anymore in order to protect his former "guru." Tirtha Swami's deposition was precise and devastating, as he admitted that he carried out the assassinations of Sulochan and Chakradhari under Bhaktipada's order.

In a July 1994 letter, Tirtha explained, "I put full faith in him [Bhaktipada]. He ordered me to execute other devotees. I acted in the belief that I was serving guru and Krishna. I can say this: Chakradhari and Sulochan did not deserve to die as they did. No one had the right to pass judgment on them, slating them for death. This is the burden I must always live with." ¹¹⁶⁴

In addition to Tirtha, Tapahpunja (who had renounced his swami title) also implicated Bhaktipada in Sulochan's murder. He claimed that in February 1986, he had told Bhaktipada that Tirtha and Janmastami were hunting Sulochan in California. Tapahpunja explained, "He [Bhaktipada] was reflective. Then he turned to me and said, 'Maybe that's what Krishna wants.'" ¹¹⁶⁵

We should not forget that it is possible that Bhaktipada was "in the dark" regarding the plot to murder Sulochan, until after it happened. Tirtha himself later admitted that he never personally heard Bhaktipada authorize the murder of Sulochan; he only heard others tell him that Bhaktipada had authorized it. Tirtha's testimony was fabricated simply to "neutralize" Bhaktipada and put him in prison.

Tirtha admitted this in a letter to the author, "I never testified to anything. I never took the stand, except in K's [1996] trial. . . . I only said he met with me and Reid to discuss killing Chakradhari. The Sulochan affair never was discussed at K's trial. . . . As for K., he had

to be neutralized. It's only for that reason I stepped forward against him." ¹¹⁶⁶ In addition, by pointing out Bhaktipada as the primary person who ordered the murder of Sulochan, Tirtha simultaneously protected the other murder conspirators. Tirtha acknowledged, "I did 'take the rap.' I'm from the old school. You don't rat on your friends or accomplices." ¹¹⁶⁷

BHAKTIPADA PLEADS GUILTY

On April 18, 1996, Bhaktipada changed his plea from innocent to guilty. Rather than fight a losing battle in court, he pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud from the federal racketeering charge, but accepted no responsibility for the slayings of Chakradhari and Sulochan. He said, "The mail fraud happened while I was in charge of the community. Therefore I had something to do with it. It was not done at my insistence, but I was aware of it. Therefore, I take responsibility." ¹¹⁶⁸ Bhaktipada sighed, "Thank God it's over." ¹¹⁶⁹

Saudamani devi dasi, from ISKCON Philadelphia, expressed the opinion of most ISKCON devotees when she said, "There was God's law and there was secular law, and Bhaktipada obeyed neither. He [thought he] was above it." ¹¹⁷⁰ Bhaktipada, until the very end, remained defiant toward ISKCON. He said, "It's a religious war. They look on me as a demon who has contaminated the pure nectar that Krishna gave us." ¹¹⁷¹

On August 29, 1996, Bhaktipada was sentenced to thirty years in prison—the maximum possible sentence—for racketeering. Federal District Court Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr. in Martinsburg, West Virginia, also fined Bhaktipada \$250,000. Bhaktipada was unmoved. He told the press, "Not a blade of grass moves without God's purpose. I'm content in that. If He wants to put me in prison, I should not object any more than if he put me in a palace." ¹¹⁷² Thomas Westfall recalled the day Bhaktipada was sentenced:

When he [Bhaktipada] appeared for sentencing he tried—when the court asked to confess his guilt—he tried to make it seem as though he didn't really do anything, he was just pleading guilty to convenience. But the Judge made him “own” his guilt.

I was standing behind where Swami and his lawyer were standing as the Judge sentenced him. He clearly did not understand what the Judge said or he was still trying to manipulate the reality. As the Judge sentenced him to 360 months, Bhaktipada turned to the lawyer at his right and in his all-too-loud voice said “Thirty-six months? This has all been for thirty-six months?”

But then the lawyer leaned over and told him that it was 360 months and I could see him doing the math on that and realizing that it was thirty years. I think at that point he came to understand that his reign was over, the only people who would continue to believe in him would be the zealots whom he always had contempt for because they were “intellectual scatterbrains” (a term he once used to me about his followers).¹¹⁷³

For the next eight years, Bhaktipada served his sentence at the Regional Jail in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and at federal prisons in Springfield, Missouri, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Butner, North Carolina. In January 1997, Bhaktipada was locked down in solitary confinement for two weeks after his cell mate reported him to prison authorities allegedly for making sexual advances.¹¹⁷⁴

Amongst all the members of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan, Tirtha took the heaviest rap: life in prison. Tirtha had fallen from “hero” to “villain.” “I went from being a quasi-hero (by the community as a whole—later by Kirtanananda’s staunch followers) to an apostate and demon, and cast aside by all but a few. Kirtanananda had been taken down and I was expendable. It was doubly bad and painful for me. In prison for being influenced by Kirtanananda and then an outcast from the people I hoped to reconcile with. It was implicit that if I came forward it would ‘go a long way toward establishing a new relationship with my fellow Vaishnavas.’ I felt betrayed. Twice.”¹¹⁷⁵

Tirtha (who renounced his Swami title in 2004 in an attempt to appease ISKCON devotees who believed he was not a suitable candidate for the honor) regretted his actions which landed him a life sentence in prison. He apologized and begged forgiveness from the Vaishnavas in an October 2004 letter to the author:

I'm in prison for the remainder of my natural life. I will never be released. I am the person who must ultimately shoulder the blame. It is I who committed the acts. . . . I deeply regret my actions from that time on all counts. I was misled by my false ego, by others, and very mistaken about many things. It was all a great tragedy. My actions impacted a great many people. Parents, spouses, children and friends were impacted with shock, grief and personal loss. It is no small thing to take another life.

When I look back to that time, I find it difficult to believe I participated. I was a very different person then. I am reminded of who I was each day that I awake in prison. There are consequences. Mostly I regret any damage I may have caused to Srila Prabhupada's preaching mission. That is my deepest regret. I beg his forgiveness. I beg the forgiveness of all Vaishnavas. ¹¹⁷⁶

Kuladri, on the other hand, with the help of an expensive law firm (and perhaps a generous loan or gift from his wealthy family in Pittsburgh), cooperated with the prosecutors and received immunity in return for his testimony. Krishna-Katha also cooperated with prosecutors and received immunity. Bhaktipada spent two years under house arrest and eight years in prison. Tapahpunja served five years in prison. Sundarakar (the manager of Palace Press) also served time in prison for the 1991 RICO indictment. Dharmatma pleaded guilty to three counts of mail fraud, and served a one-year prison sentence in a Georgia penitentiary for his involvement in the copyright lawsuit. Two members of the conspiracy, Hayagriva and Gorby, had died in 1989 and 1990. Three other conspirators, Ramesvara Swami, Radhanath Swami and Janmastami, were ignored by the prosecution, and got away scot-free.

The Cover Up Continues

ONE MIGHT WONDER, “AT BHAKTIPADA’S 1996 retrial, why did Tapahpunja and Tirtha threaten to implicate their master in the murder plot, if they loved him so much?” First, they obviously had lost their faith in him as a spiritual authority, therefore their undying love which they had previously professed so ardently had evaporated. Second, they now knew that their former spiritual master was dangerous, a pretender, a cheater, perhaps even a madman. Rather than accept a generous plea bargain from the government, Bhaktipada decided to fight what could have been a losing battle in court; consequently he put a substantial portion of the community under risk of forfeiture. Bhaktipada had to be stopped by any means. Tirtha confirmed, “As for K., he had to be neutralized. It’s only for that reason I stepped forward against him [and admitted he ordered the murders of Chakradhari and Sulochan].”¹¹⁷⁷

But what about Radhanath Swami? The prosecution seemed to be ignoring him. We should not forget that both Tapahpunja and Tirtha were extremely close to Radhanath Swami. If Tapahpunja and Tirtha put the blame on Bhaktipada, where the prosecutors wanted it, this diversion might have increased Radhanath’s chances to get away scot-free. It seemed to work at the time.

It is not hard to see the value, for some of the conspirators, in keeping secret Radhanath Swami’s involvement in the murder. In 1994, Radhanath became a certified ISKCON guru, based in Chowpatty, Mumbai, but

he also exerted considerable influence in the politics at New Vrindaban. He served as the co-GBC representative for New Vrindaban with Bhakti-Tirtha Swami (1995-1999), sole GBC representative (1999-2002) and co-GBC representative with Malati devi dasa (2002-2007).¹¹⁷⁸ Only after Janmastami created a dark cloud of suspicion regarding Radhanath's past when he accused the ISKCON spiritual master of conspiring to murder Sulochan (described later in this chapter) were Radhanath's New Vrindaban GBC duties terminated.

In 1998, after Tapahpunja was released from prison, he took charge of about twelve acres of New Vrindaban land to establish his nonprofit Small Farm Training Center and organic garden. Gardening was one of Tapahpunja's great loves. Could Radhanath have helped, behind the scenes, to allow his friend, a convicted felon, to establish and maintain such a garden for sixteen years on ISKCON property and with ISKCON funding?¹¹⁷⁹

One inside source indicated that Radhanath Swami allegedly pays Tapahpunja a monthly "allowance" of \$2,000 per month as "hush money." A devotee who asked to remain anonymous reported, "Radhanath pays Tapahpunja \$2,000 a month to keep quiet about stuff he knows about the Sulochan case. Tapahpunja's wife [Kamalavati /Elicia Heller] told this to her sister (who in turn, told it to my wife), as Radhanath had threatened to stop paying because of something Tapah said against him."¹¹⁸⁰

KULADRI RETURNS TO NEW VRINDABAN

In 2000, another prominent member of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan (who pleaded guilty to a federal charge),¹¹⁸¹ Kuladri, returned to New Vrindaban. At that time he began serving as New Vrindaban's full-time general manager (with essentially the same duties as a temple president), with a salary alleged at \$80,000 to \$100,000 a year (an enormous sum by most devotee standards; some New Vrindaban residents subsist on only \$5,000 per year). He commuted daily about 120 round-trip miles from

his suburban home in Mount Lebanon Township, Pennsylvania (near Pittsburgh). Kuladri would certainly keep quiet about his knowledge of Radhanath's involvement in the murder of Sulochan, in order to maintain his lucrative position. When I called Kuladri on the phone (c. 2005) and asked him for an interview about Sulochan, he responded, "I do not want to talk about that." That was the last time I spoke with him.

One source suggested that Radhanath was influential, indeed "insistent," in bringing Kuladri back to New Vrindaban. Tirtha noted, "I was initially surprised to learn that Kuladri was brought in as the temple president. . . . I think at the time I considered it a mistake, given how close he was to the former problems. Even so, Kuladri is an expert administrator, though his style is not very warm. I only know that Radhanath Swami was insistent upon getting Kuladri. He seems to have a lot of faith in his abilities." ¹¹⁸²

Soon, bigger and more important positions began opening up for Kuladri. In 2006, as noted by Anuttama (Geoffrey Walker), a spokesman for the GBC Oversight Board, Kuladri was "requested by the North American GBC leadership to be more directly involved in . . . [the] development of a North American Office, and fund raising for a multitude of strategic initiatives. . . . To balance these two essential areas," Anuttama explained, "Kuladri prabhu will now be officially splitting his time between New Vrindaban and North American ISKCON. In short, Kuladri is resigning from the New Vrindaban Board and any daily management functions connected to New Vrindaban. He will continue as head of the [New Vrindaban] Fund Raising department and will oversee key legal issues that currently exist, including the Turley suit. And, of course, he will continue to consult with the GBC Board on critical issues. We expect that Kuladri will spend about one-half of his time on New Vrindaban duties." ¹¹⁸³

In 2011, Kuladri was appointed as the Divisional Director of Legal, Accounting, and Regulatory Compliance for ISKCON. Kuladri promised, "I will work to ensure the Society's compliance with legal, accounting,

and regulatory requirements as well as overseeing the incorporation of ISKCON's affiliates, among other services.”¹¹⁸⁴

Today Kuladri serves as Convener-Secretary for the ISKCON GBC North American Executive Committee Property Office.¹¹⁸⁵ He also serves as an advisory board member and an ISKCON liaison for Krishna West, the preaching project inaugurated by Hridayananda Goswami which attempts to present Krishna consciousness in a manner which may be more palatable to Westerners. The Krishna West website noted, “As the Divisional Director of ISKCON Global Compliance and a legal advisor for the ISKCON North America General Counsel, he [Kuladri] has faithfully served ISKCON in various capacities for over 40 years as a senior disciple of Srila Prabhupada. . . . He is the current Executive Director of Share Your Care, Inc., a nonprofit health organization that supports various medical facilities in India, including Bhaktivedanta Hospital, Barsana Eye Camp, Vrindavan Hospice, etc.”¹¹⁸⁶

When certain members of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan were granted powerful positions in ISKCON, some godbrothers who knew of their involvement in the assassination plot were greatly disappointed, if not shocked. During the summer of 2008, the former headmaster of the New Vrindaban gurukula, Sri-Galim (Gary Gardner; today known by the name “Sri G.”)—who, around 1997, had been banned from residing in or visiting New Vrindaban because of accusations that he had physically abused and sexually molested gurukula boys—complained bitterly to the author, “I don’t see why I am not permitted to visit New Vrindaban, when Kuladri—who was a key figure in the murder of Sulochan—is not only allowed on the property but also was given a high-paying position in management. It’s just not fair.”¹¹⁸⁷

Tirtha also thought Kuladri’s appointment “particularly hypocritical.” From prison, Tirtha explained, “I find it particularly hypocritical for certain highly-placed persons in ISKCON to continue pillorying me over my ‘crimes’ when Kuladri is given a free pass. If the acts I did were so terrible how can the people who encouraged and facilitated me to commit

them be spared? Again, not once did Kuladri or anyone else in New Vrindaban ever approach me to say, ‘Don’t kill Sulochan,’ or ‘I think this is a bad idea.’ . . . I trusted Kuladri’s judgment and counsel during those difficult and troubling times. Yet the end result was that I was betrayed. Not only was I misled into thinking Sulochan was such a great threat to New Vrindaban but I was used to do their dirty work and later discarded as the fall guy. . . . New Vrindaban was taken over by gangsters. Kuladri was among those of his own ilk. Now he’s a GBC man?”¹¹⁸⁸

Rochan, the former Seattle temple president and regional secretary for Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, and a prominent member of the Guru Reform movement who had fought against the zonal acharyas, was also disturbed by Radhanath Swami and Kuladri’s promotions to powerful positions in ISKCON. In an editorial published by *Sampradaya Sun*, Rochan explained, “Because of what happened with Kirtanananda, New Vrindaban is a bigger than life story. But at the same time, readers have to understand that the New Vrindaban drama wasn’t an isolated incident, by a long shot. From my point of view, allowing people like Radhanath and Kuladri back into ISKCON, what to speak of Bhavananda [the ISKCON “guru” who was disciplined by the GBC in 1986 for illicit homosexual encounters with boys and young men, and who today serves as the Creative Director for the proposed 95-million-dollar Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, slated to be built at ISKCON Mayapura, India],¹¹⁸⁹ is just rubbing salt in the wounds for all the Srila Prabhupada disciples who were sacrificed on account of these GBC men wanting to maintain their Zonal Acarya system for as long as they did.”¹¹⁹⁰

THE DARK AGE OF NEW VRINDABAN

The period from approximately 1992 to 1997 was called by some Brijabasis the “Dark Age of New Vrindaban,” because of extreme poverty. Several hundred residents had defected between 1986 and 1994 (the population dropped from a reported high of 700 in 1986 to less than 100 eight years later), and the community was not making enough money to make

ends meet. Due to legal pressure, the fundraising “Scam-Kirtan” traveling “pickers”—once the cash cow of New Vrindaban which brought in 12.5 million dollars from 1981 to 1985—could no longer use copyrighted logos on bumper stickers and hats.

Any money that came in, such as from the Far-Eastern “pickers” in Singapore and Malaysia, was channeled to Bhaktipada’s legal fund. The cows were neglected; many died. Income had decreased to such an extent that New Vrindaban could no longer pay their electric bills: Prabhupada’s Palace was cold and dark. The old steady revenue sources from traveling “pickers,” donations from Indians, and Palace tourism had decreased to next-to-nothing.

Ven Sharma, the narrator in Jacob Young’s documentary film, *Holy Cow, Swami*, broadcast by the West Virginia Educational Broadcasting Authority, noted, “Back in New Vrindaban, there are many sincere and honest devotees who are trying to pick up the pieces of their shattered community. It will not be an easy task. The income from tourism is down. The old sources of funding are gone forever. The grand cathedral that the Swami envisioned is a shell. The heavy machinery purchased for its construction lies rusting in a field. The place is financially crippled and faces the possibility of more fines and forfeitures. There has been no electricity in the Palace of Gold for months. Worst of all, New Vrindaban’s reputation has been ruined by the Swami [Bhaktipada].”¹¹⁹¹

During this time, the prevailing philosophy at New Vrindaban was: “Every man, woman, and child, for himself or herself.” Devotees survived by becoming scavengers, individually and collectively. Anything of value was appropriated (with or without community sanction) and sold, including:

- hundreds of acres of land
- bulldozers, excavators, dump trucks
- the six large bronze bells in the bell tower
- a treasure chest of gold buried behind Bahulaban (probably Far-Eastern sankirtan collections which were buried, rather than

deposited in a bank, to prevent the government from confiscating the Laksmi)

- the steel from the Mahadvaram gate (sold for scrap metal)
- the murti of Jesus Christ in the temple (when Bhaktipada heard about the sale of Jesus, he quipped, “How much did they get? Thirty pieces of silver?”)
- the four deities of Ramachandra, Sita, Laksman and Hanuman (sold to a temple in New Jersey)
- Malini the elephant (sold to a circus)
- the two organs (the M. P. Möller pipe organ and the Allen electronic organ) in the temple (sold to churches in Ohio).

Even the musical instruments in the temple orchestra disappeared: the harpsichord, the timpani, the chimes hanging in a gold-plated frame, the double bass and the accordions. Janmastami, who had, between 1989 and 1995, contributed an undisclosed but substantial ¹¹⁹² amount of money to Kirtanananda Swami and New Vrindaban from the profits from his flower-selling business in Washington, D. C., noted, “It was at this time that many devotees who worked for me on the street, formerly expressing strident love for Kirtanananda Swami, started taking ‘a weekly paycheck’—an occasional day’s sales (I was robbed!), and Uttamauja [David Allen, a long-time New Vrindaban cow herdsman] once even took an entire Valentine’s Day sales from his stand, over \$5,000.” ¹¹⁹³

JANMASTAMI THREATENS RADHANATH SWAMI

Amongst all of Bhaktipada’s disciples, Janmastami could be the most livid and fanatical. Not one to mince words or exhibit tact or diplomacy, he warned those whom he thought had rebelled against or blasphemed his spiritual master to prepare for “reaction time.” During a community meeting at New Vrindaban in October 1993, after I spoke about Bhaktipada’s alleged sexual activities with boys and teenagers, Janmastami said nothing, but his wife, Mother Merciful (Shirley Shepard Sinkowski), casually reminded us of the *Srimad-bhagavatam* verse (4.4.17), “One should by

force cut out the blasphemer's tongue and kill the offender," and offered her purport: "According to sastra, my husband and I have the right to kill half the people in this room." ¹¹⁹⁴

When Janmastami's wife spoke to the assembly, I had no fear of having my tongue amputated or witnessing a massacre at New Vrindaban; I knew both of them well enough to know that their bark was worse than their bite. ¹¹⁹⁵ However, others at the assembly were not as undaunted. One devotee present at that town meeting took Merciful's retort very seriously and wrote to Assistant District Attorney Michael Stein in an effort to prevent violence at New Vrindaban:

There is a devotee here [at New Vrindaban] named Janmastami dasa who is extraordinarily fanatical toward Bhaktipada and believes, "He can do nothing wrong," and anyone who says or thinks otherwise is a blasphemer who would, according to Janmastami's understanding, can be executed by scriptural injunction. His wife, Merciful dasi, is of the same mentality. Recently in a community-wide meeting she publicly commented that, "We (her and her husband) have the right to kill half the people in this room."

At the present, however, their chief target is Hrishikesh dasa (Henry Doktorski). He has been a very loyal disciple of Bhaktipada's for many years and has been the musical director at the temple since Bhaktipada began changing our worship services at the temple. Hrishikesh has very dramatically taken up the role of exposé of Bhaktipada's inebrieties. Personally, I believe he is only scratching the surface, but that also his life is potentially in danger here. This is the same business Sulochan dasa had set himself to when he was shot in the head in Los Angeles. . . .

Just today this afternoon (Saturday, October 23), one of the devotee women commented to Merciful that her husband's attitude was causing anxiety among members of the community that he might kill someone. Her immediate response was, "Oh, he wouldn't do that unless Krishna or Bhaktipada told him to." ¹¹⁹⁶

Radhanath also claimed that Janmastami threatened him, “In 1993 New Vrindaban community members were informed about the spiritual problems Kirtanananda Swami was having. Janmastami dasa was furious, and told me that Kirtanananda Swami was the perfect acharya, and that anything said about him was all vicious lies. He said he held me responsible for being the leader of a conspiracy against Kirtanananda Swami and that I would be ‘destroyed.’ Since then he has repeatedly threatened me and other members of the New Vrindaban community.”¹¹⁹⁷

During a tape-recorded October 2008 telephone conversation with a former ISKCON gurukula student, Saunaka-Rsi, Radhanath spoke in more detail about his confrontations with Janmastami:

This one person Janmastami . . . somehow or other, he just hates me (laughter). In [September] 1993, Kirtanananda Swami did certain things [homosexual activities]. . . and I saw how it [negatively] affected people and I . . . stood against it. I tried to do it in a way that it was reasonable, and Janmastami, at that time, was very, very fanatical; he was the most fanatical follower of Kirtanananda Swami, and there were certain things [that] happened when Kirtanananda Swami admitted [to] improper behaviour that he did . . . with [illicit] sexual behaviour (and he [Kirtanananda] admitted it to me and . . . about a dozen of the leaders of the community) and asked everyone to help him [to follow the regulative principles].

So we had a meeting of the community and kind of explained it [Kirtanananda’s compromised position] to them [the Brijabasis] and we tried to do it in a very respectful way, and then Janmastami and a couple of others—he [Janmastami] was the leader—just went to Kirtanananda Swami and (I think Kirtanananda Swami was afraid of him because he had brain damage . . . from being attacked [by Triyogi in 1985]). . . . Janmastami basically said [to Kirtanananda Swami that] “These men are all liars who are all conspirators against you and we know you are perfect,” and Kirtanananda Maharaja then said, “Yes, they are liars and conspirators and I am perfect.” (laughter)

At that point, Janmastami came to me, just angry as fire, and said, “You have lied against the Jagad-Guru [the Guru of the World]. In doing so, you have blasphemed him, and you will be destroyed. I will destroy you.” And he just put his finger in my face and was just shouting at me (and he’s a really huge guy, too). He was shouting, “I will destroy you. You will be destroyed. You have lied. You have hung an innocent man.” And he would not let me say a word. . . .

And through the whole [Winnebago Incident] thing, I saw that . . . Kirtanananda Swami is now denying the things [fall-downs] that he had already admitted to, and had really created chaos, and I basically just told devotees, “I’m leaving here. I’m not coming back.” So I left, and eventually ended up back in Bombay, and Janmastami was sending me heavy hate letters, and I said, “I’m not planning to come back, so don’t worry about it.” (laughter)

But . . . [after I returned to ISKCON] the GBC wanted me to go back [to New Vrindaban]. He [Janmastami] was totally outraged when I did go back. He was saying I was a liar, that Mother Earth can tolerate the burden of anyone but someone who is a liar, and I remember Nityodita [Swami: Carlos Ordonez] and I were walking in the parking lot and he [Janmastami] came up to me . . . in his car (his wife was with him) and he screamed in my face and he said, “Even if Kirtanananda Swami had . . . full sex with ten thousand children, he’s still the guru of the universe, and if you don’t accept that you’re going to hell.” He’s really a madman, and you can ask Nityodita prabhu about that. . . . We were standing together and we just kind of walked away. (What can you do?)

And then . . . I went back to India and when I was in India . . . Tirtha . . . lost faith in Kirtanananda Swami . . . and he actually testified with the prosecutor attorney and . . . explained what really happened [how Kirtanananda Swami ordered the slayings of Sulochan and Chakradhari] and at that point Janmastami . . . (because he was so fanatically for Kirtanananda Maharaja) . . . fanatically flew against me when I went into New Vrindaban and .

. . . just like he was going to beat me: he was just shouting at me and he said . . . “You’re responsible. You’re the one that told Tirtha to testify like this.” I had absolutely no communication with Tirtha. I was living in India (laughter). Honestly! ¹¹⁹⁸

Radhanath Swami certainly made a brave attempt to assert his innocence of anything and everything during his tape-recorded conversation with Saunaka-Rsi, but his remark about being in India when Tirtha lost faith in Kirtanananda Swami (and not communicating with Tirtha in prison) was contradicted by Tirtha himself, as we discovered in the previous chapter. Tirtha claimed Radhanath Swami personally visited him in prison soon after the Winnebago Incident and told him all about Bhaktipada’s illicit homosexual activities with teenagers. Because the news came from Radhanath Swami, it carried much greater weight, and Tirtha lost his faith in his spiritual master.

“Right after the Winnebago Incident,” Tirtha explained to the author in a 2008 letter, “Radhanath Swami came to visit me at the old Moundsville prison, to break the news to me. I remember being disappointed, but not shocked. . . . Because it [the news] came from Radhanath Swami it carried much greater weight.” ¹¹⁹⁹

RADHANATH SWAMI’S “GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARD”

Janmastami replied to Radhanath’s statement above, pointed out a memory slip, and alleged that Radhanath’s father, Gerald Slavin in Chicago, whom Radhanath admitted had become “quite wealthy” after establishing an automobile repair business in the 1970s, ¹²⁰⁰ had used his political and financial influence to help his son escape charges of conspiracy to murder Sulochan. Janmastami explained:

In this phone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi, Radhanath Swami makes a number of False Swearings that we can quickly note. One, it was Chandramauli Swami (Frank Chiefa) that was with Radhanath Swami, not Nityo. . . . Radhanath Swami factually reports the “Any

Heavy Burden But a Liar” story, which I admit to accusing him of, but there is one important back story that Radhanath Swami, conveniently for him, leaves out. . . .

The back story concerns “our” (me and Radhanath Swami) having to go before the West Virginia Grand Jury (shortly before our parking lot confrontation), along with Paramahansa-Krishna Maharaja [P. K. Swami, Phillip J. Jones] and Brooke Brody [Bhakti-Rasa Swami, formerly Buddhi-Yoga dasa]. This was sometime in the spring of 1993 while I was living at NVC and leasing the Big Greenhouse. We all needed lawyers and New Vrindaban Community decided to cut us off financially, while spending millions hiring the high-level attorney Great [Greta] Van Susteren for Top Buffoon [Tapahpunja Swami].

I was, at that time, a “one-time friend” to Radhanath Swami, which meant I was also “friends” with Garga-Rsi (David Waterman), Sudhanu (George Weisner), Sri-Galim (Gary Gardner) and Gaura-Shakti (Gregory Carlson), along with New Vrindaban’s in-house legal counsel, Tulsī (Dick Dezio). It was from Kirtanananda Swami’s short list of lawyers that I got Allan N. Karlin from Morgantown to defend P. K., Buddhi-Yoga, myself, and Radhanath Swami. We were all called before the same Grand Jury (P. K. and Buddhi on copyright, and Radhanath Swami and I on Sulochan), and we responded, the four of us, together after having been served.

But this is the exact point where Radhanath Swami showed his true colors and turned on Kirtanananda Swami. Even after this, I still thought “We’re all on the same side!” and although Radhanath Swami knew that was no longer true, he just wasn’t ready to admit it publicly yet. After we were subpoenaed, Radhanath Swami went to Chicago to see his father, and after that, getting to talk to him was nearly impossible. My wife Shirley had tried for weeks to get an appointment (we finally got one, but Radhanath Swami wanted bodyguards present), and that was just days before the “Radhanath Swami Confrontation” in the parking lot, he with Chandramauli Swami, and I in the van with Shirley.

When I asked later what was Radhanath Swami's status, Garga-Rsi became very secretive, saying only that it was "taken care of." Later, Sri-Galim gave me some bits and pieces of the story, he being a Radhanath Swami confidant, before Sri-Galim turned on me in his attempted "Return to ISKCON." Sri-Galim told me Radhanath Swami had gone to Chicago to see his dad, and all Radhanath Swami's problems went away. The Chicago FBI Office appeared to be the conduit for Radhanath Swami's "Get-Out-of-Jail-Free Card" that was played there.

Anyway, we huddled with Radhanath Swami and Garga-Rsi, and we agreed we would get back together when people examined their options, and that was the last we ever heard from Radhanath Swami, until United States Attorney Michael Stein said, "How you doing, Radhanath?"—patting him on the back outside the courtroom in the Federal Building in Wheeling.

I had to take the money out of my flower business to pay everyone's legal bills, New Vrindaban having been cash-starved since the Sankirtan Scams went south, with both P. K. and Buddhi-Yoga promising to pay us back. When I was forced to file twenty odd small claims lawsuits against deadbeat loans I was holding, I left both of them off the list, their loyalty to Krishna seeming to me to be more important than recommended processes. ¹²⁰¹

Janmastami concluded, "Radhanath Swami has posited, 'I do not know why Janmastami hates me,' to which I must respond, 'I do not hate Radhanath Swami, but rather the Lie that he has made of his motivations,' and that would be closer to The Truth." ¹²⁰²

I do not know whether Janmastami's story about Mr. Slavin in Chicago using his political and financial influence to protect his son is true or false, but I do know for a fact that Mr. Slavin helped his son out when needed. For example, Radhanath Swami carried a credit card given to him by his father to use in times of emergency. He used this credit card in September 1993 when he left New Vrindaban under duress shortly after the Winnebago Incident. ¹²⁰³

Radhanath personally told me this during a May 16, 2003, conversation at New Vrindaban, when he said, “[The morning following the September 6, 1993 Winnebago Incident] Garga-Rsi drove me to the Pittsburgh International Airport in his pickup truck, where he dropped me off. As I wandered into the terminal, I had no idea where I would go. I knew I just needed to leave New Vrindaban and get away. I prayed to Prabhupada, ‘What should I do? Where should I go?’ I looked up at the flight information display board listing the departing flights and decided I would fly to England. I paid for my one-way ticket using a credit card my father gave me for emergencies. Once in London, I took shelter at the Gaudiya Math, and finally ended up in India at the Chowpatty Bombay temple [which had been my principle home preaching base since 1986.]”¹²⁰⁴

JANMASTAMI THREATENS NEW VRINDABAN RESIDENTS

In time, Janmastami also lost his faith in Bhaktipada. His deranged devotion had finally been turned by one of his assistants (a former gurukula boy who worked for Janmastami’s sidewalk flower-selling business), who convinced him that the rumors about Bhaktipada were true: their “spiritual master” had been having clandestine sexual relations with the teenage boys for many years. Janmastami recalled, “Hari-Venu [Gerardo Altamirano] told me to stop defending K Swa, that I looked like an asshole, because everyone else in the world knew it [the rumors] was true but me!”¹²⁰⁵ Janmastami then began threatening those who had once supported Bhaktipada. Tapahpunja remembered Janmastami’s “death threats”:

Janmastami’s death threats were of two kinds, one verbal and the other rants written on postcards that he regularly mailed. To the best of my memory, his threats were veiled in what might be best described as third-person cryptic garble. The talk of violence and karmic retribution was clear and deliberate, but not expressed in a direct “I’m going to kill you” language.

His writing style was not full grammatically correct sentences, but rather a kind of ghoulish, madman rambling. His was the work of a crazy person obsessed with hate. The subject matter was always a string of insults, accusing Bhaktipada and his alleged “co-conspirators,” with dastardly deeds. Keep in mind that during this period of prolific writing, he was often drunk or stoned. In fact, he was arrested for possession with intent to distribute marijuana. I don’t know the details of his arrest but recall that he did no jail time. Hmm.

The devotees who received these threatening postcards—some devotees more often than others—were Jayamurari, Raghunath and Jamuna, Kuladri, Janmastami’s ex-wife Merciful and myself. I know this for a fact because those persons used to hand them over to me by the dozens. For a long time I saved them in a filing cabinet. As I recall, either Merciful or Dasaratha and Vrishni [David and Virginia Van Pelt] began communicating with the FBI. In fact, they may have had a sit-down meeting with the FBI, who were definitely keeping a file on Janmastami. He was definitely on their radar.

I kept the writing in a kind of chronological order and finally handed them over to “someone,” probably Dasa and Vrishni, who passed them on to the FBI. Once Janmastami realized he could reach a broader audience with the Internet, the postcard craziness stopped. He became the darling of the ritviks who regularly published his vomit in *Sampradaya Sun*.¹²⁰⁶

Radhanath Swami corroborated Tapahpunja’s claim, “He [Janmastami] terrorizes people emotionally. That’s his sense gratification. It’s a very ugly thing; what he does to so many innocent devotees.”¹²⁰⁷ However, when I spoke to Dasaratha on the phone to confirm Tapahpunja’s claims, Dasa could not recall anything specific about Janmastami’s alleged threatening letters, nor any communications with the FBI. Actually, he had very nice things to say about Janmastami, as will be seen later in this chapter.

JANMASTAMI LEAVES NEW VRINDABAN

In any case, within a year after the Winnebago Incident and Radhanath's hasty departure from New Vrindaban, Janmastami also left the community. In the summer of 1994, he moved, with his wife and child, back to Washington D. C. He explained, "This was the official 'Kirtanananda Swami Supporters Out, Now!' decision made by Adwaita [the "Mayor" of New Vrindaban] and others, so I took the decision as Krishna's will." ¹²⁰⁸

Janmastami still owned an apartment at New Vrindaban for which he had paid \$10,000 in construction costs. Although he had relocated to Washington D. C., he often visited New Vrindaban and stayed at his apartment. During the summer of 1995, however, he was asked to move out temporarily so that Indian guests could stay there. He explained, "Krupa-Maya (John Sherwood) asked me to move out for a summer, so they could 'accommodate guests,' giving me the cabin Jayamurari later moved into as a replacement. Jaya just moved in, and by the next summer I was not allowed back. No compensation for any of the four Life Memberships I purchased, or the \$10,000 'Apartment For Life.'" ¹²⁰⁹

In 1997, Janmastami's wife left him, taking with her their two young children, and returned to her parents in Avon Lake, Lorain County, Ohio. According to "Online Criminal Records Search for John Sinkowski," on March 26, 1999, he was charged with "Menacing by Stalking" in Avon Lake Municipal Court. Janmastami never traveled to Ohio to contest the charges. He explained, "When Shirley left with the kids, we spoke over the phone a couple of times (phone cards from a payphone in Littleton, West Virginia), and her complaint then, 'not getting enough quality time,' was about the same as why she left me in D. C. (her mother got 'three hugs a day' from her hubby every day they were married, and absent that, our marriage was not sanctioned by the 'Shepard Klan,' and therefore not valid in their eyes). I failed miserably in the 'three hugs department.'" ¹²¹⁰

Janmastami heard from Shirley's parents that she had filed for a restraining order against him, although he claimed, "Shirley swore there was no such order. So far as a 'restraining order,' I was advised by Shirley

that there was no such thing in effect (it may have been a trick by her parents to lure me in, I never made it to Ohio to find out), and Shirley even requested that I come to see the kids, back in the first days of the Parental Kidnapping charge that she and her overly wealthy parents arranged for, with the purchase of an expensive and influential lawyer, and the Ohio Family Court Judge they bought, issuing me instructions to stay so many feet from our children, the ones that Shirley and I raised in the D. C.-N.V. dichotomy, that was our brief time together.”¹²¹¹

Also in 1997, Janmastami moved from Washington, D. C. to a house in Littleton, West Virginia, near the Silent Mountain limestone quarry, which he had purchased a few years earlier for \$10,000. In the spring of 1998 he moved into public housing at Eagle Hollow Apartments on Pine Hill Road not far from the community. He explained, “I moved to Eagle Hollow (NVC’s new Pavana-ville, for poor people) in 1998, having no income and being homeless. I was evicted from there in 2004, for missing bed check more than three nights in the same month.”¹²¹²

JANMASTAMI ALLEGEDLY “ON THE RAMPAGE”

The author has a friend: a devotee scholar, a Prabhupada disciple no longer affiliated with ISKCON, who is simultaneously a Gaudiya-Vaiṣṇava sannyasi and a Roman Catholic anchorite. Due to his ecumenical perspective, he appreciated Bhaktipada’s Interfaith preaching and our western music during New Vrindaban’s Interfaith era, and he visited New Vrindaban on several occasions, especially during Interfaith festivals. I attended the 1992 fire sacrifice at the New Vrindaban RVC temple, conducted by Radhanath Swami, during which he was initiated into the Vaishnava sannyasa order. At the time, we thought that Radhanath was serving as a ritvik priest for Bhaktipada, who was incarcerated under house arrest in Warwood (Wheeling), but my friend recently insisted, “I never approached ‘Bhaktipada’ to give me sannyasa, and I never accepted him as my guru. As I specifically did NOT want to ‘take sannyasa’ from ‘Bhaktipada,’ I asked Radhanath Swami to give me my sannyasi name and to perform my ceremony.” He is a prolific preacher

and his academic studies have revealed many similarities between ancient world religions and Vaishnavism. This friend, whom I regard as a brilliant scholar and also an honest man, told me that he repeatedly received threatening phone calls and letters from Janmastami:

He terrorized me and my whole family for more than a year and we are still afraid of him now. We remember the year of hell that we experienced during which I received phone calls and then dozens of horrific death threats from Janmastami dasa, which only ended when he was arrested and jailed while on his way to commit a mass murder at New Vrindaban. You must never mention what I will tell you about this to anyone, because he is still the same dangerous psychopath as before, with a murderous obsession about Radhanath *and* myself, which, regarding myself, is based one hundred percent in the wild imagining of his own delusional mind. ¹²¹³

My friend, who will remain anonymous, claimed he received a hysterical telephone call from Janmastami's girlfriend. Janmastami lived for a few months with Janmasunya devi dasi (Cynthia Fitzpatrick), who had a daughter with Bimbadhara dasa (William Jones) and an apartment in a low-income housing complex in Glen Dale, West Virginia. His girlfriend warned my friend that Janmastami had loaded a vehicle with "many weapons and ammunition" and was on his way to New Vrindaban to "kill as many people as he could." My friend said he telephoned the Marshall County Sheriff's Office immediately, and that Janmastami was subsequently intercepted by law enforcement officials who found marijuana cigarettes in the vehicle.

On September 9, 1999, Janmastami was charged with "Possession [of a controlled substance] with intent to deliver," because (my friend said) "it was the easiest [way] to hold and prosecute him, due to his prior drug detainments and arrests." ¹²¹⁴ Janmastami claims that he smokes marijuana for "medical" reasons. According to "Online Criminal Records Search for John Sinkowski," Janmastami received a one-to-five year sentence for this offense, but was released on probation (as Tapahpunja noted earlier).

In an attempt to gather more evidence about Janmastami's alleged "rampage" with "many weapons and ammunition," I asked my friend if he had copies of Janmastami's threatening letters. He replied, "I gave the original threatening letters to various law enforcement agencies. I kept copies of some of them for years, but no longer have any (that I know of) now." ¹²¹⁵

When I spoke to Janmastami about this alleged rampage to commit mass murder, he claimed that he was in a vehicle with his friend Priyavrata, who had in his possession eighteen marijuana cigarettes. They were on the way to Washington, Pennsylvania, when they happened to be stopped by the police for a vehicle violation. Janmastami explained, "I was with Priyavrata, who was driving his pickup truck to Washington, Pennsylvania, to see if he could get a job as a driver for a local trucking company. It was a rainy day, and he had his headlights on. Unfortunately, one of his headlights was broken, and the police stopped him for driving with a dead headlight." ¹²¹⁶

Regarding the alleged vehicle filled with "guns and ammo" and his plan to commit "mass murder," Janmastami noted, "This is complete balderdash! The person who says this is clearly a liar. Consider the stupidity of the claim, 'a truck full of guns and ammo,' and the charge was 'possession of a controlled substance?' This is the epitome of exaggeration and slander. Where would I have gotten the money to purchase 'a truck full of guns and ammo?' If there had been any 'weapons and ammo,' along with the eighteen joints Priyavrata was carrying (his cigarette pack, his fingerprints, he rolled them), I would still be in jail. This is all defaming falsehoods." ¹²¹⁷

In an effort to corroborate my friend's story and confirm or disprove Janmastami's alleged "rampage," I telephoned the Marshall County West Virginia Prosecutor's Office in February 2017 and spoke to investigator Thomas Westfall (formerly a deputy for the Marshall County Sheriff's Office), who has kept a file on the Hare Krishnas for more than four decades. Westfall explained to me:

This is the first time [speaking to you on the telephone] that I ever heard that Sinkowski had loaded up a vehicle with weapons and ammunition with intent to commit a mass murder at New Vrindaban. If this was true, and if he was stopped by deputies and if marijuana was discovered, the deputies would have searched the vehicle thoroughly. If weapons were found, the deputies would have jumped on it and taken that car apart, looking for more. They would have confiscated the weapons, and proudly displayed the guns on the steps of the County Courthouse (so to speak). There is no way that Sinkowski would have gotten away with probation, in that case. ¹²¹⁸

Who should we believe? Should we believe my friend, who claimed that Janmastami had loaded a truck filled with guns and ammo and headed to New Vrindaban to commit a mass murder? Or should we believe the investigator for the Marshall County Prosecutor's Office, who never in his nearly fifty years of service in Marshall County law enforcement, heard about such a story?

Perhaps Janmastami, in a moment of anger, might have threatened to load a vehicle with guns and ammo and kill everyone at New Vrindaban. Perhaps his girlfriend might have freaked out and telephoned my friend (who, incidentally, lives two thousand miles from New Vrindaban). However, it appears that, if Janmastami did say anything like that, he never had any intention of following through. Janmastami, like Tirtha, liked to boast about his toughness. Perhaps he thought that making threats might increase his stature amongst the devotee community.

Janmastami noted, "Regarding these fictitious charges about me: there is enough about me that is true and awful. No need to make up bad stuff. Janmasunya, or Priya, or Sadie [the daughter of Bimbadhara and Janmasunya] would know that none of your friend's allegations were true. Regarding your Prabhupada disciple friend, I barely know the guy, other than he solicited cash from me. I have tax receipts he sent us for his 501(c)3 charity. I did send him some of the Dead Swami Club series of poems (Chinese Chandra [Choy] calls them 'Rap-Jabber'), but as each of my 'victims' seems to assert, they were

more ‘Warnings of Karmic Reactions,’ much more than any threats of personal attacks. I do not have to deliver them their karma; Krishna already does that perfectly Himself. That may well make any number of them fearful, but I am not the cause of their fear or their just comeuppance.”¹²¹⁹

One resident of Eagle Hollow, Mahajan dasa (Matthew Reif), told me during a March 2011 conversation that he thought Janmastami might still have tiny amounts of shrapnel in his body from wounds received during his Vietnam tour, and he theorized that the trace amounts of heavy metals might be negatively affecting his brain. Tapahpunja claimed that Michael Stein, the Assistant District Attorney who served as Prosecutor during Bhaktipada’s 1996 trial, said Janmastami was “the dredge of the earth.”¹²²⁰ Radhanath Swami also claimed Michael Stein spoke ill about Janmastami, “Janmastami has no credibility and he’s a very dangerous man. That’s what the prosecuting attorney [Michael Stein] said.”¹²²¹

RADHANATH SWAMI RETURNS TO ISKCON

Shortly after the Winnebago Incident, Radhanath Swami returned to his home base at Bhaktipada’s Chowpatty temple in Bombay, which he helped establish in 1986. Radhanath resumed his relations with ISKCON, and during the 1994 GBC meetings, he was welcomed back into ISKCON as an assistant GBC and initiating guru. During a March 1994 telephone conversation from India with New Vrindaban residents, Radhanath Swami explained:

I have nothing against Bhaktipada, but I simply cannot accept what he is doing. And I feel that it’s a terrible burden on his spiritual life to be keeping all these devotees outside of Prabhupada’s movement. And I don’t think there’s even a beginning of rectification for him until all of the people who are following or were following are again brought back into what Prabhupada wanted us to be. . . .

I went along with it for so many years, but I cannot do it any longer, because I don’t believe it’s right. . . . [Considering] all the pains

and all the austerities that Prabhupada went through to establish it [ISKCON]; we shouldn't take it so cheaply. He said, "ISKCON is my body." And we want to be an insignificant part of Prabhupada's divine body. ¹²²²

Why was Radhanath Swami able to so quickly regain his lost standing after seven years outside of ISKCON? It may have been in no small part due to his considerable influence at Bhaktipada's Chowpatty temple, which was maintained by hundreds of Bhaktipada disciples—including dozens of doctors and medical students, and two of the wealthiest men in India: Nathji (Dr. Narendra Desai, the chairman of APAR Industries), and Hridayananda (Hrishikesh Mafatlal, the chairman of the Arvind Mafatlal Group and the son of the industrialist Arvind N. Mafatlal)—and thousands of friends and supporters. ¹²²³

ISKCON certainly wanted the influential Chowpatty temple in their fold, and if Radhanath Swami was accepted back into ISKCON then he would be able to re-initiate hundreds of Bhaktipada's disciples. Many of Bhaktipada's disciples in India and New Vrindaban were, in fact, re-initiated by Radhanath Swami.

Regarding Radhanath Swami's return to ISKCON, it is important to note that during the February/March 1994 GBC meetings, the GBC specified one very important condition upon the appointment of Radhanath Swami as a GBC member and initiating guru: "provided the United States Government does not indict him in its case now pending against Kirtanananda Swami." ¹²²⁴

ISKCON leaders at the time believed it was possible that Radhanath Swami might yet be implicated in the murder of Sulochan as an accomplice. ISKCON leaders had every reason to protect themselves with this clause in their resolution; they knew who at New Vrindaban had participated in the murder conspiracy. In 1986, New Vrindaban leaders did not keep the murder conspiracy a secret; in fact Kuladri had boasted about it to several ISKCON leaders. When Bhaktipada went to trial in 1996, Radhanath

Swami was not indicted, in no small part perhaps due to the influence of his wealthy father and also because of Tirtha's devastating deposition which blew Bhaktipada's defense wide open and sealed his fate. One year later in 1997, the GBC appointed Radhanath Swami as a full GBC member.¹²²⁵

Not everyone in ISKCON, however, was pleased that Radhanath had been offered positions as a GBC member and ISKCON guru. On August 26, 1994, Dharmatma sent off a letter to his godbrother, Hamsadutta, "Recently, they [the GBC] made Radhanath Swami a GBC. With all due respect, as I do like him as a person, and he is a sweet devotee, but still he was involved to some degree or had knowledge of Sulochan's murder. I know this for a fact. Not only that, he supported K[irtanananda] Swami to the end, causing many devotees much anguish and suffering. My feeling is that he, like many of the others, is motivated by profit, adoration and distinction. It's too bad, but not at all surprising. A truly advanced devotee is a rare commodity."¹²²⁶

In 1998, the GBC provisionally readmitted New Vrindaban as a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, subject to annual reviews for two years.¹²²⁷ In 2000, the community was welcomed back into ISKCON with open arms. Also in 2000, on September 10th, the ISKCON Child Protection Office concluded a seventeen-month investigation and formally determined that "Kirtanananda dasa" had molested two boys.

On June 16, 2004, Bhaktipada was released from prison and went to live with his few remaining American disciples at the Interfaith Sanctuary/Radha-Muralidhar Temple at 25 First Avenue in New York City. On June 26th, he admitted that he had "broken the regulative principles" in a letter posted on his website (later removed). In August 2005, twelve years after the Winnebago Incident which split the New Vrindaban community, Bhaktipada was accused of attempting to fondle the genitals of a visiting young man during a private darshan. The residents of the Interfaith Sanctuary split into two camps: one believed the accusation was malicious rumor invented by envious ISKCON devotees, and the other believed the accusation was true and attempted to evict the "spiritual master" from the building.

TIRTHA'S BOOKS PUBLISHED BY NEW VRINDABAN PRISON MINISTRY

Tirtha, incarcerated at Mount Olive Correctional Complex in southern West Virginia, continued writing prolifically, and in 2005 the ISKCON Prison Ministry at New Vrindaban published *The Definitive Guide to Practicing Krishna Consciousness in Prison*, a guidebook for incarcerated convicts to help them practice Krishna consciousness. I served as Tirtha's editor and Chandramauli Swami, who had become involved in prison ministry programs some years earlier,¹²²⁸ wrote the Introduction for Tirtha's book. The book was apparently popular, for it was translated and published in Slovenian and distributed, along with Chandramauli Swami's own book, *Holy Jail*, to convicts in Slovenian prisons.¹²²⁹

In 2006, the New Vrindaban Prison Ministry published four more books by Tirtha: *Prisoner Me*, *The Process of Perfect Atonement*, *Losing The Mind*, and *Freedom From Fear*. One other book which Tirtha and I worked on, *The Six Goswamis* (a transcription of lectures by Radhanath Swami), was canned for obvious reasons.

Later that year, Bhakta Bruce Gatten, a friend of Tirtha's in Connecticut who seven years later in 2013 assisted in the editing and publication of Tirtha's autobiographical book *100 Monkeyz*, circulated a letter to devotees by e-mail. In the letter, he asked readers to write to the governor of West Virginia and petition him to allow Radhanath and Chandramauli Swamis to visit Tirtha in prison. Tirtha also sent a copy of the letter to me, and asked me to forward the letter to any devotee "who interacts on the Internet."¹²³⁰ Gatten wrote:

Tirtha dasa wishes devotees to read and, if they wish, distribute the following statement which they may send or e-mail to the Governor of West Virginia [The Honorable Joseph Manchin]:

"We deplore the fact that H. H. Radhanath Swami and H. H. Chandramauli Swami have been repeatedly denied access to the Mount Olive Correctional Complex on the pretext that a drug sniffing dog alerted to the presence of illicit drugs on their persons. This is a great insult and highly disrespectful to such exalted holy men of our religious

faith. Especially so when their only purpose for hoping to enter the institution was to uplift the suffering condition of the imprisoned men there. We ask that Your Honor look into this matter and put a stop to such discriminatory profiling.”¹²³¹

This letter indicates that both Radhanath and Chandramauli Swamis had “repeatedly” attempted to visit Tirtha in prison, but were denied entrance. This also suggests that Tirtha was/is very important to Radhanath Swami.

JANMASTAMI ACCUSES RADHANATH OF CONSPIRING TO MURDER SULOCHAN

In December 2006, Janmastami, one of the conspirators in the plot to murder Sulochan, broke his twenty-year silence and announced, in a letter published by the *Sampradaya Sun*, that in January, 1986, Radhanath Swami had ordered him to “neutralize Sulochan.” Janmastami explained, “In January of 1986, on my return to New Vrindaban, I was ordered by Radhanath to neutralize Sulochan. . . . I was not indicted because my only link to the Sulochan murder was through Radhanath. I swear that before KRISHNA’s Lotus Feet.”¹²³²

Why did Janmastami wait twenty years before he broke his silence? He claims that when he first acquired Internet access in 2006, he felt a need to confess some of the crimes he committed and witnessed during his service for Kirtanananda Swami and New Vrindaban. He considered himself something of a “Winter Soldier,” the title of a 1972 documentary film which chronicled the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit. This media event, sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, intended to publicize war crimes and atrocities by the United States Armed Forces and their allies in the Vietnam War, during which 109 Vietnam veterans, as well as civilian contractors, medical personnel and academics, gave testimony about war crimes they had committed or witnessed during the years between 1963 and 1970.

Janmastami explained, “I had no computer connection until 2006 (the postcards preceded the Internet access), but my goal in writing the

Sampradaya Sun article was to admit to the wrong doings that had been done, while seeking communal solutions to the organizational problems that we all observed taking place. As a Winter Soldier, after Vietnam, we confessed to war crimes, seen and participated in, as a form of self-cleansing over what we had been through. This article was my ‘ISKCON Winter Soldier,’ and they [most devotees] have taken it as an attack on Radhanath Swami or ISKCON personally, and nothing could be further from the truth. These things are done out of love: love for Srila Prabhupada, not the mundane desire to keep another unfit pretender sitting on Srila Prabhupada’s ISKCON Vyasasana.”¹²³³

Members of the GBC came to Radhanath Swami’s defense by vouching for his integrity and casting aspersions on Janmastami’s character. GBC member Ravindra-Svarupa explained, “I have had much . . . association with H. H. Radhanath Swami. In my experience, he clearly exhibits the symptoms of one advanced in sincerely cultivating the Holy Name. I am seriously concerned, on the other hand, about Janmastami Prabhu and Giri-Nayaka Prabhu [a devotee who attempted to exert pressure on the GBC to make a statement regarding Janmastami’s accusations against Radhanath Swami].¹²³⁴ From the evidence of these emails, it seems that they have wandered from the path [of devotion] into the quicksand swamp of fault-finding. If so, I pray to Srila Prabhupada and Krishna to send one of their agents to help these two devotees before they fall further and further into mortal danger.”¹²³⁵

Malati dasi, the co-GBC representative (with Radhanath) for New Vrindaban, personally requested me in an e-mail to help her defend Radhanath against Janmastami’s accusation. She knew that I was, due to my research, arguably an expert on New Vrindaban history, and she asked if I could help her prove that Radhanath, during the months preceding the May 1986 murder, had been out on the road, traveling between his preaching centers in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and not involved in the murder conspiracy. As I had discovered, a few years earlier, that Radhanath had indeed been involved in the murder plot, I replied, “Please call me on the phone. I don’t want to discuss this by e-mail.” She never responded.

About a week after writing to me, Malati's defense of Radhanath was published by the *Sampradaya Sun*. In her scathing attack on Janmastami, she compared him to a "mad dog." She explained, "With all due respects: The author [Janmastami] is a well known detractor who has written threatening letters against New Vrindaban and its residents for almost two decades. Some threats have been so direct that the FBI was notified and keep[s] a file on this person. His former wife and children live in fear of this person with restraining orders against him. To describe him in one word would be to say that he is deranged. He is like a mad dog. Can you have a reasonable conversation with a mad dog? It is impossible. Any intelligent person walks away."¹²³⁶

Tirtha in prison also defended Radhanath Swami and attempted to discredit Janmastami by calling him the "plumber's helper." At New Vrindaban, Janmastami used to assist Jayamurari by helping maintain the community's water and sewage systems. Later, Janmastami raised money for the community by his businesses in Philadelphia and Washington D. C. selling flowers and scarves. Tirtha thought he could help to discredit Janmastami by pointing out the lowly nature of his services to the community. Tirtha explained:

Everyone . . . knows who Radhanath Swami is. Thousands of devotees can vouch for his character. The same can be said of Umapati Swami [who, by the way, was stripped of his guruship and sannyasa status four years later, on February 28, 2011, for sexual abusing his young male disciples] and Kuladri [who, as we all know, was one of the main conspirators in the plot to murder Sulochan]. These devotees know only their service to Srila Prabhupada. . . .

Why would such an esteemed Vaishnava [Radhanath Swami] casually ask the NV plumber's helper to assassinate someone? To what end would that have benefited Radhanath Swami? Even on its face it takes an incredible leap to fathom why he or anyone would ask someone of Janmastami's caliber to do this. More likely, 'Here, go plunge out a stopped-up toilet, or go to Pittsburgh and sell scarves, or maybe flowers.' That is reasonable for the plumber's helper.¹²³⁷

In a letter to the author from prison, Tirtha defended Radhanath Swami, “Radhanath Swami never played any role in any criminal activity. No murder, theft, arson, etc. Kuladri I have shielded as far as possible, even after he betrayed me and reneged on his promise to take care of my family in case things went badly. . . . The government wasn’t interested in him anyway. They wanted Kirtanananda. . . . They really only wanted Kirtanananda. . . . Dozens of devotees previously approached me to please get rid of Sulochan, to prevent him from returning and killing Kirtanananda. Not one devotee ever said ‘Stop. Think it over.’ All urged me to do the needful.”¹²³⁸

We cannot help but wonder why Tirtha has defended and continues to defend Radhanath with such impassioned constancy, although the evidence indicates that Radhanath was certainly involved in the plot to kill Sulochan. What are Tirtha’s motives? What “benefits” does he receive from Radhanath Swami for his undying devotion? As explained earlier, we heard from a reliable source one reason why Tapahpunja so adamantly defends Radhanath: he receives \$2,000 per month “hush money.” Of course, this is not much for Radhanath, whose disciples include several billionaires, but it is a lot of money for Tapahpunja: \$24,000 per year. Could Radhanath also be providing funding for Tirtha’s inmate account? Prison is a difficult and austere place to live, but having a well-padded bank account can make a prisoner’s life much more pleasant.

Another thought: Radhanath and Chandramauli Swamis were denied access to Mount Olive Correctional Complex because a detection dog at the prison allegedly discovered the odor of drugs on their persons. Because of this, they were not allowed to visit Tirtha. Is it possible that the two sannyasis might have hidden some cocaine, or other recreational drugs, on their persons, with intent to deliver to Tirtha? The author, who personally has had much association with both Radhanath and Chandramauli Swamis, thinks this is unlikely, but also acknowledges (considering all the illegal activities devotees have done for “preaching”) that anything is possible.

RADHANATH DENIES INVOLVEMENT IN THE MURDER

After hearing of the allegation attested by Janmastami, Radhanath had some personal soul-searching to do. Should he admit that he conspired in a murder, or should he deny the accusation? What would be better for Prabhupada's movement? What would be better for him? During a visit to the South Indian ashram of his godbrother Bhakti Gaurava Narasingha Maharaja (formerly Jagad-Guru dasa), Radhanath confided to his godbrother, "What was I supposed to do under those circumstances in 1986? We were convinced that Bhaktipada was a pure devotee and that Sulochan was determined to murder him, so we thought we were obligated to stop some demon from killing a pure devotee by any means possible." ¹²³⁹

After consulting with his godbrothers, Radhanath decided to deny Janmastami's accusations. His personal response was published in the *Sampradaya Sun*:

I do not have the time, health, or energy to get into Internet debates, and as I'm trying to be a Vaishnava, I'm reluctant to defend myself from such assaults of character. But for the purpose of clarification, my comments are as follows:

In 1993 New Vrindaban community members were informed about the spiritual problems Kirtanananda Swami was having. Janmastami dasa was furious, and told me that Kirtanananda Swami was the perfect acharya, and that anything said about him was all vicious lies. He said he held me responsible for being the leader of a conspiracy against Kirtanananda Swami and that I would be "destroyed." Since then he has repeatedly threatened me and other members of the New Vrindaban community.

As far as what Janmastami dasa has written on the Internet, every single allegation against me is totally false. I was not involved in any criminal activity. On a personal note, I have nothing against Janmastami Prabhu and only wish the best for him. ¹²⁴⁰

JANMASTAMI ACCUSED OF LYING

One of my longtime devotee friends—the same person who claimed Janmastami’s girlfriend called him on the phone and said he had loaded a vehicle with guns and ammo to commit a mass murder at New Vrindaban—told me that Janmastami has persecuted him for no reason, and therefore, in his opinion, Janmastami cannot be trusted. In an e-mail to the author, he entreated:

As I am your true and loyal, affectionate friend, I am concerned about if and how much you have relied on Janmastami *dasa* for information. I am concerned because I have had some horrific personal experiences with him, which have not been made public, and I have also experienced being a target of his public character assassination. . . . I have learned that he continues to viciously *lie* about me, telling his trusting victims absolutely untrue things about me that they, in turn, believe and then pass on. . . .

I do not know if anyone else has heard any version . . . of what happened between Janmastami and myself, but because of my experiences with him, I cannot possibly find *anything* that he says about Radhanath, or anyone else, as credible. If he can imagine such utterly unreal and malevolent things about me and threaten my life repeatedly over such things, what is his motivation for his campaign against Radhanath? What *really* is fueling his hatred and continued accusations about Radhanath and about me?”¹²⁴¹

Janmastami also mailed some of his “Dead Swami Club” postcard rants to Bhaktipada in November 2002. Janmastami recalled, “KS was in prison in Butner, North Carolina, and there was rumor he was to be released, so I sent a portion of The Postcard Blitz to KS, as well as ISKCON.”¹²⁴²

Bhaktipada, in prison, replied to Janmastami on November 17, 2002, “Dear John, Thank you for your recent (undated) message, which I couldn’t decipher and didn’t try very hard. If you want to write me a Krishna conscious letter in plain English, I’d be glad to correspond with you for our mutual spiritual benefit. I will not again reply to your garbage, so save Krishna’s money. Your ever well wisher, Bhaktipada.”¹²⁴³

In another letter to Janmastami nine days later, Bhaktipada changed his tune, “My dear godbrother, . . . Thank you for your recent communications. . . . I love you, John, and only desire that you become Lord Krishna’s pure devotee.”¹²⁴⁴

JANMASTAMI: ALL BARK AND NO BITE

Despite Janmastami’s threats against Radhanath and others, time has shown that he has never physically hurt anyone. One long-time New Vrindaban resident and godbrother recalled, “Janmastami was uncouth and uncultured. It seemed he used the F-word six hundred times a day. He was not afraid to express his anger or rage. On the other hand, I never heard that Janmastami ever hurt anyone. In fact, he was very courteous and helpful to me when I once asked him for advice regarding maintenance work at the community.”¹²⁴⁵

Another long-time New Vrindaban resident and godbrother, Dasaratha dasa (David Van Pelt, the brother of New Vrindaban’s Temple Commander, Devananda), remembered, “Janmastami was an extremely hard-working devotee. I hardly ever saw someone who worked with such determination and steadiness for the spiritual master. I never had a problem with him. In fact, I felt that he inspired love in my heart; love for him and the spiritual master. Years later, he became angry at me for taking his wife to the Landmark Forum [a three-day intensive personal development seminar based on the teachings of Werner Erhardt—which happened to take place in Richfield, Ohio in June 1997—during which Shirley decided to divorce her husband], but that didn’t take away the admiration I had for him as a godbrother.”^{1246 1247}

I personally spoke for over an hour with Janmastami at a restaurant in Warwood, West Virginia, on January 19, 2007, and he seemed quite pleasant, sane and self-controlled, although he looked quite unkempt, like a homeless person, which he said he was/is. During my

visit with him, he related the story of his involvement in the murder of Sulochan, and it seemed to me that he was speaking truthfully. I actually enjoyed our visit, as I hadn't seen my godbrother for fifteen years. Since then I have been in contact with him by e-mail and telephone. I admit, his writing is eccentric and sometimes difficult to understand, but I have learned to understand him, and we seem to have no problem communicating.¹²⁴⁸

Regarding Janmastami's threats to New Vrindaban residents and other devotees: it is not a crime, as attested by Sulochan's attorney earlier in Chapter 10, to verbally threaten a person in West Virginia. During the last two decades Janmastami has not hurt a hair on anyone's head. He has a record of marijuana use, but no arrests nor convictions for violent acts. It seems to me that the devotees' fear of Janmastami has been greatly overrated, just as in 1986 the high-ranking New Vrindaban managers' fear of Sulochan was similarly overrated.

Is it possible that the discreditation of Janmastami was in part "engineered" to help assassinate his character? He was, after all, one of the few murder conspirators not in the "Old Boy's Club" (Kuladri, Tapahpunja, Radhanath Swami and Tirtha)—those who kept quiet about Radhanath Swami's involvement in the murder plot. If we dismiss Janmastami as a "madman," as Radhanath and Tapahpunja claimed, it would be very easy to dismiss his testimony implicating Radhanath in the murder of Sulochan. Janmastami responded, "I do not mind any references to myself as a 'madman,' because we all well know that by any standards of normalcy these days, I clearly am a 'madman.'" ¹²⁴⁹

For whatever it's worth, in an April 2011 article posted online in *Prabhupada News*, Janmastami announced, "We ask for the assistance, the mercy and the forgiveness of all those devotees that we may have offended throughout the years." ¹²⁵⁰

“FAITH IS BLIND AND IGNORANCE IS BLISS”

In December 2006, when Janmastami accused Radhanath of conspiring in the plot to murder Sulochan, I had already conducted much research for my forthcoming book about the history of New Vrindaban. I knew several persons besides Janmastami who claimed that Radhanath was involved in the murder plot, including two high-ranking New Vrindaban leaders: the director of sankirtan, who incriminated Radhanath directly, and the temple president, who incriminated him indirectly. A few years later, after reading through more of the voluminous Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive (some tens of thousands of pages), I discovered documents which revealed that the temple president had also implicated Radhanath Swami directly.

This got me to thinking: why is it that so many people (like myself, like Kuladri, like Tapahpunja, Tirtha, Janmastami, Radhanath Swami, so many hundreds and thousands of others) gave their hearts, minds, and bodies to a pretender who appeared to be saintly on the surface, but had dark and hidden secrets from his past and present which he covered up? Subsequently, I wrote an essay which expressed my thoughts about this phenomenon. In my essay, I did not accuse Radhanath of being a member of the conspiracy to murder Sulochan, although I believed the evidence against him was substantial. I merely wanted to point out that when one's mind and heart have been captured by a charismatic figure, when one develops great emotional investment and love for a person, one's capacity for reasoning and judgment becomes compromised. The true believer only acknowledges evidence which supports his or her beliefs and disregards evidence which contradicts his or her beliefs.

On March 20, 2007, *Sampradaya Sun* published my essay, “Faith Is Blind and Ignorance Is Bliss.” Two months later, while visiting New Vrindaban during the May Festival of Inspiration, Trivikrama Swami, a former San Francisco temple president and a leader of the 1985-1987 Guru Reform Movement, approached me and asked me why was I harassing

Radhanath Swami. I explained that I did not intend to harass him; I merely intended to point out that Radhanath had been deceived by Kirtanananda for twenty years, and perhaps many of us are still deceived today. ¹²⁵¹

RADHANATH ATTEMPTS TO CONVINCe DHARMATMA HE WAS MISTAKEN

In 2008, Radhanath Swami's autobiography—*The Journey Home: Autobiography of an American Swami*—was published. The 344-page hardcover book begins with his childhood in Highland Park, Illinois, and ends with a reunion with his parents in 1972, after he left India and before he came to New Vrindaban. In the "Afterword," he devotes one page to his twenty years at New Vrindaban, but he is careful not to mention the names "New Vrindaban" or "Kirtanananda."

In June of 2010, Radhanath Swami visited Dharmatma at his home in Alachua, Florida, and requested a private darshan. Radhanath then hounded his godbrother in his office for over an hour. He attempted to convince Dharmatma that he was mistaken when he testified that he had given money 24 years earlier to Bhaktipada and Radhanath, as described in Chapter 12, to help Tirtha and Tapahpunja escape to India. Dharmatma described Radhanath Swami's visit during a December 2016 telephone conversation with the author:

In June of 2010, Radhanath Swami called to arrange a meeting with me at my home in Alachua. This was unprecedented, so I immediately began wondering what it could possibly be about. Maharaja asked if we could speak privately, in the process excluding my wife, who has known him since the early 1970s at New Vrindaban.

What unfolded was a serious discussion that lasted over an hour wherein Maharaja tried to convince me that I was mistaken in my testimony wherein I had stated that he and Kirtanananda had come to the Sankirtan House [on Sunday, May 25, 1986] to collect money to be used to help Tirtha (Sulochan's murderer) leave the country. Maharaja used every trick in the book to coerce me to change my testimony even though I was thoroughly convinced of my recollection.

At some point I agreed to say that there was a possibility that I could have been mistaken, more because of his relentless persuasion and promises made to me, than anything else he said to convince me. Subsequent to this incident, and after more fact-finding and corroboration from a witness who was in the Sankirtan House at the time, and after refreshing my memory by seeing the timeline of the arrest of Tirtha and Tapahpunja, I stand by my original testimony. I was disappointed at the fact that Radhanath Swami was so concerned about his public image. ¹²⁵²

RADHANATH SWAMI DISCOURAGES SCHOLAR OF ISKCON

On August 16, 2010, *Sampradaya Sun* published my article, “Radhanath Swami’s Alleged Involvement in Sulochan’s Murder.” In the article, I quoted extensively from several trial transcripts with testimony from persons who claimed that Radhanath (and others) had been involved in the murder plot, such as (1) *United States of America, Plaintiff, v. CR 90-87 Keith Gordon Ham, Terry Sheldon, Steven Fitzpatrick, New Vrindaban Community, Inc., Govardhan, Inc., Cathedral of Healing, Inc.* (Martinsburg, West Virginia: March 1991), and (2) *Thomas Drescher Before the Federal Grand Jury* (Wheeling, West Virginia: August 11, 1994). In addition, I quoted from writings by Dharmatma and Janmastami, and personal interviews with three former New Vrindaban residents. ¹²⁵³

On September 14, 2010, one of the world’s foremost scholars of ISKCON, a Professor of Sociology and Religion who has written several books and dozens of academic articles about ISKCON—who I first met at the 2003 New Vrindaban Festival of Inspiration—arrived at Pittsburgh International Airport to meet with me to discuss co-authoring together a book about New Vrindaban. Seven years earlier I had given him a 300-page manuscript of my New Vrindaban history book-in-progress, from which he quoted liberally in his subsequent academic articles. He recognized that my research—based on my personal archive of New Vrindaban publications, letters, newspaper and magazine articles, trial transcripts,

and hundreds of interviews with devotees, plus the Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive—was very important, and he wanted to work together with me to create the first definitive history of New Vrindaban.

At our meeting, we formalized our agreement: I would give him unlimited access to my research and my archives, and he would write most of the book. We would work together editing and proofreading. Both my name and his would be acknowledged as the authors, and he would submit our manuscript to an academic press for publication.

One month later, the Professor of Sociology and Religion, after considerable work on Chapter One, sent me a “disheartening” message: he had received a personal telephone call from Radhanath Swami, who attempted to discourage him from collaborating with me. Radhanath had threatened, if the professor co-authored a book with me about New Vrindaban, his professional “integrity would be at stake.” The professor wrote:

Hi Henry.

Well there is trouble brewing about our co-authoring a book on New Vrindaban. . . . Today . . . I spoke on the phone with Radhanath Swami who heard . . . that we are working together on the New Vrindaban book. His concerns were as you might expect. He feels that your efforts to implicate him in the murder of Sulochan are off base. Because of this he wonders why I would work with you and wondered if the book we plan to write would not just be critical but wrong on the facts. He thought my integrity would be at stake to work with you.

I assured him that I was essentially writing the book using your manuscript in addition to my own information from interviews, etc. That I wasn't interested in the details of the murder, only what the consequences of it were for Kirtanananda and for the development of New Vrindaban.

He seemed to trust what I had to say but hopes that you won't be entering into the political arena with commentaries such as your August *Sampradaya Sun* article [“Radhanath Swami's Alleged Involvement in

Sulochan's Murder"] that will lead some devotees to reject our book out of hand. As you know, devotees don't read books, etc., even though they often are quick to reject anyway. I have seen this time and again with my own writing. . . . I just wanted to update you. . . . Obviously, this is disheartening. ¹²⁵⁴

On November 2, 2010, the Professor of Sociology and Religion formally terminated our New Vrindaban history book project. He wrote, "I am heartbroken that we couldn't do this together as I believe we make a good team and would have produced a great book." ¹²⁵⁵

"THE LADY DOTH PROTEST TOO MUCH, METHINKS"

I find it interesting that Radhanath Swami would spend so much time and effort to: (1) assert his "innocence" in a lengthy phone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi, (2) discredit Janmastami, calling him a "mad man," (3) attempt to get Dharmatma to change his sworn testimony, and (4) discourage a respected Professor of Sociology and Religion from co-authoring a book with me. What is he trying to prove? What is he trying to hide?

Ironically, his protestations remind me of a line by Shakespeare which Bhaktipada liked to quote: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." In other words: Radhanath's overly-frequent and passionate attempts to convince others of the matter of his innocence in the Sulochan murder plot (of which the opposite is true), makes himself appear doubly defensive and insincere.

And it is not only devotees on the fringes of ISKCON, or outside ISKCON, such as Rochan or Kailasa-Chandra, who are suspicious or distrustful of Radhanath. At least one Prabhupada disciple, a scholar and author who has faithfully served in ISKCON for over four decades and who today occupies an important position in a prominent European ISKCON temple, contacted me by e-mail and asked to read my manuscript. He told me he wanted to be prepared for a possible future catastrophic scenario in which knowledge of Radhanath's involvement in

Sulochan's murder became widespread throughout ISKCON. In such a circumstance, the GBC might be forced to demote him from his position as an ISKCON spiritual master. Such a scenario would certainly cause havoc amongst the tens of thousands of Radhanath disciples and supporters in Europe and the rest of the world, if it doesn't create a devastating schism in ISKCON.

In an e-mail to the author, the European devotee explained, "It [Sulochan's murder] was all thirty years ago and who is thinking about it? Not me, for one, and I would prefer not to. However, the talk surrounding this terrible event does not appear to be going away despite the passing of years. So now it seems that it may shortly become a problem for me and the people I look after pastorally. I have to prepare for the worst." ¹²⁵⁶

Even some of Radhanath Swami's own disciples have begun to doubt and abandon their spiritual master. Radha-Madhava Fitch (initiated as Rasikananda dasa)—the son of Prabhupada disciples Akhilananda and Mrgaksi—who designed the cover of Radhanath's autobiography and headed up his U. S. Media Team, noted:

Yes, I was the one who told Radhanath Swami he had to clean up his Internet image. I was his disciple at the time, and was in charge of his media in the USA. His book was coming out and when you Googled his name the only thing that came up was "Radhanath Swami Murder Conspirator" from the article on harekrsna.com. He just told me never to publish anything about him ever on the Internet as people just criticize him.

So I told him that, the first thing anyone does is that they search your name when they hear about you. Once you launch your book the first thing they will see is that article. I told him that you have to have positive information out there to counteract the negative. So he gave me \$2000 in cash and told me to take care of it. We built a website with a few videos with him in it, but it didn't have much impact. He then hired a P. R. firm from Seattle and paid them \$10,000 to create a bunch of fake websites about him with fake reviews written by a

non-devotees. That didn't work, so we engaged a hacker to try to take down the article, but that didn't work either. So he engaged his entire congregation in Mumbai and around the world to create as many websites as possible, and their devotional service was to every day go to all the websites and click on the links and write glowing reviews.

He also had them all sign up for pre-purchase and to all buy his book on Amazon as soon as it came out so it would become a bestseller. I met the brand ambassador for Google at Burning Man [an annual gathering, an experiment in community and art, that takes place in Nevada's Black Rock Desert], and introduced Radhanath Swami to him. I believe they have been in touch since and have made arrangements for his total Google domination in the search results.

Since that time I have become disillusioned with Radhanath Swami, and have seen that indeed the articles which he was trying to cover up are actually true, as I have witnessed from his character, behavior and choices. When my sister approached him to tell him about the child abuse she underwent, he covered it up and shut her down. I tried to speak to him about it, but he would not speak to me, even though I followed him around the entire world for a year. It was later confirmed by other contacts that he was directly involved in abusing them. I have since renounced any connection to him, and recommend anyone who has any interest in him to please do their research first. ¹²⁵⁷

As of this writing, Radhanath Swami has become an extremely popular ISKCON guru with thousands of disciples, undoubtedly tens of thousands. A Google search for "Radhanath Swami" yielded a result of over one million pages. In comparison, a Google search for "Bhaktipada," his siksa guru for twenty years, yielded only 30,200 pages. ¹²⁵⁸

STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON MURDER AND PERJURY

Readers may wonder: could the Sulochan murder conspiracy case be reopened? Could the three murder conspirators who were ignored by the prosecution—Radhanath, Janmastami and Ramesvara—be indicted and have to go to

court again? The author thinks the chances are negligible, although anything is possible. In West Virginia, there is no statute of limitations for a felony, and murder in the first certainly qualifies as a felony charge. However, perjury charges have a statute of limitations of three years—unless the defendant is proven to have run away from the state in order to avoid prosecution.

Sulochan's editor, Kailasa-Chandra, has very strong feelings about the men who conspired to murder his friend, a young devotee who attempted to expose the bogus "gurus," especially those who lied (and continue to lie) in order to escape punishment. One can avoid punishment from the government if clever and lucky. Nevertheless, can one avoid punishment from the Yamaduttas, the agents of Yamaraja, the Lord of Judgment after Death? In an e-mail to the author, Kailasa-Chandra explained:

If Radhanath's father succeeded in bribing prosecutors to look the other way (as Janmastami claims) or if Radhanath was granted immunity in exchange for testimony that the government believed it needed to convict Kirtanananda Swami, any immunity he received does not protect him from being exposed as both a perjurer and an accomplice to murder. Since the statute of limitations (for perjury) has apparently passed, he is protected from criminal prosecution. He is not protected, however, from being implicated up to his eyeballs in the murder of a dissident who, over time, has been proven to have been right.

Put the pieces of the puzzle together: Radhanath is the biggest saha-jjiya in "ISKCON" (although he certainly has competition there), and it takes some real *cajones* to pull off such a colossal hoax for so many years. This guy will do whatever it takes to survive—like the character in "Jack Reacher" who bit off his own fingers—but many of his followers, and even some of his disciples, will abandon ship once it becomes common knowledge that he facilitated murder. Radhanath deserved to serve a stretch in the joint for that (and for his perjury), but he'll apparently avoid it. However, something almost as painful for him may be destined, as the mill of justice takes time to finally start grinding, but, once it does, it grinds exceedingly fine.

I said to myself, right after the hit went down thirty-one years ago, that I was going to avenge Sulochan's murder. If by editing and proofreading this well-researched and documented book—*Killing for Krishna*—I can do so, then I am prepared (and trained!) to endure whatever the pretenders concoct as retaliation; after all, I have decades of experience at flying through all kinds of flak thrown at me by these blockheads and scumbags. ¹²⁵⁹

KIRTANANANDA SWAMI MOVES TO INDIA

On March 7, 2008, Bhaktipada, along with his longtime confidant Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami, left the U. S. permanently and moved to India. When I visited him in New York City three days prior to his departing flight, he told me personally, "There's no sense in staying where I'm not wanted." ¹²⁶⁰ In India, he made his headquarters at the Ulhasnagar Temple on the outskirts of Mumbai where his disciples built a suite for him on the roof of the temple which they called "Bhaktipada's Palace of Love." Bhaktipada's move to India generated mixed responses. One longtime friend of New Vrindaban, Patrick Garrison of Ithaca, New York, fondly reminisced:

Well, as the saying goes, "all good things must end." And so the circle closes, the cycle completes. Just as Prabhupada came to the West around the age of 70, now Kirtanananda returns to India around the same age. . . . Go in peace. May time heal those who were wronged, bring forgiveness to all where needed. In time, may the champions of orthodoxy find wisdom in your heresy, learning that love of God is as much spirit of the law as it is observing the lot of it. ¹²⁶¹

On the other hand, many who had suffered under Bhaktipada's 26-year reign, including a former New Vrindaban gurukuli—Rama-Lila Waterman, the daughter of Garga-Rsi and Mudhakari (David and Marie Waterman)—were considerably less favorable. Rama-Lila protested:

Here goes Kirtanananda off to retire peacefully in India on money earned by the blood, sweat, tears and bones of so many. The cycle isn't complete—give me a break!! The damage his regime inflicted is reverberating in my generation as we speak! Don't speak any flowery language to me—it is an insult.

ISKCON was sued [forty-four children of ISKCON filed a \$400 million lawsuit against ISKCON in 2000 for permitting alleged multiple forms of child abuse, including sexual, emotional and physical abuse] because of leaders like him who manipulated people for their own agenda. The cycle will be complete when he is suffering his sins in hell along with Hitler. I credit all the dysfunction NV is currently experiencing with him. It would have been a beautiful Vrindavan ideal if he had been out of the picture. ¹²⁶²

BHAKTIPADA'S GOLDEN YEARS

In India, during the last three-and-a-half years of his life, Bhaktipada enjoyed a life of comfort and leisure: he chanted Hare Krishna, honored prasadam, attended temple programs, gave occasional lectures, participated in Hari-Nam chanting in a nearby park with his disciples, read from *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-bhagavatam* and *Caitanya-caritamrita*, worked on his computer writing his own books, conversed with devotees and guests, took naps in his air-conditioned suite during the sweltering noonday sun, and enjoyed foot massages by adoring disciples. He had retired from all material activities and undoubtedly relished his new-found freedom from managerial headaches.

Bhaktipada in India was supported by competent and loving hands. During the previous 15-20 years, his disciples Madhusudan dasa Bapuji and Bhakti-Yoga Swami (formerly Raktak dasa), by dint of their own endeavor, had built impressive temples and guest houses in Ulhasnagar (Anand Vrindavan Dham) and Rishikesh (New Madhuban) costing many hundreds of thousands of dollars. There was no shortage of funding for preaching and maintenance. Both disciples were experienced preachers

and managers, and they didn't need to bother Bhaktipada for instruction or guidance, except perhaps only for the most esoteric spiritual matters.

In India, Bhaktipada had no pressing responsibilities; he was treated like an honored guest; like a beloved father or elderly grand-father. Indeed, he was regarded as a venerable grand-guru by most of the devotees at Ulhasnagar. Bhaktipada practically stopped initiating new disciples, except in Pakistan. New recruits were, as a rule, initiated by his charismatic disciple Madhusudan dasa Bapuji. If at times he appeared a little forgetful, or senile, or cantankerous, no one cared. They knew he was always thinking of Krishna, always chanting Krishna's name, always seeing Krishna in his "heart of hearts with the eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love," and therefore he was always treated with adoration, respect, and love.

Bhaktipada's disciples purchased an expensive and comfortable battery-powered motorized wheelchair for their spiritual master. Bhaktipada seemed to enjoy the mobility of the little four-wheeled scooter and liked to nimbly zip around through hallways and rooms and on the streets outside. His disciples took him to the market, they took him on Hari-Nam, they took him to scenic sites in the city, and on hot days they took him to public ghats for bathing. YouTube videos posted by Bhaktipada's Indian followers clearly reveal the great affection they lavished on their spiritual master.¹²⁶³

Sometimes Bhaktipada's disciples took their spiritual master on pilgrimages to holy places such as Vrindaban, Mathura, Nandagram, Raman-Reti, Dwaraka-Dhama, Rishikesh, Goa, and Badrinath. He lectured to thousands of people at pandal programs in Ulhasnagar, Rishikesh, Nagpur, Ambajogai, Parli-Vajinath, Majalgaon, and the Lord Siva Mandir in Karachi, Pakistan. They spared no expense to make him feel loved and Bhaktipada appreciated their love and he reciprocated in kind. His disciples once took him on a day trip to the Shangri La Resort and Water Park, where they enjoyed playing "toss the ball" with each other in the Olympic-size pool. When I heard about this loving pastime

I was reminded of the time thirty years earlier when I had the pleasure of swimming with Kirtanananda Maharaja and his associates in the summer of 1978 at the Radha-Kund pond across from the Bahulaban temple at New Vrindaban.

RADHA-VRINDABAN CHANDRA SWAMI

This life of leisure was only possible because of the loyalty and foresight of Bhaktipada's most obsequious sycophant, Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami (Ronald Nay, formerly Gopinath dasa), who had served as Bhaktipada's personal secretary, treasurer and confidant since 1975.¹²⁶⁴ At New Vrindaban, when Bhaktipada was accused of illicit sexual transgressions with boys and young men and had to move to Silent Mountain (1993), when he pleaded guilty to mail fraud and was imprisoned for eight years in federal penitentiaries (1996-2004), when he attempted to fondle the genitals of a visiting young man at the New York City Interfaith Sanctuary and some of his own disciples tried to evict him from the building (2005), and finally, when most of his American followers abandoned him (2008), it was RVC Swami who defended his master's reputation by writing, editing and publishing the *New Vrindaban Newsletter* (1992-1996) and *Bhaktipada Newsletter* (1996-1997). After 1997, news of Bhaktipada was mostly shared by e-mail correspondence.

These publications, which glorified the spiritual master, featured lectures, darshans, letters and excerpts from Bhaktipada's books, and were mailed to disciples in India, Pakistan and elsewhere. In India, newsletters were translated into Hindi, as most of his Indian and Pakistani disciples spoke little or no English. Bhaktipada's trusting and naïve followers—half-way around the earth from the turmoil and upheaval which afflicted his disciples in New Vrindaban and New York City like a fatal cancer—were protected and sheltered from doubt because of RVC's propaganda which tirelessly trumpeted Bhaktipada's innocence, purity, and unflinching faith in Prabhupada and Krishna. RVC carefully cultivated

Bhaktipada's Indian and Pakistani disciples for sixteen years (1992-2008) and, because of this, they maintained their staunch and unflinching faith in their spiritual master.

Bhaktipada's disciples in Ulhasnagar, Rishikesh and Karachi placed their confidence in RVC Swami; they trusted him as their siksa guru and their link to Bhaktipada. They were naturally suspicious of ISKCON, which had expelled their spiritual master from Prabhupada's society in 1987. They also distrusted Radhanath Swami who, after twenty years faithfully serving Bhaktipada, had defected in 1993 from the League of Devotees International and joined forces with the enemy. My Pakistani godbrother, Parmanand dasa (Kumar Parkash), explained, "Basically I join Gurudev in 1998. That time Gurudev was in prison. That time Radha-Vrindavan Chandra Swamiji help us very much, always send us Gurudev darshan and question-answers which devotees was asking from Gurudev." ¹²⁶⁵

In Ulhasnagar, one of RVC Swami's most important duties was serving as Bhaktipada's "gatekeeper." If Bhaktipada was resting or seemed to be tired, RVC Swami allowed no visitors to the fourth floor. It seems RVC Swami was never far from Bhaktipada's side. Clearly the two supported each other and protected each other. RVC Swami stayed very close to his master, perhaps to help prevent the Indian disciples from suspecting that their spiritual master might have an unnatural fondness for boys and young men. RVC Swami understood his master's mind better than most others, as he was cut from the same cloth. Amongst all of Bhaktipada's followers and disciples, RVC Swami was undoubtedly his greatest protector, defender and sycophant. After Bhaktipada's death, RVC Swami became an initiating guru himself, and was honored with the title: His Divine Grace Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami. ¹²⁶⁶

It is doubtful that any of Bhaktipada's Indian or Pakistani disciples knew that RVC Swami had been evicted from New Vrindaban in the mid-1990s for physically abusing and sexually molesting young boys in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. They probably did not know that on August

30, 1999, the ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection concluded an investigation and determined that he had physically and sexually molested boys at New Vrindaban, including forcing at least one to perform oral sex on him.¹²⁶⁷ Apparently, none of Bhaktipada's disciples in Pakistan and India (except, perhaps, for those who joined at Chowpatty) were aware of these transgressions.

However, others, whose eyes had not been “tinged with the salve of love,” suspected something may be amiss at “Bhaktipada's Palace of Love.” For instance, a devotee initiated by Prabhupada, Jagadananda dasa—Dr. Jan K. Brezezinski, formerly Hiryanagarbha dasa, who served as the headmaster for New Vrindaban's Varnashram College in 1974 and today lives in Vrindaban, India, where he edits and translates Gaudiya-Vaishnava literatures for educational institutions—visited “Bhaktipada's Palace of Love” in Ulhasnagar and found himself in an uncomfortable situation. In an e-mail to the author, Jagadananda explained, “I met RVC Maharaja for the first time [in 2013]. We talked a bit, I had never met him. Then suddenly there was a twelve-year-old boy there in the room and RVC was putting his arm around him and treating him with a little too much affection. I suppose it could have been seen as normal, but given the context I felt a little uncomfortable.”¹²⁶⁸

KIRTANANANDA SWAMI DIES

During the summer of 2011, as Bhaktipada lay on his deathbed afflicted with a cancerous tumor in his throat, bleeding in his brain, lungs filling with fluid which resulted in a collapsed lung and a lung infection, and failing liver and kidneys, some devotees who knew of his criminal and immoral activities at New Vrindaban posted derogatory comments on his Facebook page. His Indian disciple, Visakha devi dasi, who managed the page, immediately deleted the comments and threatened to block anyone who posted negative comments on Bhaktipada's wall.

Visakha expressed the sentiments of all her faithful Indian and Pakistani godbrothers and sisters—those disciples with great emotional investment who see Bhaktipada not with their imperfect minds nor with their physical senses, but only in “their heart of hearts with the eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love”—when she wrote, “I don’t care what people think they know about; what they think the so-called truth is about Srila Bhaktipada and His past.” She indicated also that those who accused her spiritual master of molesting boys and ordering murders “can lie too,” and the witnesses, prosecutors, jurors and judges who testified against him, tried him, convicted him, and sentenced him to prison were “corrupt as well.” She admonished everyone to “look to Krishna with an open heart.”¹²⁶⁹

Seven weeks after his 74th birthday, on Monday morning at 7:15 a.m. (Mumbai time) on October 24, 2011, Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada died from kidney failure at Jupiter Hospital in Thane, near Mumbai. Twenty-one years earlier, Nathji dasa (Dr. Narendra Desai), Bhaktipada’s wealthy industrialist disciple, consulted with an Indian astrologer who predicted, “Death will be due to kidney or heart failure. The name of Krishna will be on his last breath. He will be fully conscious at the time of death. Death will be outside of the U. S. A.”^{1270 1271}

Major newspapers across the globe published Bhaktipada’s obituary, including the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *CBS News*, *UK Daily Mail*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and many other papers. The maverick Hare Krishna website *Sampradaya Sun*, also posted an obituary.¹²⁷²

As thousands of Bhaktipada’s faithful disciples and followers around the world (the majority live in India and Pakistan) received the news that their beloved spiritual father had ended his earthly pastimes, they cried mournful tears of separation. My godbrother, Parmanand in Pakistan, sadly remembered, “[That fateful morning] I took my breakfast, broke my Ekadasi [the once-a-month Hindu fast from beans and grains] with food at 7:30 a.m. morning time, and [my godbrother] Vrindavan dasa came to my house. His eyes was full of tear when he informed me Gurudev finished His Lila in this

land, and He left us. I went down stairs where a few devotees were feeling so much separation. Then my senior godbrothers call all Pakistani devotees in Swami Narayan temple, and then we done Sankirtan for our Gurudev. Prabhuji, [from now on] every Dwadasi [the day following Ekadasi] is giving me so much separation feeling for Gurudev.”¹²⁷³

Two days after his death, while Bhaktipada’s body was lying in an ice-filled wooden coffin at the Mohini Gosala cowshed in Vrindaban, India, three prominent ISKCON leaders came to offer dandavats to their deceased godbrother: Gopal-Krishna Goswami (Gopal Krishna Khanna), who had received sannyasa from Bhaktipada in 1981; Radhanath Swami, who had received sannyasa from Bhaktipada in 1982; and the Vrindaban ISKCON temple president, Pancagauda dasa.¹²⁷⁴ Bhaktipada’s disciples in Ulhasnagar remember their guru with great affection. They believe his “selfless devotion” will inspire “future generations to come.”

Srila Bhaktipada lived the last four years of His material life at Anand Vrindavan Dham, Ulhasnagar, India. Srila Bhaktipada had been a living example of selfless devotion for all the future generations. He had always been a revolutionary in the way He lived His life. Enduring infinite number of physical as well as social hardships, He always trusted and thanked Krishna for the present moment now as it is.

Srila Bhaktipada’s simple lesson “Thank You Krishna” has been His greatest gift to the Spiritual world; something which will inspire all of us now, as well as all our future generations to come.¹²⁷⁵

Tirtha in prison also reflected on Bhaktipada’s passing, and the demise of “a pitiful, lost, delusional soul.” Tirtha explained:

When I first heard that he was down to his last few remaining days I recall feeling a sense of relief. Not actually for myself. Relief for him. He could finally be freed from his absurd role as guru. The sheer mockery of it all. The holy man blind to reality. Deaf to truth. Acting out a part in a play of his own making. Clinging tightly up until the very end. A mere caricature of his former self. Pretending he held claim as a proper representative—of anything. Of nothing.

In his old age exposed as a pitiful, lost, delusional soul. The fruit of many long years of sensual living. His few remaining followers, likewise adrift, lost in illusion. Convincing themselves he was entering spiritual Samadhi and left feeling slightly numb and somehow disappointed. Just as a child thinks he is intentionally being left behind while others go on to enjoy an exciting outing or festival. . . . One thing was certain: either people loved or hated the man. His death bringing sorrow for some, great elation to others. ¹²⁷⁶

SULOCHAN: THE SUBJECT OF A CABLE TELEVISION SHOW

On November 4, 2012, a television crew from The Discovery Channel came to New Vrindaban to tape interviews for a new weekly series titled “Deadly Devotion,” which featured stories about religious cults and murders. One of the first season’s episodes was dedicated to the murder of Sulochan. The television crew came primarily to interview Sulochan’s former wife, Jamuna dasi, Anuttama, ISKCON’s International Director of Communications and co-GBC for New Vrindaban, and Thomas Westfall, a former sergeant and deputy at the Marshall County Sheriff’s Department. They also filmed Prabhupada’s Palace and the temple. Jaya-Krishna dasa, the New Vrindaban temple president, sent out a notice to all the Brijabasis requesting them to “Please do not speak to the crew or give them any information.” Jaya-Krishna wrote:

Dear Brijabasis, . . . The Discovery Channel will be present in New Vrindaban on Sunday [November 4, 2012]. They are producing a report on Sulochan Prabhu. Anuttama Prabhu, ISKCON’s minister of communications, who I asked to deal with this sensitive matter, tried his best to avoid the reportage. He had to decide that influencing the content is the only way we can make the best out of the situation. The TV crew will arrive on Sunday, visit the Palace and the Temple. The devotees to interview have been defined. Please do not speak to the crew or give them any information. All interview requests should be brought to the attention of Anuttama Prabhu or myself. ¹²⁷⁷

Lion Television: Investigation Discovery Channel broadcast the episode about Sulochan's murder on July 2, 2013. Other interviewees who appeared in the episode included Tim Lee (Puranjana), Nori J. Muster (formerly Nandini), Steven Gelberg (formerly Subhananda), and Sulochan's mother, Helga Bryant.

In an effort to avoid bad publicity, New Vrindaban management has adopted the policy not to talk about the past. In effect, a curtain of silence has descended upon the community. One New Vrindaban Board Member explained, "We've come to the point where we're not going to talk about past criminal activities; otherwise the bad publicity will never go away."¹²⁷⁸

RAMESVARA RETURNS

After leaving ISKCON in 1986, Ramesvara disappeared for about two decades. He went back to Long Island to work for his father. One of Ramesvara's former disciples noted, "[In 1986] Ramesvara's father had offered him a job in the family business, put a million dollars worth of assets in his name, and provided him with a credit card. . . . Ramesvara revealed . . . that he had let his hair grow to please his father. He said that by taking a job from his family he would be able to donate millions of dollars to save the BBT."¹²⁷⁹

Recently, Ramesvara has become involved again in ISKCON activities. In the summer of 2008 he attended the annual Festival of India in Los Angeles.¹²⁸⁰ One of Ramesvara's godbrothers told me, "After ISKCON he went back to New York, got married, had a daughter who is grown now and he tells me she went to live on a kibbutz in Israel, so instead of becoming a Hare Krishna she got into her Judaism. I think he was working in real estate and made a bunch of money. He's divorced and for the past eight or nine years he's been going to ISKCON festivals and, in fact, I saw him a few weeks ago [during the 2017 Memorial Day weekend] in Los Angeles at the Prabhupada festival. He's been working

with Jayadvaita lately on stopping the sale of the New York (Brooklyn) ISKCON temple.”¹²⁸¹

On May 9, 2015, Ramesvara presented a seminar at the New Vrindaban Festival of Inspiration about the BBT marathons in 1969 and 1970 to produce paintings for Prabhupada’s *Krishna Book* and *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. I happened to be at New Vrindaban for that festival and I attended his seminar. He said he is currently working on a book on the same topic. Ramesvara also appeared in the 2017 film by John Griesser (Yadubara), *Hare Krishna! The Mantra, the Movement and the Swami Who Started It All*, although his name does not appear in the online Indie Movie Database (IMDb).¹²⁸²

Meanwhile, Tirtha in prison continues to write for the ISKCON Prison Ministry. In 2012 his hips had deteriorated to such an extent due to arthritis that he was confined to a wheelchair. He wrote, “For almost seven years I endured terrible pain from the bone on bone trauma of this disease. Of course no one [outside of prison] would ever delay that long under normal circumstances. But because of being in prison it was very difficult to get anything done. It was only after pursuing my legal options that they reluctantly agreed to treat me.”¹²⁸³

On January 15, 2013, Tirtha had his left hip replaced in the hospital. He explained, “I hadn’t walked in almost six months. So being able to walk with the help of a walker or cane is a great improvement. I was approved for both hips so I expect in around six months or so they’ll replace the right hip. I have to say being confined to a wheelchair was a horrible experience.”¹²⁸⁴

More recently, Tirtha was attacked by a mentally-disturbed inmate and nearly died from the wounds. Tirtha explained, “I was assaulted by an inmate wielding a deadly weapon and nearly lost my life. As to the why, it remains a mystery, except to say the person was a deranged fellow with an extensive history of such attacks on others. It’s possible someone put him up to it, but these things are difficult to decipher. After

recovering from my wounds in hospital, I was taken to another facility. Suffice to say, it has been a long road to recovery. I likely should have died, but Krishna saved me for something further. . . . Some say I'm lucky to be alive. Maybe. Maybe not. I know I don't want much more of this." ¹²⁸⁵

A recent report suggests that Tirtha may have found a new wife and remarried. Thomas Westfall explained, "Drescher has remarried recently and has his new 'wife' running errands for him, and reaching out to people on the outside." ¹²⁸⁶ Tirtha denied this. "You heard I was married? I'm as isolated as it gets, and still crazy rumors persist. I have contact with six people, total. Last time I was married was in 1981. That's hardly news. Where do you hear these things? I also heard I was dead. Several times over. In the same lifetime! I suppose I have died. I used to hope to outlive my enemies. Long enough to piss on their graves. So far I have. In the end, we will all fade out of the picture." ^{1287 1288}

SULOCHAN'S SON SPEAKS

Sulochan's only surviving offspring, his son Sarva Dharma (Christopher Bryant, grew up at New Vrindaban with his mother Jamuna, stepfather Raghunath, and half-brother and half-sisters. He also spent one month each summer with his grandparents in Michigan, but no one ever told him much about his biological father nor the circumstances relating to his death. Sarva explained, "My entire life, neither my mother nor my grandparents offered very much information about those events [about the murder of my father] and I thus never really touched on them much myself either. I think for all involved [my family members], it was really too much of a tragedy, and maybe they didn't know how to deal with it very well, either." ¹²⁸⁹

No one involved in the murder conspiracy has ever contacted Sarva and apologized or offered to provide an explanation or financial remuneration for his loss. Sarva noted, "I've never been contacted or anything else from any persons responsible [for my father's murder]." ¹²⁹⁰

KILLING FOR KRISHNA

ISKCON has never, to my knowledge, addressed, analyzed and codified the Vaishnava dogma that asserts that killing, under certain circumstances, can be permitted. Prabhupada certainly approved of killing a human being for Krishna in theory, although he never authorized it in practice. While killing without authority, he claimed, is considered an “abomination,” killing with authority is devotional service—the highest good for all.

It is not my intention to exhaustively analyze Prabhupada’s statements on killing, but I will briefly touch on the subject. In order to understand killing for Krishna, we must first understand that the eternal soul can never be killed; only the temporary material body can be destroyed. In *Bhagavad-gita* (2.19), Krishna explains, “He who thinks that the living entity is the slayer or that he is slain, does not understand. One who is in knowledge knows that the self slays not nor is slain.” Prabhupada elaborated on this verse in the purport:

When an embodied living entity is hurt by fatal weapons, it is to be known that the living entity within the body is not killed. The spirit soul is so small that it is impossible to kill him by any material weapon, as is evident from the previous verses. Nor is the living entity killable because of his spiritual constitution. What is killed, or is supposed to be killed, is the body only.

This, however, does not at all encourage killing of the body. The Vedic injunction is *ma himsyat sarva bhutani*: never commit violence to anyone. Nor does understanding that the living entity is not killed encourage animal slaughter. Killing the body of anyone without authority is abominable and is punishable by the law of the state as well as by the law of the Lord. Arjuna [Krishna’s warrior disciple], however, is being engaged in killing for the principle of religion, and not whimsically.

Killing can be subdivided into three categories: (1) killing plants, (2) killing animals, and (3) killing human beings. Killing, in all cases, is forbidden, unless it is authorized by Krishna. During a room conversation in

Delhi, India, Prabhupada talked about killing vegetables for food and how, if the vegetables are offered to Krishna, this killing becomes authorized by Krishna, who accepts the sinful reaction:

One has to eat. And whatever you eat, that is coming out of some living entity, even if you eat vegetables. The vegetable has also life, the tree, the plant. So, the real explanation is that you take which is offered to Krishna. That is nice philosophy. Killing you have to do, either you kill vegetable or animal, killing you have to do. Therefore our proposition is that you take the prasadam of Krishna, so if killing is bad then the responsibility goes to Krishna. We take Krishna's prasadam. This is the method.

And *Bhagavad-gita* says, *yajña-sistasinah mucyante sarva kilbisaibh*. Suppose you don't kill animal, but you kill vegetables, but still you are responsible. *Bhunjate te tv agham papa ye pacanty atma-karanat* [*Bhagavad-gita* 3.13]. Anyone who is preparing food for his personal eating, he's eating all sinful activities. It may be vegetables or animals, it doesn't matter. *Bhunjate te tv agham papa*. So this is the best formula. . . . I say that even vegetable you are killing, but that killing responsibility goes to Krishna. We are killing for Krishna. . . . Because he [the plant] is killed for Krishna's purpose, so he [the soul in the plant] gets immediately liberation.¹²⁹¹

Regarding animal killing, Prabhupada condemned slaughtering and butchering animals as a grave and heinous crime. However, in certain situations, such as when a warrior hones his technique by hunting wild animals, killing animals, he claimed, is perfectly permissible. In *Krishna Book*, Prabhupada related a story of Krishna's warrior disciple, Arjuna, hunting in the forest to sharpen his marksmanship skills. Arjuna was preparing for the forthcoming battle at Kuruksetre between the army of the Pandavas (the five sons of Pandu, the king of Hastinapur) and the army of the Kauravas (the Pandavas' cousins: the 100 sons of King Dhritarashtra, who inherited the throne at Hastinapur after Pandu left for the forest to become a mendicant). Prabhupada noted:

One day, while Krishna was staying with the Pandavas, He and Arjuna prepared themselves to go to the forest to hunt. Both of them sat down on Arjuna's chariot. . . . Thus Arjuna prepared to go to the forest with his bow and infallible arrows. He dressed himself with suitable protective garments, for he was to practice for the time when he would be killing many enemies on the battlefield. He specifically entered that part of the forest where there were many tigers, deer and various other animals. . . .

After entering the forest, Arjuna killed many tigers, boars, bison, gavayas [a species of wild ox], . . . rhinoceroses, deer, hares, porcupines and similar other animals, which he pierced with his arrows. Some of the dead animals that were fit to be offered in sacrifices were carried by servants and sent to King Yudhisthira [Arjuna's elder brother]. The ferocious animals, such as tigers and rhinoceroses, were killed only to stop disturbances in the forest. Since there are many sages and saintly persons who are residents of the forest, it is the duty of the ksatriya kings to keep even the forest in a peaceful condition for living.¹²⁹²

Regarding killing human beings, Prabhupada explained that killing another human being when authorized by Krishna "is not killing," it is "freedom" from karmic reaction. During a tape-recorded conversation with Hayagriva, Prabhupada explained:

That is explained in the *Bhagavad-gita*: *yajña-arthat karma*. Only for *yajña*, or Krishna, you should work. *Yajña-arthat karma, anyatra karma-bandhanah*. Otherwise you are entangled. This is freedom, to work for Krishna; then you are not under entanglement. . . .

There are many practical examples. Just that a soldier, he is killing, his business is killing, and the more he kills [the more] he gets recognition. But as soon as he kills one man on his own account, he is murderer. . . . The soldier's business is to kill, and so long he is killing for the satisfaction of his state, of the government, he is getting recognition medals. The same soldier, as soon as he kills

one man for his own sense satisfaction, he is a murderer, he is to be hanged. This is the *karma-bandhanah*. The business the same: killing. But one killing is on the order of the state and one killing is for his sense gratification. So killing business is the same, but the position is different.

Similarly, when you act for Krishna, that is not *karma-bandhanah*; that is freedom. And when you act for yourself, that is *karma-bandhanah*. That is the teaching of *Bhagavad-gita* throughout. Arjuna was thinking, “Killing, and [I will] suffer the sinful activities,” because he was thinking on account of himself. But when he understood that “I am induced to kill on behalf of Krishna. Krishna wants this fight,” then he accepted Krishna’s proposal. That is not *karma-bandhanah*. That is not killing. One has to understand this. ¹²⁹³

WHEN ISKCON RULES THE EARTH

Prabhupada predicted a future “Golden Age”—a ten-thousand-year period ¹²⁹⁴ during which his books would be universally regarded as “the law books for mankind,” ¹²⁹⁵ when the entire planet would become Krishna conscious. In this utopian world, Prabhupada believed, ISKCON would be the world’s dominant religious, political and military force, and all, without exception, would address God as Sri Krishna and recognize *Bhagavad-gita* as the holy word of God.

In his Introduction to *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, Prabhupada noted, “Let there be one common scripture for the whole world—*Bhagavad-gita*. And let there be one God only for the whole world—Sri Krishna. And one mantra only—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. And let there be one work only—the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” During two morning walk conversations in India, Prabhupada revealed his thoughts about killing for Krishna in the future, after the ten-thousand-year “Golden Age” had become established and ISKCON ruled the planet with an iron fist:

We have to kill this civilization of mudhas [foolish men]. That is Krishna consciousness movement. *Paritranya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskrtam* [*Bhagavad-gita* 4.8]. Those who are actually human being, you have to give them Krishna. And those who are mudhas [less than human], we have to kill them. This is our business. Kill all the mudhas and give Krishna to the sane man. Yes. That will prove that you are really Krishna's. We are not nonviolent. We are violent to the mudhas. ¹²⁹⁶

[We] will teach military art. With tilak [a mark worn by Hindus on the forehead], soldiers will [march and chant], "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna." (laughter) We want that: marching with military band, "Hare Krishna." You maintain this idea. Is it not good? When there will be military march of Krishna conscious soldiers: anyone who does not believe in Krishna, "Blam!" [gunshot sound] (laughter) Yes. The same process as the Mohammedans did, with sword and Koran, we'll have to do that. "Do you believe in Krishna or not?" "No, sir." "Blam!" Finished. (Prabhupada laughs) ¹²⁹⁷

Prabhupada also appeared to advocate using modern weapons of mass destruction, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles with thermonuclear warheads, under certain circumstances for killing for Krishna. Ramesvara Swami, who once served as Prabhupada's secretary, accompanied his master during a train ride from Bombay to Allahabad on January 11, 1977, to attend the Kumbha Mela (arguably the largest Hindu pilgrimage festival in the world). On the train, he heard Prabhupada drop a bombshell: after ISKCON takes over the United States government and military, the U. S. would threaten to use nuclear weapons against any nation which refused to "surrender to Krishna." Ramesvara remembered:

After we have secured America, we will use everything in Krishna's service, even atom bombs. "Surrender to Krishna or else we will drop this atom bomb." That's an exact quote from Prabhupada. These are highlights, I would say, of major conversations we were having about the [forthcoming World] War [III, which Prabhupada prophesied]. We

had a very extensive conversation about the war on that train ride to Allahabad to Kumbha Mela.

Prabhupada told me the war was inevitable, there is no way it can be stopped. I said, “Prabhupada, I thought you once said that if we keep distributing [your] books then maybe the war can be stopped.” He said, “No. That will increase it. That will make it come faster. We want that. That is preparing the world for the fight against atheism, my books. They are preparing the world. This war is inevitable. If they are reluctant to fight, we will force them to.” So he was speaking like this. ¹²⁹⁸

WHO CAN LEGITIMATELY AUTHORIZE KILLING FOR KRISHNA?

According to Vaishnava theology, killing for Krishna is a good thing, but the thoughtful devotee must never-the-less ask, “How do we really know when killing is actually authorized by Krishna? After all, Krishna is no longer with us. He disappeared from the earth some thousands of years ago. Who today can tell us what is Krishna’s desire? Who understands the mind of God?” Prabhupada answered that question without hesitation: the bona fide spiritual master.

Vaishnavas believe the self-realized, liberated spiritual master on the topmost transcendental stage of devotional service (known as an *uttama-adhikari* or *maha-bhagavat*) is non-different from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and although he is not God, he is to be worshiped, obeyed, and honored just like God. He is infallible, just like God, because he is cent-per-cent surrendered to God. Krishna says, “The spiritual master must be accepted not only as my representative but as my very self. He must never be considered on the same level with an ordinary human being.” ¹²⁹⁹ Prabhupada confirmed, “On the absolute platform, there is no difference between the spiritual master and the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” ¹³⁰⁰

Next, we must ask, “How do we absolutely know who is a bona fide spiritual master and who is a pretender? Who today is qualified to authorize killing for Krishna?” This is the thousand-dollar question, and Vaishnava

pundits in and out of ISKCON have debated this for decades without arriving at a conclusive answer accepted by everyone. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this book to attempt to answer this incredibly important and profound theological question.

Kailasa-Chandra offered his perspective on the “extremely rare” and “drastic” devotional service of killing for Krishna, and who might legitimately authorize such an extreme act of destruction:

Absolute activity requires absolute sanction. A neophyte [a novice, or third-class devotee] cannot possibly self-authorize any such drastic action. A madhyam-adhikari [a more advanced, second-class devotee] would strongly prefer to seek the authorization from an uttama-adhikari [a perfectly self-realized, liberated maha-bhagavat devotee situated on the topmost level of transcendence], because he is on the absolute plane. Obviously, relative to Sulochan, the murder was sanctioned by a saha-jiya, and performed by mixed devotees, mostly in the mode of ignorance, which was the prevalent mode at the Moundville camp.

Let us always remember that Lord Chaitanya did not use killing or murder as part of His strategy, so these circumstances that you speak of [killing for Krishna] would be extremely rare. Just as importantly, if the killer is apprehended [by law-enforcement agents], he would not be able to use [in his legal defense] the reason that the Lord wanted it [the murder]. He would not be judged not guilty on that basis, which means, even if the Lord sanctioned it, the devotee performing the seva [service] should be fully prepared to give up his life—or spend the remainder of it in prison—as part of the weight for taking on such a seva.¹³⁰¹

THE “CULT OF KIRTANANANDA”

The plot to murder Sulochan, the murder itself, and the subsequent desperate attempts of the conspirators to avoid justice, was (and is) an unfortunate chapter in the history of New Vrindaban and ISKCON. In 1978, the zonal acharyas had pulled the wool over almost everyone’s eyes in

ISKCON by claiming that they had been promoted to the *paramahansa* stage of self-realization by the inconceivable mercy of Prabhupada. Most ISKCON devotees really believed that propaganda.

However, when the “self-realized” acharyas began falling down (1980-1986), many began to have doubts about the gurus’ alleged infallibility, except at New Vrindaban. The Brijabasis had firm faith that Bhaktipada would never fall down, and if he was threatened by a “demon,” it would be better to assassinate the “demon” and deal with the fallout, rather than let the “Jagad-Guru” be harmed.

Bhaktipada and his followers had created a charismatic cult: the “Cult of Kirtanananda.” He could not have achieved his powerful position alone; by definition, charisma cannot exist without followers who attribute divine or supernatural powers to their leader. The charismatic relationship is a two-way street; it takes two (or more) to tango. Bhaktipada’s disciples and followers believed he was a pure devotee, the only self-realized guru amongst all the ISKCON gurus, and the “World Acharya.”

A RASCAL AND A ROGUE

Unfortunately, we were all deceived; for in secret Kirtanananda enjoyed illicit sense gratification, such as the pleasures of the flesh with boys, teenagers and young men as early as the late 1960s, according to reliable witnesses. New Vrindaban had an “Inner Sanctum”—a secret society of homosexuals and pedophiles protected by Bhaktipada from the very beginning of the community. In addition, although few people know this, Kirtanananda also enjoyed the intoxicating pleasures of alcohol and recreational drugs from time to time, such as marijuana, beer and cocaine, in the company of Hayagriva and some others in the late 1960s, throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and apparently also into the 1990s. Randall Gorby, who was a close friend to Hayagriva, recalled, “Howard Wheeler preferred opium and . . . Keith Ham preferred to use cocaine.”¹³⁰²

As early as March 1968, seven months after taking sannyasa, Kirtanananda “Swami” was observed smoking marijuana. During that month, on his way to visit Richard Rose’s West Virginia property for the first time, Kirtanananda stopped in to see his older brother Gerald at his home in Madison, Wisconsin. During his visit, Gerald’s wife, Elsie, smelled the odor of burning cannabis in her bathroom and made a note of it in her diary. When I visited Kirtanananda’s brother and sister-in-law on June 30, 2003, she read to me excerpts from her 1968 diary and commented, “He [Keith] must have been smoking pot in the bathroom.” Immediately, her husband interjected, “Not only in the bathroom; he once lit up a joint right in our living room!”¹³⁰³

Chakradhari, arguably New Vrindaban’s biggest devotee drug dealer, used to sell recreational drugs to Hayagriva, but turned against Kirtanananda when he heard through Hayagriva that the “guru” of New Vrindaban was attending parties with some of the young male Mexican laborers and enjoying illicit sex. Most Brijabasis thought that Chakradhari was spreading “rumors” about Kirtanananda. The “rumors” were, however, fact. To protect his power, authority, and his secret pleasures, Kirtanananda was willing to authorize the murder of whistle-blowers, such as Chakradhari and Sulochan. Bhaktipada was no spiritual master, at least not according to Prabhupada’s definition. He was a cheater; a show-bottle pretender, and, in Sulochan’s words, a “rogue,” “a pseudo-religionist,” and “nothing but a sense gratifier.”

DERANGED DEVOTION

Yet Bhaktipada appeared to love his devoted followers, and his devoted followers loved him. Intense love is one of the primary characteristics of the charismatic bond. Len Oakes—formerly a senior consultant psychologist with the Cairnmillar Institute School of Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy in Melbourne, Australia, who has published widely on

topics in communal studies, the psychology of religion, and on counseling issues associated with new religious movements—asserted:

Love may be so intensely experienced in charismatic groups as to transcend worldly, even, human, concerns. . . . In ordinary life this may mean taking a stance of selflessness toward one's beloved—typically a spouse or child—that seeks satisfaction in terms of their, rather than one's own, good (or even one's survival). But in a charismatic movement the love that is generated may transport the group to an otherworldly or world-rejecting state.¹³⁰⁴

Just as a parent may be willing to sacrifice his life to protect his child, similarly a disciple may be willing to sacrifice his life to protect his spiritual master. Self sacrifice is a symptom of intense love, but love can also be unhealthy; love can be co-dependent, even pathological. This type of “love,” which I call “deranged devotion,” is very dangerous, and this is what happened at New Vrindaban (as well as in much of ISKCON as a whole).

This pathological “love” still exists in some circles in ISKCON, and the tragic yet heroic saga of Sulochan serves to enlighten us as to why we should not encourage nor participate in those charismatic cults. Instead, to whatever extent possible, we can work to curtail those cults from ever again gaining the momentum they did in the nineteen-eighties. We can only hope that wherever charismatic relationships exist in ISKCON, dispassionate, critical, watch-dog observers—whose eyes are not “tinged with the salve of love,” which interferes with the brain's normal functions of reasoning and critical thinking—will regularly monitor such charismatic gurus and their disciples. They must be watched constantly and offenders must be disciplined, if necessary. Only in this way can the atrocities of the past never manifest again.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

MANY KIND SOULS HELPED ME to research, write, edit and publish this book; and provide funding for production expenses. In particular, I thank Kailasa-Chandra (Mark Goodwin), who proofread my manuscript and offered helpful editing suggestions. But instead of writing a long list of names, I single out five very important people—my godbrother Chaitanya-Mangala (Christopher Walker), Tapahpunja (Terry Sheldon), Madhava-Ghosh (Mark Meberg), Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami (Ronald Nay) and my godbrother Mathura dasa (Matthew Brian Berresford)—who made this book possible. Without the foresight and wisdom of these Vaishnavas, *Killing for Krishna* could never have seen the light of day.

An explanation is in order: Bhaktipada had a secret archive locked behind bars in his basement at his house, which was meticulously cataloged and cared for by his secretary Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami. I lived in the brahmachari ashram in the basement of Bhaktipada's house for about a year (1986-87), and I never knew this room existed. The archive contained a nearly-complete collection of *Brijabasi Spirit* and other New Vrindaban publications. Other items included books, magazines, newsletters, hundreds of newspaper clippings, transcripts of devotee interviews with private investigators, transcripts of several court trials, photographs, negatives and slides, and hundreds of letters from Bhaktipada's personal correspondence.

However, after Bhaktipada was confined to house arrest in Warwood in 1991, and again later in 1993 after the Winnebago Incident—when he went to live at his Silent Mountain cabin by the stone quarry near Littleton, West Virginia—his house was abandoned. Around this time, RVC Swami was evicted from New Vrindaban for physical and sexual molestation of gurukula boys, which occurred in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Then in 1996, Bhaktipada was incarcerated in prison for eight years. The house was locked up, and I don't think anyone ever went there.

During this time, probably around 1996, a few young men who grew up at New Vrindaban broke into Bhaktipada's former residence, vandalized the house, and entered into the secret fortified archive room in the basement. They ransacked the room and strew its contents about in large piles on the floor in the room and adjacent hallway. Items the vandals thought valuable, like large paintings, photographic prints, televisions, furniture, etc., were taken.

Another former New Vrindaban gurukuli, Chaitanya-Mangala, heard about the break in, went into Bhaktipada's house, saw the papers and artifacts lying helter-skelter and realized that, some day, somebody might want to write a history of the New Vrindaban community. He retrieved the artifacts and brought them to his cabin. Chaitanya-Mangala remembered:

You may recall that this period was a free-for-all in New Vrindaban. Like many, including many of the "leaders" at the time, these Gurukulis were grabbing what they could before someone else did the same. In an effort to save the archive, I purchased large cardboard boxes, methodically went through the contents of the room, and picked up as much of the materials I thought salvageable. I also carted away a few filing cabinets as well. ¹³⁰⁵

After a few years, Chaitanya-Mangala left New Vrindaban in the spring/summer of 2000 and gave the archive to Tapahpunja for safekeeping. About three years later, I think it was during the 2003 Festival of

Inspiration, I visited New Vrindaban and spoke to Tapahpunja, who was in charge of the organic garden. I showed him the 300-page manuscript of my New Vrindaban history book-in-progress. Tapahpunja got excited and said he had something that I should see, and he took me up the hill just west of Prabhupada's Palace, to the big gravel parking lot behind Sankirtan and Ruci's house (formerly Vahna and Hladini's house), where Prabhupada stayed during his 1976 visit.

In the parking lot was a semi-truck trailer. Tapahpunja unlocked and swung open the double doors, and we climbed up inside. There, inside the trailer, were dozens of cardboard boxes and metal filing cabinets filled with books, magazines, newspaper clippings, photographs, negatives and slides, and Bhaktipada's personal correspondence. I felt like I had discovered Captain Kidd's buried treasure. The artifacts in the trailer were priceless, and some files (as I discovered later) contained confidential (and undoubtedly classified) information which may have been known only to Bhaktipada and his secretary/librarian. Tapahpunja gifted me the entire collection.

Five years later, on March 4, 2008, I visited Bhaktipada at the New York Interfaith Sanctuary a few days before he moved permanently to India. At that time, I asked Radha-Vrindaban Chandra Swami to let me photocopy his personal collection of *New Vrindaban Newsletters* (1992-1996) and *Srila Bhaktipada Newsletters* (1996-1997), publications which he had written, edited and mailed out to Bhaktipada's disciples.

A month later, on April 10, 2008, I visited Madhava-Ghosh (1949-2016) at his home at New Vrindaban. We talked about New Vrindaban history. As I was preparing to leave, he opened a closet, pulled out a large cardboard box, and gave me a complete bound set of the court transcripts from Bhaktipada's 1991 trial (ten volumes and thousands of pages).¹³⁰⁶

Another devotee who shared with me hundreds of important New Vrindaban publications and documents was my godbrother Mathura dasa (Matthew Brian Berresford), who lived in West Berlin, Pennsylvania and

worked as a kindergarten teacher at North Frederick Elementary School in Frederick, Maryland. How did he acquire such a huge archive?

This archive came from the basement of Bhaktipada's house, a couple years before the gurukula boys broke in and ransacked the archive. In 1994, RVC Swami realized that his days of living at New Vrindaban were numbered; the boys he had physically abused and sexually molested at Nandagram in the 1970s, and at the RVC temple complex in the 1980s and 1990s, were now aggressively campaigning to have him evicted from New Vrindaban. But before he was expelled, he managed to retrieve for safekeeping a considerable portion of his master's personal archive. RVC Swami arranged to bring this substantial collection to New York City where he kept it secret and safe at the Interfaith Sanctuary.

About fourteen years later, when Bhaktipada and RVC Swami left New York City in March 2008 and moved permanently to India, RVC Swami entrusted these precious archives to Mathura prabhu, because he was, at that time, one of Bhaktipada's last disciples in America who remained faithful to his guru. The collection consisted of hundreds of items: original letters from Prabhupada, early issues of *Brijabasi Spirit*, dozens of cases of books written by Bhaktipada, such as *The Illustrated Ramayana*, two original type-written autobiographical manuscripts written early in 1966 by Howard Wheeler, and a voluminous collection of Bhaktipada's personal correspondence.

While browsing through the materials one day, Mathura happened to find a letter Bhaktipada had written to one of the teenage boys he had molested in 1986. In the letter, Bhaktipada explained that actually he never broke any of the regulative principles because he never had an orgasm, and therefore what he did was not really "sex." Mathura was bewildered by this letter. He had, of course, heard rumors that Bhaktipada had sexually molested boys at New Vrindaban, but RVC Swami had always reassured him that the rumors were rumors; not facts. Mathura, in great distress and confusion, contacted RVC Swami, who assured him that the letter was "a fake."

Although Mathura loved Bhaktipada and RVC Swami, how could he believe that this damning letter was “planted” in the archive as a “fake?” It was an original letter with Bhaktipada’s handwritten signature. He began to doubt the alleged holiness of his spiritual master and his confidant, and soon lost his faith in his “guru.” At that time, Mathura contacted me, as he had heard I was writing a biography of Kirtanananda Swami, and he asked me if I would like to come over and see his archives. He told me, “Needless to say, I lost all faith in Bhaktipada after seeing that [letter]. I tossed my beads in the river.”¹³⁰⁷

I drove from Pittsburgh to Mathura’s home in West Berlin, Pennsylvania, on October 6, 2008, and brought my camera and laptop computer. I arrived in the morning; I had never met him before. (I think he was initiated in the early 2000s, some years after I left New Vrindaban, by a letter from Bhaktipada in prison.) Mathura showed me his extensive collection of New Vrindaban publications and documents, including two unpublished, typewritten autobiographical manuscripts written by Howard Wheeler around 1965-1966. Then he left to run some errands. I was there in his house about six or seven hours, and took hundreds of photos and downloaded them from my camera to my laptop, before he returned home.

A few weeks after my visit, a loyal Bhaktipada disciple, Prahlabari dasa, came to Mathura’s house and confiscated the entire archive and transported it to an undisclosed location. In a Gmail chat with the author, Mathura explained, “And when Prahlabari came, that [damning] letter [by Bhaktipada] quickly vanished. Sadly I’m certain it has [been] burned or otherwise destroyed. He took it all, aside from what I had out of the boxes and was sorting. They moved it all to some secret location, I think offshore: Puerto Rico, I feel. All the boxes they took. All the books.”¹³⁰⁸

Obviously, there were sensitive and confidential materials in the archives and Mathura could no longer be trusted to keep them secret. I am grateful that he allowed me to photograph this archive before it was taken away and possibly destroyed by RVC Swami’s henchmen.¹³⁰⁹

I thank these five devotees for their generosity and for their vision. I sincerely hope that I have not disappointed them, as I have tried to utilize these resources to present an accurate (as accurate as possible, at least) history of what really happened at New Vrindaban. After my research was completed, I donated the archive to Bhaktipada's next of kin, his brother Francis Gerald Ham. In turn, Gerald donated the magnificent Keith Gordon Ham/Swami Bhaktipada Archive to the West Virginia and Regional History Center at West Virginia University in Morgantown, where it will be securely protected for posterity. ¹³¹⁰

The author.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The author playing harmonium at the New Vrindaban Bahulaban temple (1982). Drawing by Carl Carlson (Krishna-Katha) from *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1982), 24.

HENRY DOKTORSKI CO-WROTE THE CHAPTER “Guru Authority, Religious Innovation, and the Decline of New Vrindaban” for the book, *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism* (SUNY Press: 2013). His collaborator was the scholar of ISKCON, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., a professor of Sociology and Religion at Middlebury College in Vermont.

Henry has written dozens of articles which were published by the *Brijabasi Spirit* (1982-2014) and the *Sampradaya Sun* (2006-2013). His articles have also been published by *Sri Vrindavana Dhama Newsletter* (Vrindaban, India), ISKCON News, Dandavats.com, ISKCON.net, Srila Prabhupada’s ISKCON Spiritnet, El Tambor Rugiente, and the *Cooking with Kurma* blog. He edited and published Bhaktipada’s 1993 Vyasa-Puja Book. Bhaktipada recognized Henry’s writing skills and dubbed him “My Literary Disciple.”¹³¹¹

Henry joined ISKCON at New Vrindaban, West Virginia, in August 1978 at the age of 22. In March 1979, he received the Sanskrit name “Hrishikesh dasa”—“servant of the Master of the senses”—from Kirtanananda Swami at a fire sacrifice during the Gaura-Purnima festival. He faithfully served his spiritual master at New Vrindaban for fifteen years in various and diverse capacities, such as: Palace artistic decorator, designer, gold-leafer, and painter (1978-79), gurukula music instructor (1979), president of the Pittsburgh ISKCON temple (1980), and a traveling sankirtan “picking” party leader (1980-1987). He received the 1982 Golden Van Award as the top men’s collector.

Henry served as co-director for Bhaktipada Books and Palace Publishing (1985-1986) and traveled to India to represent New Vrindaban and Palace Publishing at the ISKCON Mayapura festival commemorating the quincentennial anniversary of the appearance of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1986). He served as director for Palace Charities (1985-1987)—the free prasadam (vegetarian food offered to Krishna) distribution program for senior citizens of Moundsville and Wheeling, West Virginia.

During New Vrindaban’s “City of God” interfaith era, Henry served as Minister of Music—principal organist, choirmaster, orchestra director and composer-in-residence (1986 to 1993) and also assisted in New Vrindaban’s public relations department by writing press releases and meeting with newspaper reporters (1987-1988 and 1992-1993). During this time—the “City of God” era at New Vrindaban—Henry had much personal association with his spiritual master and traveled with Kirtanananda Swami during trips from New Vrindaban to New York City; Maryville, Tennessee; to Bombay, Mayapura and Rishikesh, India, and other places.

In October 1993, Henry rejected his spiritual master and resigned from his duties at New Vrindaban after conducting an investigation and concluding that Kirtanananda had a long secret history of sexual deviations with boys and young men and had no desire to change. Henry became a vocal spokesman for the grassroots movement at New Vrindaban which questioned Kirtanananda Swami’s leadership and recommended rejecting his interfaith liturgical reforms and returning New Vrindaban to the traditional Bengali temple worship style as advocated by the ISKCON founder and acharya, Srila Prabhupada. By speaking out against Kirtanananda, he encountered the wrath of a few fanatical god-brothers and sisters and was warned, “If you do not stop your blasphemy, you will be dead meat.”

Henry is presently working on two more titles about the Hare Krishna movement:

- *Eleven Naked Emperors: The Crisis of Charismatic Succession in ISKCON (1977-1987)*—a history of the zonal acharya era of ISKCON, and
- *Gold, Guns and God: Swami Bhaktipada and the West Virginia Hare Krishnas*—a monumental 108-chapter biography of Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada and a history of the New Vrindaban Community.



The author offers the ritual foot-bathing ceremony (pada-puja) to his guru, Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada, while Gudakesh, Bhaktipada's German shepherd guard dog, enjoys affectionate petting from gurukula children during the spiritual master's extravagant 50th birthday celebration at New Vrindaban (September 7, 1987).

T I M E L I N E O F I M P O R T A N T E V E N T S

- July, 1974:** 22-year-old Steven Bryant becomes a duly-initiated disciple of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Founder/Acharya of ISKCON, and receives the name Sulochan dasa at a fire sacrifice at Detroit ISKCON.
- 1975:** Sulochan visits New Vrindaban, the West Virginia ISKCON farm community, then goes to Los Angeles to work for the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT).
- June 1976:** Sulochan and his best friend, Puranjana (Tim Lee), “bloop” from ISKCON Los Angeles after the Gopi-Bhava Club was disbanded by Prabhupada. Sulochan first visits India, then settles at Bhaktivedanta Manor in England.
- November 14, 1977:** His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada passes away at the age of 81.
- February/March 1978:** Eleven senior managers and spiritual leaders of ISKCON, who Prabhupada had appointed as Ritvik Acharyas in July 1977, appoint themselves as Prabhupada’s successors.
- 1979:** While living in London, Sulochan meets an attractive, young hippie girl, Jane Rangeley, who is interested in Krishna consciousness; two weeks later they get married.
- Autumn, 1980:** Sulochan travels to India on business and asks his wife to go to New Vrindaban. He gives her pendants to sell so she can raise the money to buy air tickets from London to New York for her and her young son from a previous relationship.
- Early December, 1980:** Jane arrives at New Vrindaban with her son.
- December 25, 1980:** Jane receives initiation from His Divine Grace Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada (Keith Gordon Ham), the ISKCON spiritual master who established and leads the New Vrindaban community, and becomes Jamuna dasi at a fire sacrifice, without her husband’s knowledge or permission. On the same day, the life-size murti (statue) of Prabhupada at the Palace is adorned for the first time with a gold bejeweled crown and regal attire.

- Early 1981:** Sulochan comes to live at New Vrindaban, he works in the mold shop casting ornamental pieces for the gardens and walkways at Prabhupada's Palace. After some months, he becomes lax in attending services and following some of the regulative principles.
- December, 1982:** Sulochan and Jamuna leave New Vrindaban and move to California.
- March 1983:** GBC expresses concern about Bhaktipada using the title "Founder-Acharya of New Vrindaban" and worshiping Prabhupada at the Palace with a crown.
- April 11, 1983:** Bhaktipada orders Prabhupada's crown removed, because he claims Prabhupada appeared to him in a dream and asked him to do it.
- July 10, 1983:** Chakradhari (Charles Saint-Denis), known as "The King of the Fringies," is murdered by New Vrindaban's chief "enforcer," Tirtha (Thomas A. Drescher), and accountant/bookkeeper, Daruka (Daniel Reid), on community property. Soon after, Daruka moves to Los Angeles. Tirtha moves to Ohio after he is banned from residing at New Vrindaban.
- October, 1983:** After ten months in California, Sulochan completes construction of his motor home, and his family packs up and heads east.
- December, 1983:** Sulochan and his family arrive at New Vrindaban; he soon leaves on business, but Jamuna remains there with the children.
- April, 1984:** Sulochan sets up a little workshop on the third floor of the Bahulaban Utility Building to manufacture pendants for his business. He purchases two firearms from a New Vrindaban resident.
- June 24, 1984:** After arguing with community leaders, Sulochan leaves New Vrindaban with his two young children (one still in diapers); his wife remains with her eldest son. Jamuna immediately calls Bhaktipada for help, a ksatriya posse is hastily assembled, and she retrieves her two sons in Martins Ferry, Ohio, with the help of three armed New Vrindaban enforcers. Sulochan, defeated, drives to Los Angeles, acquires a pirated microfiche set of Prabhupada's letters and begins studying them. He focuses on Prabhupada's quotes on marriage and Kirtanananda Swami.
- October 11, 1984:** Sulochan sends a letter to ISKCON centers "declaring war on Kirtanananda and the entire society" if his wife and children are

not returned to him. He practices target shooting by firing his guns at a picture of Kirtanananda Swami. Sulochan works on his book, *The Guru Business*, and periodically mails out damning excerpts to Bhaktipada and other ISKCON leaders.

September, 1984 : The Guru Reform movement is born when North American ISKCON temple presidents, at a routine meeting, spontaneously begin discussing the problems they have with the zonal acharyas, the eleven senior leaders who, in 1978, had appointed themselves as Prabhupada's successors.

November 1984 : Ravindra-Svarupa (William H. Deadwyler, III), the president of Philadelphia ISKCON and leader of the Guru Reform movement, writes a paper titled "The Next Step in the Expansion of ISKCON: Ending the Fratricidal War."

November 24, 1984 : Jamuna gets a divorce. She later remarries and has three children with her new husband.

February, 1985: Bhaktipada threatens to resign from the GBC if Sulochan is not discredited.

March, 1985: Sulochan files a complaint with the GBC regarding Bhaktipada initiating his wife without his permission; Bhaktipada files a complaint about Sulochan spewing blasphemous slander.

May, 1985: Sulochan teams up with editor Kailasa-Chandra (Mark Goodwin) for almost three months; they live in Sulochan's van and stay in Santa Cruz, where Kailasa-Chandra edits Sulochan's *The Guru Business* manuscript.

1985: Sulochan moves to Berkeley; he lives in his van.

August, 1985: Emergency GBC meetings held at New Vrindaban; an ISKCON "guru," Bhavananda Goswami (Charles Bacis), confesses having an illicit liaison with a young male devotee; Ravindra Svarupa presents his second paper: "Under My Order: Reflections on the Guru in ISKCON." GBC Privilege Committee rules that Bhaktipada "erred" in initiating Jamuna without her husband's permission.

September 2, 1985: Bhaktipada's 48th birthday celebration; Hamsadutta (Hans Kary) leads kirtan.

- September 16-19, 1985:** North American GBC and Temple Presidents Meeting at New Vrindaban. Bhaktipada reads his paper, “On My Order,” a rebuttal to Ravindra-Svarupa’s “Under My Order.” Sulochan comes to West Virginia and, on his request, is locked up in protective custody in the Marshall County jail where he telephones newspaper reporters and sends out press releases about corruption at New Vrindaban.
- New Vrindaban publishes a partly-fictitious and highly-inflammatory six-page article titled “The Story of a Cheater: The Real Facts on the Sulochan Story.” GBC expels Sulochan from ISKCON for issuing death threats in “abhorrent” and “blasphemous” language. New Vrindaban leaders quietly begin talking about assassinating Sulochan.
- October, 1985:** Sulochan’s best friend, Puranjana, meets with Radhanath Swami (Richard Slavin) in Berkeley and intercedes on Sulochan’s behalf in order to get the authorities to allow him to see his two young sons again.
- October 27, 1985:** A mentally-disturbed devotee visits New Vrindaban, Triyogi dasa (Michael Shockman), and smashes Bhaktipada in the head with a three-foot-long iron bar. Triyogi is jailed by police. Bhaktipada is rushed to Reynolds Memorial Hospital in Glen Dale, then to Ohio Valley Medical Center in Wheeling, with severe, life-threatening head injuries.
- October 31, 1985:** Bhaktipada is transferred by helicopter to Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. ISKCON leaders offer support.
- Late October/Early November, 1985:** New Vrindaban managers organize confidential meetings to plan and implement increased security measures to protect Bhaktipada. To a man, they all agree that the “demon” (Sulochan) must be destroyed. New Vrindaban leaders begin serious talk about assassinating Sulochan. Tirtha dasa (Thomas A. Drescher) is asked to be a hit man. Tirtha makes phone calls to Los Angeles in search of Sulochan.
- November, 1985:** Sulochan mails out a 15-page essay—“Violence In ISKCON: Caution”—claiming that Bhaktipada lives by violence and, if Triyogi recognized the offenses Bhaktipada was committing against Prabhupada, that would have been a noble motivation for killing him. He claims the ISKCON gurus have more or less declared open season

on themselves, and they have no one else to blame. Sulochan predicts it is only a matter of time before each guru is dead or wishes they were.

November 6, 1985: Bhaktipada wakes from coma.

November 14, 1985: Prabhupada's disappearance day; Bhaktipada's disciple Jadabharata (Jean Thibeault) places Prabhupada's crown back on his head at the Palace and announces, "If anyone tries to take off this crown, it will be over my dead body."

November 22, 1985: Bhaktipada is discharged from Allegheny General Hospital and returns to New Vrindaban. He can barely walk and talk, and he has to be spoon fed.

December 4, 1985: Bhaktipada holds a press conference and calls Triyogi a "crazy fanatic" who had been "influenced" by Sulochan. He ambulates with great difficulty using a walker.

December 6, 1985: Sulochan claims his life is in danger.

December, 1985: Tapahpunja Swami, the president of ISKCON Cleveland, receives an anonymous telephone call from a former New Vrindaban resident in Laguna Beach warning him that Sulochan might attempt to murder Bhaktipada.

January, 1986: *Back to Godhead*, the official magazine for ISKCON, publishes an editorial by Satsvarupa dasa Goswami (Stephen Guarino), an author, ISKCON guru and senior editor for the magazine, which compares Bhaktipada to Jesus Christ, Haridasa Thakura, and Prahlada Maharaja. In Los Angeles, when Sulochan discovers that His Divine Grace Ramesvara Maharaja (Robert Grant), the head of the North American BBT and ISKCON guru for southern California, is inside Govinda's Restaurant, he brazenly walks into the restaurant with a .45 pistol tucked under his belt. He is stopped by security guards who escort him off the premises. Ramesvara says, "Sulochan needs a new body."

Tapahpunja Swami flies to California and attempts to convince a San Diego enforcer, Yudhisthira (Jeff Cornia), to assassinate Sulochan. Yudhisthira says he'll do it for \$5,000 by giving Sulochan a heroin overdose. Tapahpunja, a cheapskate, balks at the price and returns to Cleveland, Ohio. Another hatchet man, a follower of Hamsadutta, Vipra dasa (Vladimir Vassilievich),

is also asked to kill Sulochan. He declines the offer. Around the same time, Radhanath Swami (Richard Slavin), the most beloved and respected sannyasi at the New Vrindaban community, visits Los Angeles ISKCON.

Janmastami (John Sinkowski), who makes a substantial amount of money for New Vrindaban from his flower-selling business in Philadelphia, visits New Vrindaban after the Christmas marathon and is recruited by Radhanath into the murder conspiracy. Janmastami subsequently drives to California with a handgun and a vial of cyanide, where he searches for Sulochan in Berkeley and Los Angeles. However, Sulochan is no longer in California; he is staying with his parents in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Sunday, January 26, 1986: Sulochan leaves Michigan and drives to the Ohio Valley with a hand gun “for his own protection.” He rents a room at the Scott Motel in Saint Clairsville, Ohio, and works on press releases and articles for newspapers and television news reporters. He notifies the Marshall County sheriff where he is staying.

Friday, January 31, 1986: Sulochan telephones the New Vrindaban president, Kuladri (Arthur Villa), and tells him he is coming to Moundsville to destroy Kirtanananda and the New Vrindaban Community; “to finish the job” that Triyogi had started. Sulochan intends to destroy Kirtanananda using press releases and propaganda. New Vrindaban managers, however, think Sulochan is going to hide out in the woods with a high-powered rifle and shoot Bhaktipada. Kuladri calls Marshall County Sheriff Donald Bordenkircher for professional assistance, who agrees to help protect Bhaktipada and the community.

Sunday, February 2, 1986: Tapahpunja and Tirtha drive to Royal Oak, Michigan, to search for Sulochan. Tapahpunja telephones Mrs. Bryant and pretends to be Puranjana. Mrs. Bryant gives him the phone number of the motel where her son is staying. Tirtha and Tapahpunja drive back to the Ohio Valley, where they meet with Randall Gorby, a non-devotee friend of Tirtha’s, and discover Sulochan at the Scott Motel near Saint Clairsville, Ohio.

Monday, February 3, 1986: Sulochan drives to Wheeling (followed by Gorby, Tapahpunja and Tirtha) and meets with investigators at the FBI office in the Federal Building. He attempts to convince them to begin

an investigation of New Vrindaban. While at the FBI office, he also finds out from his mother that she gave away his location “to an enemy.” Sulochan checks out of the Scott Motel, and rents a room at another motel in Saint Clairsville, the Fischer Motel.

Tuesday, February 4, 1986: Gorby watches the Fischer Motel. Sulochan realizes he has been discovered and throws Gorby off the trail. Gorby claims that Sulochan “headed west on I-70 at a high rate of speed,” probably headed for California. Sulochan doubles back and rents a room at a boarding house in Washington Lands, just south of Moundsville. He notifies the sheriff of his location.

Tirtha receives from Tapahpunja his first payment of \$2,500, flies to Los Angeles, and hooks up with Janmastami to search for Sulochan, who they suspect is headed for California.

Wednesday, February 5, 1986: Gorby “discovers” Sulochan’s location at the boarding house in Washington Lands, notifies Kuladri, and suggests that Kuladri ask the sheriff to arrest him. That night, Kuladri follows Gorby’s suggestion and calls the sheriff.

Thursday, February 6, 1986: Sulochan is arrested by the sheriff’s deputies shortly after midnight and is charged with carrying a concealed weapon. He is taken first to the Wetzel County Jail, and later he is taken to the Marshall County Jail, where he meets his godbrother Triyogi, who is serving a 14-month sentence for assaulting Bhaktipada. He asks Triyogi to personally bring him his meals from the kitchen, because he is afraid of being poisoned by other inmates who might be in league with New Vrindaban.

Friday, February 7, 1986: Sheriff Bordenkircher invites New Vrindaban leaders to come to his office and examine Sulochan’s telephone and address book. In California, Tirtha and Janmastami meet with the head of security for Los Angeles ISKCON, Krishna-Katha (Jeffrey Breier), and Ramesvara’s personal secretary, Premadatta (Michael Scheffer), and a security assistant, Mahamantra dasa (David Fuller).

Saturday, February 8, 1986: Tirtha, Janmastami, Krishna-Katha and Mahamantra examine abandoned mine shafts in the Mojave Desert where Tirtha and Janmastami plan on dumping the body after the kill.

- Sunday, February 9, 1986:** Tirtha flies back to Ohio and returns to his wife and son at their trailer park home in Ravenna, and Janmastami begins driving his van back to Philadelphia and his business selling flowers. Tirtha receives from Tapahpunja his second payment: only \$1,700. He complains to Gorby that New Vrindaban promised him \$2,000.
- Monday, February 10, 1986:** *New Vrindaban News* publishes article by Kuladri titled, “Demon Discredited: The Inside Story.”
- February 26, 1986:** At the Marshall County Jail, Sulochan begins a ten-day hunger strike. He is placed on suicide watch.
- March 7, 1986:** Sulochan begins eating again.
- March, 1986:** Bhaktipada acquires two guard dogs: Gudakesh and Gurudasa.
- April 3, 1986:** After two months in jail, Sulochan goes to trial and is found guilty by a Marshall County Magistrate Court on a charge of carrying a deadly weapon.
- April 11, 1986:** Sulochan is released from jail after posting \$5,000 bail and returns to his parents’ home in Michigan.
- Late April 1986:** Tirtha and Randall Gorby drive to Michigan and spy on the Bryant residence. Gorby puts a Snoopy bumper sticker on Sulochan’s van.
- April 30, 1986:** Sulochan leaves Michigan and begins driving to California.
- May 11, 1986:** Sulochan telephones his mother to wish her a happy Mother’s Day.
- Mid-May, 1986:** Sulochan visits friends in Three Rivers, including his fiancée Bhagavati (Cathy Barry). Soon after, he returns to Los Angeles and his van is spotted by temple security, who immediately notify New Vrindaban hit men. Later, Krishna-Katha spots Sulochan’s van again near the Los Angeles temple, and follows him north on I-5. Krishna-Katha gives up the chase.
- Sunday, May 18, 1986:** During a meeting at the home of Bhaktipada’s former college roommate, lover and co-founder of New Vrindaban, Hayagriva (Howard M. Wheeler), Bhaktipada refuses to authorize payment of \$4,000 for Tirtha to fly to Los Angeles to “do the deed.” Hayagriva, Kuladri, Tirtha and Gorby have a second meeting to try to

figure out how to get the funds. Bhaktipada leaves for Europe. Kuladri claims that, just before Bhaktipada left New Vrindaban, while sitting in the back seat of his Cadillac limousine, Bhaktipada told Kuladri that Hayagriva can have \$2,500.

Monday, May 19, 1986: Tirtha, not Hayagriva, goes to the New Vrindaban sankirtan leader, Dharmatma (Dennis Gorrick), and receives \$2,500 to continue his hunt for Sulochan. Sulochan is presently in the San Francisco Bay area.

Tuesday, May 20, 1986: Tirtha flies to Los Angeles and rents a car at Ugly-Duckling Rent-A-Car agency at 8:00 a.m. Pacific time. Tirtha telephones Krishna-Katha, who tells him Sulochan was last seen heading north on I-5. Tirtha drives north on the freeway in speedy pursuit. Sulochan visits friends in San Francisco and Berkeley, including his buddy, Puranjana. When they part, Sulochan prophesies, “I have the sudden feeling that I am not going to ever see you again, Puranjana.” Sulochan returns to Los Angeles to visit with other friends and say “goodbye.” Sulochan is quickly spotted by Los Angeles ksatriyas. Tirtha is notified by telephone and begins driving back to Los Angeles. In two days, Tirtha puts 1,082 miles on his rented car.

Wednesday, May 21, 1986: Tirtha arrives in Los Angeles late in the morning. Krishna-Katha shows him where Sulochan’s van is parked. Tirtha and Krishna-Katha spend most of the afternoon, evening and night silently observing Sulochan’s van. They wait for the opportune moment to dispatch him to his “next body.” Late that night, K. K. leaves Tirtha and returns to Los Angeles ISKCON, but his curiosity gets the best of him, and he secretly returns to the street where Tirtha watches Sulochan’s vehicle. K. K. hides in the shadows.

Thursday, May 22, 1986: Tirtha murders Sulochan near the Los Angeles ISKCON temple (at approximately 1 a.m. Pacific time). Tirtha drives to LAX, ditches rental car, calls New Vrindaban, and flies from Los Angeles to Dallas, then to Cleveland. He then probably goes to his home in a trailer park near Ravenna, Ohio (about 50 miles south of Cleveland) to sleep.

Friday, May 23, 1986: Tirtha, in desperate need of the remainder of the \$8,000 payment promised by Hayagriva to purchase plane tickets for himself and his family to fly to India, telephones Dharmatma and asks for money. Dharmatma refuses. Tirtha also calls Hayagriva, Kuladri, and the New Vrindaban comptroller, Dulal-Chandra (Howard Fawley), for money, but “they just give him the run-around.”

Tirtha drives to Columbus, arrives in the afternoon; speaks to Tapahpunja Swami about getting escape money. Bhaktipada returns to the U. S. from Germany and hears the news of Sulochan’s murder. He arrives back at New Vrindaban that night.

Saturday, May 24, 1986: Bhaktipada delivers the early-morning *Srimad-bhagavatam* lecture at New Vrindaban. A devotee asks Bhaktipada, “How should we understand it when a demon is killed?” Bhaktipada responds that “A devotee isn’t disturbed when a snake is killed.” Tirtha drives to Youngstown, Ohio, where he meets with his friend Gorby and begs him to intercede on his behalf to get his escape money, which Hayagriva had promised. Gorby telephones Hayagriva, who says, “I can’t discuss this on the phone.”

Sunday, May 25, 1986: Gorby drives to New Vrindaban and personally meets with Hayagriva, who assures him that Tirtha will get his money “through the normal procedure.” Tapahpunja comes to New Vrindaban and tells Dharmatma he and Tirtha need money “to leave the country.” Dharmatma tells him to talk to “Number One” (Bhaktipada) regarding the money. Tapahpunja talks to “Number Two” (Kuladri), who also tells him to see Bhaktipada.

Tapahpunja allegedly spends ten hours with Bhaktipada trying to convince him to authorize the funds for escape money. Bhaktipada finally relents but does not have enough cash in his personal safe. Bhaktipada and Radhanath Swami drive to the sankirtan house and Dharmatma gives them several thousand dollars (\$6,000 according to Dharmatma’s first recollection) in cash.

Bhaktipada returns to his house, where he personally counts out the bills one by one, thereby putting his fingerprints on the bills. That night,

or the next morning, Tapahpunja and Radhanath Swamis leave New Vrindaban together and drive to Kent, Ohio, where they meet with Tirtha and give him the cash.

Monday, May 26, 1986: Tirtha spends the day packing and preparing to leave for India with his wife, son and stepson. Tapahpunja assists.

Tuesday, May 27, 1986: Tirtha, accompanied by Tapahpunja, his wife, son and stepson, go to Bank One in Kent, Ohio, to change \$4,000 in small bills to big bills. At 11:55 a.m., Tirtha is arrested by Kent police on a West Virginia warrant regarding the 1983 disappearance of Chakradhari. Tapahpunja is also arrested. After hearing the news, Kuladri leaves New Vrindaban in great anxiety and flies to New York City, where he hides out with a friend at the New Vrindaban satellite center in Brooklyn.

Wednesday, May 28, 1986: Randall Gorby, the government's principle witness, is nearly killed at 9:00 a.m. when he lights a cigarette in his house and ignites a gas explosion.

Thursday, May 29, 1986: Radhanath Swami delivers \$7,500 to the Cleveland temple for Tapahpunja's bail.

Friday, May 30, 1986: After three days in jail, Tapahpunja is released on bail. Soon he disappears.

June, 1986: Tapahpunja flees to Ireland, then Australia, then India, then Malaysia. Other important New Vrindaban managers defect, some never to return.

July, 1986: Bhaktipada meets with Radhanath Swami, Tapahpunja Swami, and Janmastami in Bombay.

August 18-19, 1986: Emergency meeting of the North American GBC held in San Diego. Bhaktipada asked, by telephone, if he will resign from the GBC if indicted by the Grand Jury. He answers in the affirmative.

September 11, 1986: New Vrindaban lays off 187 employees.

September 15, 1986: Grand Jury meets to investigate a possible connection between New Vrindaban members and the death of Sulochan. Bhaktipada refuses to resign from the GBC when indicted.

November 1986: North American temple presidents meet in Chicago and request the GBC to remove Bhaktipada from ISKCON.

November 23, 1986: Sulochan's three-year-old son drowns.

December 2-5, 1986: Tirtha's trial for the murder of Chakradhari. He is found guilty.

December, 1986: Bhaktipada begins his First Amendment Freedom Tour, preaching on radio, television and in newspapers.

December 15, 1986: Tirtha is sentenced to life in prison without parole.

January 5, 1987: The FBI raids New Vrindaban, confiscates computers, financial records, filing cabinets, cash, and bumper stickers and baseball caps bearing the names and logos of professional and college sports teams used by the traveling "pickers."

Early March, 1987: The remains of four bodies unearthed at New Vrindaban by police.

March 16, 1987: Bhaktipada is expelled from ISKCON for "moral and theological deviations."

April 9, 1987: *Rolling Stone* article, "Dial Om for Murder," published.

July 22, 1987: Tirtha becomes a swami at a fire sacrifice at the West Virginia State Penitentiary.

July 24, 1987: Lawsuit filed against the New Vrindaban community for illegally using copyrighted trademarks in a multi-million-dollar nationwide panhandling operation.

February, 1988: New Vrindaban is expelled from ISKCON.

November, 1988: *Monkey on a Stick: Murder, Madness and the Hare Krishnas* published.

May 24, 1990: a federal grand jury returns an eleven-count indictment charging Bhaktipada with racketeering: kidnapping, running a fraudulent charity scam, mail fraud, and conspiring to murder two devotees—Chakradhari and Sulochan.

June 7, 1990: Bhaktipada pleads "not guilty," and is released on a \$250,000 bond. He is ordered not to leave the United States.

June 14, 1990: After four years in hiding, Tapahpunja is apprehended in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur by U. S. Marshals from Hawaii.

July 24, 1990: Randall Gorby is found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning.

- November/December, 1990:** Tirtha's trial in Los Angeles for the murder of Sulochan; when the jury cannot reach a decision, a mistrial is declared.
- March 29, 1991 (Good Friday):** Bhaktipada convicted on the RICO and mail fraud counts (the jury failed to reach a verdict on the murder counts). He is incarcerated at the Eastern Regional Jail in Martinsburg, West Virginia and files an appeal.
- May 1, 1991:** Bhaktipada hires the law firm of high-profile attorney Alan Dershowitz from Harvard, with a \$100,000 retainer and \$495/hour rate.
- June 20, 1991:** Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr. announces Bhaktipada's sentence: thirty years in prison.
- July 10, 1991:** Judge Merhige releases Bhaktipada on \$250,000 bail, pending his appeal, but rules that he cannot return to New Vrindaban. Bhaktipada lives in an apartment in the Warwood neighborhood of Wheeling, where he stays for two years under house arrest with an electronic monitoring device locked on his ankle.
- August, 1991:** Tirtha convicted of murdering Sulochan in a second trial in Los Angeles.
- December 4, 1991:** Tirtha sentenced to "life imprisonment without parole" for the murder of Sulochan.
- Spring, 1993:** Radhanath Swami, P. K. Swami, Bhakti-Rasa Swami, and Janmastami subpoenaed to appear before the Grand Jury. Radhanath visits his father in Chicago.
- July 1, 1993:** Bhaktipada wins his appeal.
- August 16, 1993:** Bhaktipada returns triumphantly to New Vrindaban.
- August 28-September 5, 1993:** Parliament of the World's Religions' centennial celebration in Chicago, which Bhaktipada attends.
- September 6, 1993:** Bhaktipada's 56th birthday festival at New Vrindaban. Bhaktipada's chauffeur, however, sours the joyous mood when he tells devotees that, on the way back to New Vrindaban from Chicago during the all-night 380-mile drive, the privacy curtain of Bhaktipada's Winnebago van accidentally opened, and he observed his spiritual master and a teenage male Malaysian disciple in bed in the back of the Winnebago mobile home engaging in prolonged embraces and kisses in a manner which was

more appropriate for the amorous relationship between lovers than for the disciplined relationship between a spiritual master and his disciple. This becomes known as “The Winnebago Incident.”

When the news spreads throughout New Vrindaban, the community splits into two nearly-equal camps: those who think the story is malicious rumor and continue to support Bhaktipada, and those who believe the story and want Bhaktipada out of New Vrindaban. Tensions flare. Bhaktipada leaves New Vrindaban and retires to Silent Mountain, his cabin near a stone quarry in Littleton, West Virginia.

Radhanath Swami and Devamrita Swami (Jay Matsya)—a powerful preacher who had previously served ISKCON in Eastern Europe under Harikesh Maharaja and had come to New Vrindaban around March or April 1986—also leave New Vrindaban after hearing threats uttered by fanatical and angry Bhaktipada disciples, such as: “Coffins should be procured for the blasphemers who dare to spread slanderous lies about the spiritual master, Krishna’s pure devotee.”

March, 1994: Radhanath Swami, back at the Chowpatty temple in Mumbai which he helped establish eight years earlier, is welcomed back into ISKCON as an assistant GBC and initiating guru, with one important condition: “provided the United States Government does not indict him in its case now pending against Kirtanananda Swami.”

March 14, 1994: Bhaktipada is offered a plea bargain; he refuses.

March 27, 1995: The West Virginia State Penitentiary closes its doors. Tirtha is moved to the Mount Olive Correctional Complex in Fayette County.

April 16, 1996: Bhaktipada’s retrial begins. His attorney, however, throws in the towel after discovering that Tirtha Swami, who is serving life in prison for the murders of Chakradhari and Sulochan, has lost his faith in Bhaktipada after hearing about his molestation of teenage boys in the community and decides not to withhold incriminating information anymore in order to protect his former guru. Tirtha now claims that he carried out the assassinations of Sulochan and Chakradhari under Bhaktipada’s order.

- April 18, 1996:** Bhaktipada pleads guilty to one count of mail fraud from the federal racketeering charge but accepts no responsibility for the slayings of Chakradhari and Sulochan. He is imprisoned for eight years, at first in the Eastern Regional Jail in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and later in federal penitentiaries in Springfield, Missouri; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Butner, North Carolina.
- January, 1997:** Bhaktipada is locked down in solitary confinement for two weeks at the Eastern Regional Jail in Martinsburg, West Virginia, after his cell mate reported him to prison authorities for making sexual advances.
- March, 1997:** Radhanath is appointed as a full GBC member.
- March, 1998:** The GBC provisionally readmits New Vrindaban as a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, subject to an annual review for two years.
- March, 2000:** The GBC welcomes New Vrindaban unconditionally back to ISKCON.
- September 10, 2000:** The ISKCON Child Protection Office determines that “Kirtanananda dasa” had molested two boys.
- June 16, 2004:** Bhaktipada is released from prison; he goes to live with his disciples at the Interfaith Sanctuary in New York City.
- June 26, 2004:** Bhaktipada admits that he had “broken the regulative principles” in a letter posted on his website.
- August, 2005:** Bhaktipada is accused of attempting to fondle the genitals of a visiting young man during a private darshan. The Interfaith Sanctuary residents split into two camps: one believes the accusation is a malicious rumor invented by envious ISKCON devotees, and the other believes the accusation is true and tries to evict the “spiritual master” from the building.
- December 22, 2006:** Janmastami, one of the conspirators in the plot to murder Sulochan who escaped prosecution, breaks his twenty-year silence and announces, in a letter published by the *Sampradaya Sun*, that in January, 1986, Radhanath Swami ordered him to “neutralize Sulochan.”
- Late December, 2006:** Malati dasi, the co-GBC representative for New Vrindaban, compares Janmastami to a “mad dog.”

- January 3, 2007:** Ravindra-Svarupa accuses Janmastami of falling into the “quicksand swamp of fault-finding.”
- January 8, 2007:** Tirtha, in prison, attempts to discredit Janmastami by calling him the “plumber’s helper.”
- January 10, 2007:** Radhanath Swami announces, “As far as what Janmastami dasa has written on the Internet, every single allegation against me is totally false. I was not involved in any criminal activity.”
- January 24, 2008:** Tirtha in prison warns the author that if he publishes his forthcoming history book about New Vrindaban, “You will gain nothing but pain and suffering in your life.”
- March 7, 2008:** Bhaktipada leaves the U. S. permanently and moves to India. He says, “There’s no sense in staying where I’m not wanted.” He makes his headquarters at the Ulhasnagar Temple, managed by his disciples on the outskirts of Mumbai. His loyal disciples build a suite for him on the roof of the temple, which they call “Bhaktipada’s Palace of Love.”
- 2008:** Radhanath Swami’s book, *The Journey Home: Autobiography of an American Swami*, is published.
- June, 2010:** Radhanath attempts to convince Dharmatma to change his testimony.
- October, 2010:** Radhanath Swami discourages a scholar of ISKCON from collaborating on a New Vrindaban history book with the author.
- October 24, 2011:** Bhaktipada dies from kidney failure at Jupiter hospital in Thane, a city near Mumbai, India.
- October 26, 2011:** Radhanath Swami, in the company of two other ISKCON leaders, visits the Mohini Gosala cowshed in Vrindaban, India, where Bhaktipada’s body is lying in state, and offers prostrated obeisances to his former siksa guru (instructing spiritual master).
- July 2, 2013:** *Lion Television: Investigation Discovery Channel* (cable TV) broadcasts an episode about Sulochan’s murder.
- January 2018:** *Killing for Krishna: The Danger of Deranged Devotion* is published.

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E N D N O T E S

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2. <http://tirthainprison.com> is no longer online, but much of it can still be seen at http://web.archive.org/web/*/tirthainprison.com. I edited and uploaded dozens of Tirtha's very interesting articles, including some articles which described his friendly relationship with Radhanath in the early 1980s, to Tirtha's website. However, around 2007 Tirtha asked me to remove the articles he wrote praising Radhanath Swami, after some devotees began criticizing Radhanath Swami (and Chandramauli Swami) for visiting Tirtha in prison. I think people were starting to think Tirtha was special to Radhanath. At that time, Radhanath began to distance himself from Tirtha. The entire site was deleted in 2012.
3. In 1972, Hayagriva resigned as president of New Vrindaban and Kirtanananda Swami took over.
4. Subal dasa joined ISKCON in San Francisco in 1967, and later that year established an ISKCON center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 1981 he worked for ISKCON Press in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and also served as editor for *Brijabasi Spirit*.
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16. Jack Bryant, cited by Robert A. Fernandez, "Krishna dissident is slain on coast," *San Francisco Examiner* (undated, c. May 1986).

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22. Nori J. Muster (formerly Nandini devi dasi), *Lion Television*.
23. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, "Murder."
24. Tim Lee (Puranjana), *Lion Television*.
25. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 1, Facebook message to the author (October 3, 2017).
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27. Denis Harrison (Hari-Sauri), *Transcendental Diary*, Vol. 2 (1994).
28. Thomas G. Herzig (Tamal-Krishna Goswami), "The Perils of Succession: Heresies of Authority and Continuity In the Hare Krishna Movement," *ISKCON Communications Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 1997), http://content.iskcon.org/icj/5_1/5_1perils2.html (accessed July 3, 2017).
29. Tim Lee (Puranjana), Facebook message to the author (October 2, 2017).
30. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Interview with Jack Bryant" (March 12, 1990).
31. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 1, Facebook message to the author (October 3, 2017).
32. Tim Lee (Puranjana), Facebook message to the author (October 2, 2017).
33. Tim Lee (Puranjana), Facebook message to the author (June 29, 2017).
34. Tim Lee (Puranjana), "Hari Sauri Re-writes History (Again)," <http://krishna1008.blogspot.com/2014/05/hari-sauri-re-writes-history-again.html> (May 28, 2014).
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39. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), *Lion Television*.
40. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (7.11.29), purport.
41. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (6.18.33-34), translation.
42. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (7.11.26-27), translation.
43. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (9:3:10), purport.
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46. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (1.7.43), lecture, Vrindaban (October 3, 1976).
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49. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), e-mail to the author (August 29, 2008).
50. “The Original, High Quality Picture Pendant,” *ISKCON World Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (c. 1982), 8.
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52. Tim Lee (Puranjana), Facebook message to the author (October 2, 2017).
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54. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), *Lion Television*.
55. We now know that Kirtanananda Swami was not a bona fide guru, and therefore none of his so-called “diksa initiation” ceremonies were bona fide.
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57. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), e-mail to the author (August 25, 2008).
58. It should be noted that many faithful Brijabasis also did not follow the regulative principles. That in itself was no bar from living at New Vrindaban as a fringe devotee. But all Brijbasis had to surrender to Bhaktipada and his representatives.
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66. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 123.
67. Tim Lee (Puranjana), Facebook message to the author (July 19, 2016).
68. Terry Sheldon (Taphapunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
69. Geraldo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), telephone conversation with the author (July 2, 2017).
70. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), offering in *Sri Vyasa-Puja: The Most Blessed Event* (September 3, 1984), 81.
71. The director of Palace operations and marketing from 1980 to 1985 wrote: “The top tour guides [at the Palace] were: Krishna-Katha prabhu [Carl Carlson], Lajjavati dasi [Lynn Weisner], Jalakolahari prabhu [George Meyers], Rasavihari devi dasi, Damodar dasa [Alan White] and Kanka dasi [Susan Hebel], Sulochan dasa [Steven Bryant] along with Puru prabhu. There were others, but these were the best. They were given training and customer service training as well.

- Not just thrown out on the floor.”—Randy Stein (Mahabuddhi), e-mail to the author (March 30, 2003).
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 83. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), “GBC Findings,” 3.
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 87. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *The Guru Business*.
 88. Helga Bryant, *Lion Television*.
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 97. Tim Lee (Puranjana), *PADA History of ISKCON*, “David attacks Goliath.”
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100. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, "Murder."
101. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, "Murder."
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103. Eric Johanson, e-mail to the author (July 12, 2014).
104. Former gurukula boy, Gerardo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), conversation with the author (January 9, 2007).
105. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Keith Weber" (June 25, 1989).
106. Matthew Goldman (Puskar), telephone conversation with the author (September 28, 2008).
107. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (July 14, 2014).
108. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with William Stacnowski" (June 29, 1989).
109. Hans Kary (Hamsadutta), cited by John Hubner, "How the Krishnas Turned Bad," *San Jose Mercury News* (June 21, 1987), <http://surrealist.org/jpgspdfs/hubner1.pdf> (accessed July 14, 2015).
110. Terry Sheldon (Taphpunja Swami), cited by Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon," telephone conversation with Taphpunja in Penang, Malaysia (March 22, 1990).
111. Prabhupada, *Sri Isopanisad*, vs. 18, purport.
112. Prabhupada, conversation in a car on a drive from Paris to Chateau (June 12, 1974).
113. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (December 27, 2016).
114. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
115. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *Violence In ISKCON: Caution*, 9.
116. Prabhupada, morning walk in Los Angeles (December 30, 1973).
117. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (July 24, 2014).
118. Steven John Forbes (Nistraigunya), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991).
119. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
120. Prabhupada, *Sri Isopanisad* (12).
121. Nathan Baruch Zakheim (Naranarayan), conversation with the author at Los Angeles ISKCON (June 28, 2017).
122. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 124.
123. Gail Conger, "Life and Death Among the Krishnas at New Vrindaban," *Akron Beacon Journal* (February 7, 1988).
124. Tim Lee (Puranjana), *PADA History of ISKCON*, "David attacks Goliath."
125. Eric Johanson, e-mail to the author (February 8, 2015).

126. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
127. True. Kirtanananda was initiated on Radharani's appearance day (September 23, 1966). He was unable to attend Prabhupada's first initiation ceremony on the day following Janmastami (September 9, 1966) because he was, at the time, incarcerated in Bellevue Hospital.
128. True. Prabhupada awarded him sannyasa on Janmastami (August 28, 1967).
129. True. In September 1967, after leaving India, Kirtanananda disobeyed his spiritual master by returning to New York City, instead of going to London as ordered. In New York he told his godbrothers that Prabhupada was not coming back to America, that he would die in India, but he (Kirtanananda Swami) had been given sannyasa so he could lead ISKCON in Prabhupada's absence. Kirtanananda then began attempting to "Westernize" Krishna Consciousness by encouraging his godbrothers to abandon the dhoti, sikha and tilak, so they would appear less foreign to Americans.
130. Not exactly true. To my knowledge, Kirtanananda never "sat on a throne" until after Prabhupada's death. In late 1974 or early 1975, however, New Vrindaban pujaris (priests) placed Kirtanananda Swami's photograph on the step below Prabhupada's vyasasana in the Bahulaban temple. While offering guru-puja to Prabhupada's photo, they also offered worship to Kirtanananda's photo. When Prabhupada heard about this, he chastised his errant disciple when Kirtanananda Swami visited him in Hawaii. The picture was promptly removed.
131. True. Kirtanananda Swami was the first of the eleven ISKCON gurus to begin initiating disciples (December 25, 1977).
132. Perhaps this is true or false. The KSS probably refers to Adwaitacharya's highly-lucrative (but risky) enterprise buying hashish and other illegal drugs in India and Thailand, smuggling them into the U. S., and selling the product to dealers and consumers in New York City and Los Angeles. However, during the same time period, devotees in Laguna Beach also operated a huge drug smuggling operation. I do not know which came first.
133. True. According to Janmastami, Adwaita paid \$26,000 to a printer in Bangkok for an unspecified amount of counterfeit U. S. currency in denominations of \$100, \$50 and \$20. He then tried to get other devotees to buy cash from him and pass it off on the street. Adwaita asked Janmastami to purchase some of his currency, but Janmastami refused, saying, "His stuff really looked bad."—Janmastami dasa, e-mail to the author (August 3, 2008). It seems New Vrindaban never made any money from this scheme.
134. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *The Guru Business*.
135. Emil Sofsky (Adwaitacharya), telephone conversation with the author (January 5, 2003).
136. It is not hard to see the inconsistency in Adwaitacharya's protestation that Kirtanananda Maharaja "begged" him to stop his enterprise; "ordered" him

to stop. If Maharaja wanted him to stop, all he had to do was refuse the cash which Adwaita brought to New Vrindaban in briefcases and suitcases stuffed with big bills. I was present in Maharaja's office/apartment on the fourth floor of the Bahulaban administration building/men's ashram during one such visit by Adwaita in the summer of 1978. If Kirtanananda Maharaja had burned one such suitcase in front of Adwaita's eyes, he surely would have stopped his dealing. But Maharaja accepted the cash. If Kirtanananda Maharaja had actually "begged" and "ordered" Adwaita to stop his business, it was simply for show. Adwaita understood his master's mind: "The money is the honey."

137. Perhaps. Kirtanananda may not have been the first to permit a sankirtan leader to act as "husband" to the unmarried sankirtan women. Around the same time, Hamsadutta's sankirtan leader in Berkeley, Jiva dasa (James Patrick Underwood), also served in this capacity.
138. True. The New Vrindaban sankirtan leader discovered that many of the unmarried women needed intimate male association in order to keep them satisfied and out on the road collecting money, and Bhaktipada authorized the sankirtan leader to satisfy the women as their polygamous "husband." New Vrindaban was not alone in this regard; the Berkeley sankirtan leader had a similar arrangement with the women book distributors and collectors. Prabhupada sometimes advocated polygamy; during his youth polygamy was socially accepted and legal in India. As a young man in Calcutta, he considered marrying a second wife, but his father discouraged him. At least three or four New Vrindaban men had multiple wives in the 1970s and early 1980s.
139. The sankirtan leader denied this accusation, but New Vrindaban's biggest "picker," Mother Maharha (Mary Saint-John), said she overheard the conversation between Bhaktipada and the sankirtan leader. She later spoke about it to Sulochan, who included her testimony in his book.
140. True. Prabhupada wrote dozens of letters in 1967 and 1968 condemning Kirtanananda Swami for trying to take over ISKCON. He called his disobedient disciple a "crazy man."
141. True. Bhaktipada asked Mother Isani to design and construct a gold-plated, bejeweled crown, scepter and tilak for the murti (statue) of Prabhupada at the Palace. The women in the sewing department made a gorgeous satin and velvet cape embroidered with gold thread to compliment his regal accouterments. Prabhupada was first dressed as a king on Christmas Day, 1980.
142. Not exactly, as far as we can tell. We think Sulochan here refers to a letter in the BBT Archive from Prabhupada to Hayagriva (January 15, 1968), in which Prabhupada indicated that Kirtanananda "does not believe in *parampara* [the chain of discipular succession] or in the necessity of scriptural authority. He seems to feel that this is a sort of tyranny."

143. True. When Keith went to the welfare office during the summer of 1966 in an attempt to get money for Prabhupada's temple, he explained to the clerk, "God told me [to come here]," and was then sent to Bellevue mental hospital for an evaluation. Keith unwittingly signed himself in and was incarcerated for three weeks until he finally convinced his father to come and sign his release papers.
144. True. After one particularly devastating snow storm in February 1977, the New Vrindaban cowherds were unable to deliver hay to one isolated pasture, and nearly a dozen cows died. Kirtanananda was charged with cruelty to animals and spent one day in the Marshall County Jail until New Vrindaban posted \$3,000 bail. He was found guilty, but the charges were dropped after he appealed. New Vrindaban considered the charges harassment, because of the severe weather during that winter. Later, however, in 1992, dozens of cows at New Vrindaban died due to neglect.
145. True, at least during the early days of ISKCON. Kirtanananda was 28 when he first met Prabhupada. Most of the other disciples were ten or more years junior.
146. Not exactly. Kirtanananda, Hayagriva and Umapati joined at the same time.
147. I have never talked to Achyutananda about this, but it sounds like something Kirtanananda might have said in private.
148. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *The Guru Business*.
149. Bhavananda's public disgrace will be discussed in Chapter 3.
150. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *The Guru Business*.
151. As Sulochan predicted, Kirtanananda was eventually "caught" in the act (September 1993). This will be discussed in Chapter 15.
152. Sulochan probably never knew how close to the truth he had come in this statement. He was referring to Kirtanananda's acceptance of money generated by illegal recreational drug enterprises, but actually Kirtanananda enjoyed beer and cocaine from time to time, in the association of Hayagriva and a few other trusted confidants. This was revealed later by Randall Gorby (and others) who said, "Howard Wheeler preferred opium and . . . Keith Ham preferred to use cocaine."
153. I have never seen evidence of this, but I suppose it could be possible.
154. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *The Guru Business*.
155. Prabhupada, cited by Paul Ferry (Parambrahma), "Hawaiian Trip," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (February 2 and 9, 1975), 18.
156. Wallace Sheffey (Umapati Swami), e-mail to the author (February 12, 2013).
157. "A Life of Leadership," *The Most Blessed Event: Sri Vyasa-Puja* (September 4, 1978), 2.
158. Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), *Srila Prabhupada-Lilamrita*, Vol. 2, 113.
159. Wallace Sheffey (Umapati Swami), e-mail to the author (February 23, 2013).
160. Wallace Sheffey (Umapati Swami), e-mail to the author (June 5, 2014).

161. Wallace Sheffey (Umapati Swami), e-mail to the author (February 23, 2013).
162. *Back to Godhead* printed the following eighteen poems and articles by, and interviews with Kirtanananda Swami:
- 1966 Vol 01, No 01, (untitled poem, No. 1)
 - 1966 Vol 01, No 01, (untitled poem, No. 2)
 - 1966 Vol 01, No 01, (untitled poem, No. 3)
 - 1966 Vol 01, No 02, (untitled poem, No. 4)
 - 1969 Vol 01, No 29, “Man’s Link to God”
 - 1969 Vol 01, No 31, “Krishna’s Light vs. Maya’s Night”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 32, “Prasadam: Food for the Body, Food for the Soul and Food for God”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 33, “Observing the Armies on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra, Part 1”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 34, “Contents of the Gita Summarized”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 35, “Karma-yoga—Perfection through Action, Part 3: Sankirtana”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 37, “Transcendental Knowledge, Part 4: He Is Transcendental”
 - 1970 Vol 01, No 38, “Karma-yoga—Action in Krishna Consciousness, Part 5: Work in Devotion”
 - 1970-1973 Vol 01, No 40, “Sankhya-yoga: Absorption in the Supreme”
 - 1970-1973 Vol 01, No 41, “Knowledge of the Absolute: It Is Not a Cheap Thing”
 - 1970-1973 Vol 01, No 42, “Attaining the Supreme: What Is Brahman?”
 - 1974 Vol 01, No 66, “Turning Our Love Toward Krishna”
 - 1977 Vol 12, No 12, “The Things Christ Had to Keep Secret”
 - 1986 Vol 21, No 07, “The Heart’s Desire: How can we find happiness that is not purchased with our pain?”
163. S., *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 225, 226, 229.
164. Walter Parry (Vrindapati), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 237.
165. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 449.
166. Walter Parry (Vrindapati), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 240.
167. S. spoke to me personally about this event during a visit to my home in January 2006. The letter from Prabhupada he referred to was to Hayagriva (November 8, 1970).
168. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), “The Hidden History of ISKCON,” Part 3.
169. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), “The Hidden History of ISKCON,” Part 3.
170. “GBC MEETING 1983” (March 18, 1983), <http://www.dandavats.com/wp-content/uploads/GBCresolutions/GBCRES83.htm> (accessed May 15, 2014).

171. "GBC MEETING 1983" (March 19, 1983), <http://www.dandavats.com/wp-content/uploads/GBCresolutions/GBCRES83.htm> (accessed May 15, 2014).
172. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 3.
173. Randy Stein (Mahabuddhi), e-mail to the author (March 31, 2003).
174. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), offering in *Sri Vyasa-puja* (September 5, 1983), 9.
175. Jamuna wrote: "I do know that Radhanath Swami and Sulochan were good friends before this whole thing went down." Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), e-mail to the author (September 4, 2008).
176. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), letter to Kirtanananda Swami (May 30, 1985).
177. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 124.
178. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter written at Sri Krishna Balarama International Guest House, Vrindaban, India addressed to "My dear GBC Godbrothers" (February 22, 1985).
179. Thomas G. Herzig (Tamal-Krishna Goswami), letter to members of the Privilege Committee (April 5, 1985).
180. *Eleven Naked Emperors: The Crisis of Charismatic Succession in ISKCON (1977-1987)*.
181. Prabhupada, room conversation (November 2, 1977), cited in "Sri Prabhupada Speaks Out: His Final Instructions," *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1-2 (1978), 25.
182. Vaishnava dasa (disciple of Ramesvara Maharaja), letter to Thomas G. Herzig (Tamal-Krishna Goswami) (January 12, 1987), <http://www.skepticfiles.org/krish/guruva.htm> (accessed August 27, 2015).
183. Prabhupada, *Krishna Book*, Vol. 2.
184. A handful of disciples, when they heard that the eleven managers had taken over, understood that great problems would soon become manifest in the society, but to most of ISKCON, the future problems were unanticipated.
185. Robert Grant (Ramesvara), cited by Yasodanandan, "Notes In Response," *The Vedic Village Review*, No. 12 (March 1990), 15. <http://prabhupada-books.de/english-book-scans/vvr12.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2016).
186. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 171.
187. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "Cleaning House."
188. Van Charnell (Rochan), telephone conversation with the author (December 4, 2014).
189. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "Pillars of Success."
190. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "Pillars of Success."
191. E. Burke Rochford, Jr., *Hare Krishna in America*, 209, 211, 236, 237.
192. "The Underground Hare Krishnas," *Hinduism Today*, Volume 8, Number 5 (September/October 1986).
193. J. Stillson Judah, cited in *Monkey On A Stick*, 390.

194. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "Pillars of Success."
195. "GBC Notes," *New Vrindaban News* (August 25, 1985).
196. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "Pillars of Success."
197. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 121.
198. Van Charnell (Rochan), telephone conversation with the author (December 4, 2014).
199. "Festival Highlights," *New Vrindaban News* (September 5, 1985).
200. Van Charnell (Rochan), "Oh, I remember you!—an Open Letter to Hamsadutta dasa," (1997) <http://www.hareKrishna.com/philosophy/vada/writings/hans.htm> (accessed March 5, 2014).
201. Kathy Kuskey, "New Vrindaban Hosts Spiritual Conferences," *Wheeling News-Register* (September 16, 1985).
202. Trivikrama Swami, cited by Tim Lee (Puranjana), "ISKCON History, Part 2."
203. In 1984 Bhaktipada was appointed co-GBC with Gopal-Krishna Swami and Jagadish Goswami for Vrindaban, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. See GBC Resolutions (March 8, 1984).
204. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *On His Order*, a paper presented at the GBC and North American Temple Presidents Meeting at New Vrindaban (September 17, 1985).
205. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
206. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by Kathy Kuskey in "Krishna Officials Claiming 'Bitter' Ex-Husband's Charges Are Untrue," *Sunday News-Register* (September 15, 1985), 11.
207. Government exhibit 14.
208. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, "Murder."
209. Donald Bordenkircher, cited by Kathy Kuskey in "Krishna Officials Claiming 'Bitter' Ex-Husband's Charges Are Untrue," *Sunday News-Register* (September 15, 1985), 11.
210. Anonymous woman, cited by Thomas Ferraro in "Krishnas Involved in Seamy Accusations, Including Murder," *Sunday News-Register* (July 6, 1986).
211. Jane Seward (Jamuna), cited by Kathy Kuskey in "Krishna Officials Claiming 'Bitter' Ex-Husband's Charges Are Untrue," *Sunday News-Register* (September 15, 1985), 11.
212. High-ranking New Vrindaban leader, cited by anonymous California devotee in John Dart's article "Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect," *Los Angeles Times* (July 20, 1986), 3.
213. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 47-49.
214. Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI interview with Randall Gorby (June 24, 1986).

215. "Motion filed by William Kolibash, U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of West Virginia seeking Jim Lees disqualification from representing Bhaktipada," cited by George Belanus in "Both Sides Want Lees as Witness," *The Intelligencer* (August 11, 1990).
216. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 125.
217. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited in "Devotee Produces Statements to Back Wife Stealing Claim," *Wheeling News-Register* (September 17, 1985), 2.
218. Donald Bordenkircher, cited in *The New York Times* (August 19, 1986).
219. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "A Rebuttal to the smear sheet circulated by Kirtanananda (Keith Ham) about Sulochan dasa, Sept. 16, 1985, at New Vrindaban, West Virginia, during a summit conference."
220. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Conversation with Puranjana and Isvari regarding the recent smear sheet on Sulochan dasa circulated by Keith Ham (Kirtanananda dasa)" (September 27, 1985).
221. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), e-mail to the author (August 25, 2008).
222. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (July 19, 2014).
223. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "GBC Findings," 1.
224. Privilege Committee Report, cited by Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "GBC Findings," 4-5.
225. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
226. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "GBC Findings," 6.
227. Privilege Committee Report, cited by Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "GBC Findings," 4-5.
228. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
229. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (July 19, 2014).
230. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by Kathy Kuskey, "Krishna Council Will Make Excommunication Decision," *Wheeling News-Register* (September 30, 1985).
231. "Radhanath Maharaja to Berkeley," *New Vrindaban News* (October 20, 1985), 1.
232. Tim Lee (Puranjana), "Interview with Puranjana dasa" (November 1, 1985), from Sulochan's *The Guru Business* manuscript, 135.
233. Tim Lee (Puranjana), "Interview with Puranjana dasa" (November 1, 1985), from Sulochan's *The Guru Business* manuscript, 135.
234. *Holy Cow, Swami*.
235. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Motive Behind the Attack of Swami is Disputed," *Wheeling News-Register* (December 5, 1985).
236. Typewritten commentary on newspaper clipping, "Motive Behind the Attack of Swami is Disputed," *Wheeling News-Register* (December 5, 1985).
237. In the late 1980s, Dezio studied law at WVU Morgantown and, in 1990, became a West Virginia licensed attorney. Today, Richard Dezio, P. C., has an estate

- planning practice in Alexandria, Virginia. See <http://www.dezio.com> (accessed April 3, 2017).
238. Dick Dezio (Tulsi), cited by Carl Remensky in “Krishna leader injured in attack,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (October 29, 1985), 4.
239. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (May 9, 2015).
240. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by David Waterman (Garga-Rsi), “Bigotry’s Fire: Notes on Bhaktipada’s Trial,” *Brijabasi Spirit* (January 2, 1988), 7.
241. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Eric Harrison in “Violence is Focus of Krishna Inquiry,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (August 21, 1986), 16-A.
242. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 5 (December 11, 1987), 829.
243. Michael Shockman (Triyogi), cited by Dick Dezio (Tulsi), in an article by Terry Smith, “Krishnas May Investigate New Disciples,” *The Intelligencer* (October 31, 1985), 1, 6.
244. Some sources claimed the iron bar which Triyogi wielded as a weapon was a brick prying tool, but one Brijabasi insisted, “It wasn’t a brick prying tool, it was a stake used to hold the curb molds.”—Mark Meberg (Madhava-Ghosh), e-mail to the author (October 20, 2008).
245. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 5 (December 11, 1987), 829.
246. Dick Dezio (Tulsi), cited in “Krishna Chief Recovering From Beating,” *Wheeling News-Register* (November 22, 1985).
247. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 509.
248. Mark Meberg (Madhava-Ghosh), e-mail to the author (October 20, 2008).
249. Daniel Van Pelt (Devananda), hand-written investigative report, 2.
250. Donald Bordenkircher, cited in “Local Krishna Guru Felled; World ISKCON Leaders Coming,” *Moundsville Daily Echo* (October 28, 1985).
251. Donald Bordenkircher, cited by Douglas Root in “Krishna Follower Held in Attack on Swami,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 29, 1985), B-5.
252. “Ex-Hare Krishna Devotee Sentenced,” *Intelligencer* (May 30, 1986).
253. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “Krishna’s Great Counter-Attack: Interview with a Reporter from Dan Rather CBS Evening News,” *New Vrindaban News* (October 6, 1986), 2.
254. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Frank Chiefa (Chandramauli Swami), “On Tour With Srila Bhaktipada,” *Brijabasi Spirit* (June 1986), 20.
255. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter to Michael Shockman (Triyogi), (October 20, 1987).
256. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (November 26, 2016).

257. Undated and untitled article by anonymous author, believed to have been written by David Waterman (Garga-Rsi) in consultation with Arthur Villa (Kuladri) (c. late October, 1985).
258. To read the complete six-page article, go to: http://henrydoktorski.com/nv/Bhaktipada_Is_Struck_Down.doc.
259. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), cited in *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 36.
260. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 509-510.
261. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada) (November 5, 1986), cited in "CBS News INTERVIEW," a pamphlet published by New Vrindaban (c. late 1986)
262. "Srla Bhaktipada Recovers," *Land of Krishna*, Vol. 2. No. 6 (February 1986), 1.
263. Umapati spent so much time at the hospital that Bhaktipada referred to him as his "Jewish mother." Evelyn Sheffey (Ilavati devi dasi), "Sauce of the Week," *New Vrindaban News* (November 21, 1985).
264. Umapati said "Forever By His Side" was the best piece I had written to that date. It can be seen at: http://henrydoktorski.com/nv/Forever_By_His_Side.html.
265. In the ancient Sanskrit epic, *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas are described as the five sons of Pandu, the king of Hastinapur, by his two wives Kunti and Madri. Their names are Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. All five brothers were married to the same woman, Draupadi. Together the brothers fought and prevailed in a great war against their cousins, the Kauravas, known as the Kuruksetre War, during which Krishna served as Arjuna's chariot driver.
266. Haridasa Thakur (b.1451) is the most famous Muslim convert of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who maintained his unflinching faith despite extreme adversity.
267. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), "Srimad-bhagavatam class—October 29, 1985," *New Vrindaban News* (October 31, 1985).
268. Satsvarupa always admired Kirtanananda from the beginning. They were initiated on the same day: September 23, 1966.
269. Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), "Krishna, Please Let Him Stay," Morning class at New Vrindaban (October 29, 1985), *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (January 1986), 13.
270. Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), "Krishna, Please Let Him Stay," Morning class at New Vrindaban (October 29, 1985), *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (January 1986), 13.
271. Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), *Journal and Poems*, Volume 2 (July-December 1985), 174.
272. Stephen Guarino (Satsvarupa dasa Goswami), "Tribute to a Pure Devotee," *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January 1986), 36.
273. John E. Favors (Bhakti-Tirtha Swami), "Class Excerpts," *New Vrindaban News* (November 24, 1985).

274. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
275. "From Around the World," *New Vrindaban News* (November 6, 1985), 2, and "Responses," *New Vrindaban News* (November 21, 1985), 1.
276. Dick Dezio (Tulsi), "News Release" (November 11, 1985).
277. "Mail-A-Prayer," *New Vrindaban News* (November 6, 1985).
278. Robert Seguin (Radha-Govinda), "Appreciations of Srila Bhaktipada," *New Vrindaban News* (November 6, 1985).
279. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Krishna's Great Counter-Attack," *New Vrindaban News* (October 6, 1986), 2.
280. Bhima-Karma, telephone conversation with the author (January 29, 2013).
281. Alleged victim number 5, "Official Decision on the Case of Sri Galima dasa," ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (February 1, 2000).
282. Alleged victim number 6, "Official Decision on the Case of Sri Galima dasa," ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (February 1, 2000).
283. Gary Gardner (Sri-Galim), cited by Dhira Govinda, "Official Decision on the Case of Sri Galima dasa," *ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection* (February 1, 2000).
284. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), "Conversation between the Counseling Board and Srila Bhaktipada (April 17, 1986)," *New Vrindaban News* (April 22, 1986).
285. "Srila Bhaktipada Exhibits External Consciousness!" *New Vrindaban News* (November 6, 1985), 2.
286. Dave Martin (Yogadeva—initiated by Bhaktipada as Yogesvara dasa in 2009), telephone conversation with the author (April 17, 2012).
287. "Srila Bhaktipada Nectar," *New Vrindaban News* (November 21, 1985), 4.
288. The RVC deities in Bhaktipada's house were cultured marble resin replicas made from molds cast from the original hand-carved marble Radha-Vrindaban Chandra deities from India.
289. "Srila Bhaktipada Comes Home," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (January 1986), 16-21.
290. My story was published in "Meditations on the Bhaktipadastakam Prayers—Part 2," *Nectar of the Holy Name*, No. 10, published at New Madhuban in Rishikesh, India (October 1988), 4.
291. Thomas Allin (Toshan-Krishna), letter to Bhaktipada (November 25, 1985).
292. Howard J. Resnick (Hridayananda Goswami), cited in "Srila Acharyadeva Visits," *New Vrindaban News* (December 25, 1985).
293. "Swami, New Vrindaban Named in OVMC Suit," undated newspaper clipping.
294. "Swami, New Vrindaban Named in OVMC Suit," undated newspaper clipping.
295. Jean Thibeault (Jadabharata), cited by Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami) during a conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (May 16, 2003).

296. John Mowen (Kasyapa), cited in "Srila Bhaktipada Nectar," *New Vrindaban News* (November 29, 1985), 2.
297. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami) during a conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (May 16, 2003).
298. "Srila Bhaktipada Nectar," *New Vrindaban News* (November 29, 1985), 2.
299. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), "Srila Bhaktipada Nectar," *New Vrindaban News* (November 29, 1985), 2.
300. "Town Meeting," *New Vrindaban News* (January 26, 1986).
301. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), "New Orleans Diary," *New Vrindaban News* (February 17, 1986).
302. "Srila Bhaktipada's World Tour Begins," *New Vrindaban News* (March 1, 1986).
303. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter to Warren Deshon, Framingham, Massachusetts (May 23, 1986).
304. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1736-1737.
305. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 5 (December 11, 1987), 830.
306. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), e-mail to the author (May 26, 2017).
307. "Don't Leave Us," *Brijabasi Spirit* (October 19, 1987), 3-4.
308. Bhaktipada's attendant physician, *Holy Cow, Swami*.
309. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 5 (December 11, 1987), 851.
310. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Krishna Swami Says Beating May Have Impaired Memory," *The Intelligencer* (December 12, 1987).
311. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), telephone conversation with the author (September 16, 2008).
312. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 452-453.
313. At least from the age of six, young Keith Ham was known for (1) his inflated sense of self-importance, (2) getting people to do what he wanted, and (3) childhood temper tantrums when he didn't get what he wanted.
314. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.
315. Elsa F. Ronningstam, *Narcissistic Personality*, 72.
316. Elsa F. Ronningstam, *Narcissistic Personality*, 72-73.
317. Elsa F. Ronningstam, *Narcissistic Personality*, 73.
318. Prabhupada, *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi-lila, 17.41), purport
319. Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, *The Guru Papers*, 112-113.
320. Van Charnell (Rochan), "The Bhagavan Letter" (June 25, 2000). Accessed from <http://www.hareKrishna.com/lawsuit/editorial/rocana2.htm> (ca. 2003), but the page was later removed.
321. Hans Kary (Hamsadutta), telephone conversation with the author (August 15, 2003).

322. Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, *The Guru Papers*, 52-53, 57, 131.
323. Susan Hebel (Kanka devi dasi), telephone conversation with the author (August 25, 2003).
324. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (October 8, 2003).
325. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
326. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Strong Faith (September 1993).
327. Naranarayana dasa Visvakarma (Nathan Baruch Zakheim), telephone conversation with the author (December 12, 2005).
328. Henri Jolicoeur (formerly Hanuman Swami), e-mail to the author (September 12, 2011).
329. Thomas Meyers (Taru dasa), "Ashram Items," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (July 1978), 16.
330. Deborah Houtchens, telephone conversation with the author (March 3, 2003).
331. These are only a few examples of Kirtanananda's sexual transgressions. More will be revealed in my forthcoming Bhaktipada biography, *Gold, Guns and God—Swami Bhaktipada and the West Virginia Hare Krishnas*.
332. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Visit with Srila Bhaktipada (August 4, 2003)," <http://web.archive.org/web/20040607163336/http://bhaktipada.net/080403.html> (accessed November 10, 2014).
333. Bhaktipada cited this verse by Emerson in a darshan published in *The City of God Examiner*, No. 36 (September 26, 1990), 2.
334. Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, No. 51
335. Bhaktipada cited this couplet by Whitman in a darshan published in *The City of God Examiner*, No. 36 (September 26, 1990), 2.
336. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), "Excerpt from a class given by Srila Bhaktipada at the Vrindaban Brahmachari Ashram (October 24, 1986), *New Vrindaban News* (October 28, 1986).
337. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami) during a sankirtan darshan in the summer of 1987, *Cutting the Knot*, 229.
338. Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), "Sankirtan Darshan: Guru Changes His Mind Because Krishna Changes His Mind" (May 1987), *Devamrita Daggers*.
339. *Brahma-Sambhita*, (verse 38).
340. Marjorie Ham, cited by Ganendra dasa, "Vyasa-puja Homage," *Sri Vyasa Puja* (September 3, 1979), 14.
341. Bob Larson and Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), from a conversation broadcast on the "Bob Larson Talkback Show" (December 8, 1986), cited in "Srila Bhaktipada Talks Back," *New Vrindaban News* (December 12, 1986), 4.
342. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter to the author (July 20, 2003).

343. Keith's drinking prowess was confirmed by fellow students at Peekskill High School (class of 1955): John R. Pulice, Barbara T. Catalina, Chris Gamwell, Robert Cole, Lois Ann Bogardus, A. Gordon Hennessy, Andrew Antunes, and Donald S. Straub.
344. Francis Gerald Ham, conversation with the author in Madison, Wisconsin (July 9, 2003).
345. Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva), *Volume II*, "There was a child, Part 5," 3.
346. Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva), *Volume II*, "Chapter IV: The Ivy Years: Flight As In Anger," 4.
347. Francis Gerald Ham, cited by Margalit Fox, "Swami Bhaktipada, Ex-Hare Krishna Leader, Dies at 74," *The New York Times* (October 24, 2011).
348. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letters to the author (June 15, 2003) and (September 21, 2003).
349. Howard Wheeler, *Volume II*, "Part I: The Long Sleep," 3-4.
350. Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva), *The Hare Krishna Explosion*, 5.
351. Wallace Sheffey (Umapati Swami), e-mail to the author (February 25, 2013).
352. Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva), "Sleepers Awake! New York: Summer 1966," *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 1, No. 46 (1970-1973), 25.
353. Bruce Scharf (Brahmananda), e-mail letter to the author (October 9, 2003).
354. Charles Barnett (Achyutananda), *Blazing Sadhus* (78-79).
355. Prabhupada, letter to Rayaram (November 9, 1967).
356. Prabhupada, letter to Rayaram (November 5, 1967).
357. Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva), "Chant," *Brijabasi Spirit* (November 1981), 20.
358. Prabhupada, letter to Bruce Scharf (Brahmananda), (July 29, 1968).
359. Prabhupada, tape-recorded conversation with devotees at New Vrindaban (June 9, 1969).
360. Prabhupada, cited by Cintamani dasi, "Srila Prabhupada in New Vrindaban," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (c. October 1985), 23, 24.
361. Prabhupada, cited by Arthur Villa (Kuladri), "Srila Bhaktipada's Vision," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (September 1979), 8-9.
362. Prabhupada, cited by Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, "Feast Lecture," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1979), 15.
363. Prabhupada, morning walk in Los Angeles (undated), cited by Yasomatinandana dasa, "Vyasa-puja Homage," *Sri Vyasa-puja* (August 21, 1981), 6.
364. Prabhupada, cited by Alfred Tarantino (Ajeya), e-mail to the author (March 26, 2014).
365. Prabhupada, cited by Mark Meberg (Madhava-Ghosh), letter to Victor Mistretta (Vrikodara), c. 1987.
366. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada) *Trial Transcript IV*; Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1733.
367. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript I* (September 18, 1986), 43.

368. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
369. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “As My World Ends—Where to Now?” *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (October 1976), 11, 12.
370. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “As My World Ends—Where to Now?” *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (October 1976), 18.
371. The word “Scam-Kirtan” is a bastardization of the Sanskrit word “sankirtan,” which, according to its broadest definition, means “the performance of activities that in some way glorify God.” There are various forms of sankirtan, such as chanting God’s holy names, offering and accepting sanctified food, and producing and distributing sacred literature. See Garuda dasa, “The Phenomenon of Sankirtana,” <http://www.krishna.com/phenomenon-sankirtana> (accessed December 23, 2016). In ISKCON, “picking” or fundraising was also considered “sankirtan.” “Scam-Kirtan,” therefore, means collecting money using fraudulent means, such as lying or stealing.
372. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 867.
373. Bernadette Hodas (Draupadi) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1847, 1849.
374. Leon Daniel, “Krishnas Gain Uneasy Accord in West Virginia Hills,” *Los Angeles Times* (January 15, 1984).
375. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 3 (December 9, 1987), 658.
376. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 3 (December 9, 1987), 659, 660, 661.
377. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), cited in untitled typewritten manuscript.
378. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript I* (September 18, 1986), 38.
379. Linda Ridall Villa (Kutila), cited by Jill Lawrence, “Son of Baptist minister Krishna colony’s swami,” *New Castle News* (New Castle, Pennsylvania) (September 9, 1978), <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/53277437/> (accessed July 5, 2017).
380. Linda Ridall Villa (Kutila), cited by Jill Lawrence, “Son of Baptist minister Krishna colony’s swami,” *New Castle News* (New Castle, Pennsylvania) (September 9, 1978), <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/53277437/> (accessed July 5, 2017).
381. In her conversation with the *New Castle News* reporter, Linda (Kutila) claimed that she hailed from a “middle-class” family, but it seems she was trying to minimize her affluent background. Very few American middle class children attend private schools, go to country clubs, and wear Alençon lace at their weddings. She grew up in a gorgeous home on Amberson Avenue in the wealthy Pittsburgh neighborhood of Shadyside. Her mother and father’s friends were all “socially prominent” (see Endnote 384) citizens of the city. Her upbringing was certainly not middle class.
382. Linda Ridall Villa (Kutila), cited by Jill Lawrence, “Son of Baptist minister Krishna colony’s swami,” *New Castle News* (New Castle, Pennsylvania)

- (September 9, 1978), <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/53277437/> (accessed July 5, 2017).
383. Srila Prabhupada Disciple Database (accessed February 15, 2017).
384. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, “Socially Prominent Attend Bridal Event at Shadyside Presbyterian Church” (July 20, 1947).
385. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, “Linda Ridall marries Arthur Villa” (February 13, 1973).
386. My Indian wife was best friends with this girl [S] from Bombay, and my wife told me about her friend’s fling with Kuladri.
387. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), “Interview with Kuladri in Mumbai” (October 2011), <https://vimeo.com/46349554> (accessed July 7, 2017).
388. Prabhupada, cited by Thomas G. Herzig (Tamal-Krishna Goswami), letter to Keith Gordon Ham (Kirtanananda) (July 11, 1977).
389. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), “Srila Bhaktipada’s Vision,” *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (September 1979), 8-9.
390. Hubner and Gruson, *Monkey on a Stick*, 305.
391. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript I* (September 18, 1986), 15-16, 18.
392. “Memo to File, RE: Randall Gorby” (August 20, 1986).
393. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1129.
394. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript II*, Day 3 (December 9, 1987), 695.
395. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript I* (September 18, 1986), 48-49.
396. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
397. Thomas Westfall, *Lion Television*.
398. Report of Investigation—Sheriff’s Office—Sgt. Westfall, “Missing Person Report,” MCSD Case No. F28-83, 20.
399. “Armed Forces of the United States Report of Transfer or Discharge” for Thomas A. Drescher.
400. Robert H. McWilliams, Proceedings, 88.
401. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 1, “My Introduction to Krishna Consciousness.”
402. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 2, “Meeting Prabhupada in Toronto and New Vrindaban.”
403. Paul Ferry (Parambrahma), “Notes by Fred Bardner, Assistant Prosecutor” (August 20, 1986).
404. Paul Ferry (Parambrahma), cited in “Report of Investigation—Sheriff’s Office—Sgt. Westfall, ‘Missing Person Report,’ MCSD Case No. F28-83”.
405. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (February 13, 2013).
406. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), *Grand Jury Interview*.
407. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 5 (December 11, 1987), 840.
408. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.

409. Donald Ferry (Mahabuddhi), cited by Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI Interview in Elkins, West Virginia" (September 16, 1986).
410. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
411. Some will say that the funding came from the Columbus ISKCON temple, but let us not forget that the temple at 99 East 13th Avenue was a New Vrindaban satellite center and the temple president, Narada-Muni, would never put money into an illegal enterprise without New Vrindaban sanction.
412. Sulochan claimed that Advaita's enterprise created \$4,000,000 in profits between 1977 and 1980 from heroin sales alone. (See "Jonestown In Moundsville.")
413. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 7, 2009).
414. "Report of Criminal Investigation," 12.
415. Patty (Purvacitti dasi), letter to David Shenk (Gadai dasa) in Buffalo (January 10, 1980).
416. Janmastami, who knew Purvacitti when she lived in Buffalo and Philadelphia, recalled, "Purvacitti was a diabetic, and not very healthy, even though plump and young. She was probably about two or three years younger than Tirtha. When they were together they had an apartment next to the Buffalo temple on Bidwell Parkway that Mukta and Loka's dad bought for them. She later moved to Philadelphia, and married a black-skinned devotee from there (I forgot his name). They lived outside the temple, did 'Scam-Kirtan' to pay their rent, and took free meals at the temple, just as she had done with Tirtha in Buffalo. Later she died in childbirth, giving birth to that man's child."—John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 16, 2016).
417. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 41-42.
418. Thomas Westfall, *Lion Television*.
419. Cathy Olrech (Kusumapida), Facebook chat with the author (March 4, 2015).
420. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 4, 2017).
421. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (September 3, 2017).
422. Janmastami elaborated in more detail the story of the arson wars with the Rice boys: "Coming from Bahulaban to Prabhupada's Palace, half way up the first hill, if you turn right, that lane went to the mechanic shop. The next neighbors on that side of the road, past the mechanic shop, were 'The Rices,' two brothers and their old father, if I remember correctly. They had three vehicles, a Caddy, a truck, and a junker they were rebuilding on the front lawn. We bought a rental complex, the house and two trailers and some out buildings, including a barn full of hay from the fellow between Tom Bock and the Rice place. Rice boys wasn't that happy about that. Like the Williams' which used to own the land Nityo now lays claim to, them old boys ran the ridges, and the cops were not the boss of them. a fact the cops were well aware of.

“When NVC bought the land, those Klansmen set fire to one of the trailers on the downhill side of the road. It had been promised to Bhakta Mike, later Mahesh Pandit (Mahesh Bandit, Puskar used to call him), and was cleaning it up for a couple of days before they burned it. There was no one else it could have been. Tirtha was newly there at the time, and he was eager to prove his worth, and without any provocation other than that, Tirtha went and put the match to their fixer upper. Second night in a row, ‘House Fire on Krishna Ridge’ on the police scanners, the WV cable of that era.

“I lived at Nandagram at the time, walking home past the pig barn at night and talking to Sonny Neibergall, the original purchaser of the Staller Farm, because Staller refused to sell to us. (The Klan had put the order out, if you sell out to The Krishnas, keep right on going, don’t try to move to Glen Dale with your ill gotten gains.) That, plus Sonny paid more than he wanted to because EPA was breaking his balls. That’s how he was forced out to our neighborhood, and he wanted to be ‘a good neighbor,’ as he had some sway in the area. I told him, ‘This stuff has got to stop,’ but within a day or two, the second trailer went up out on the ridge, score another for Team Rice. Tirtha was never ‘under orders,’ but there are no limits to stupidity, as he has proven in this case.

He was ‘winging it,’ at every step, and whether he and Kirtanananda Swami talked after the fires, I cannot say. I had very little to do with Tirtha on the farm, him being a ‘Fringie’ and all. It didn’t start out with any orders. Tirtha went back and fired up the pick up truck, and they came back the next night and fired up the whole barn full of hay, threatening the other three remaining structures and keeping the local Fire Departments tired from overwork. Those were The Rice Boys.

“I told Sonny, ‘We have more buildings to lose than they do, and the only thing they got left is the Caddy, parked right next to the trailer, that will take the trailer and them with it when it goes.’ Cops sat out the lane every night for a couple of weeks. Rice Boys moved.”—John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (September 4, 2017).

423. In this passage Tirtha incorrectly used the word “mountain” instead of the correct word “ridge.” New Vrindaban is not located on or anywhere near a mountain. It is, geologically speaking, located on the Allegheny Plateau: an ancient plateau deeply dissected by millions of years of stream erosion. Narrow and steep ravines (hollows) twist through the resulting hills and ridges. The older plateau surface is evident in the pattern of hilltops all tending to reach the same elevation (about 1,300 to 1,400 feet above sea level).
424. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *100 Monkeyz*, 141-146.
425. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon,” telephone conversation with Tapahpunja in Penang, Malaysia (March 22, 1990).

426. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (January 17, 2017).
427. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (January 17, 2017).
428. These medals are mentioned on John Sinkowski's discharge papers, dated April 29, 1970.
429. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 18, 2016).
430. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 21, 2016).
431. Today, John understands that his so-called "diksa initiation" was not bona fide.
432. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), "De-Briefing."
433. Geraldo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), telephone conversation with the author (July 2, 2017).
434. Former New Vrindaban gurukula boy, Facebook message to the author (June 24, 2017).
435. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 18, 2016).
436. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), *The Journey Home: Autobiography of an American Swami* (2008), 5, 6, 60.
437. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), e-mail to the author (June 17, 2017).
438. Christina Marie Mills (Pradhana-Gopika devi dasi), *Trial Transcript I* (November 19, 1986), 39, 33-34.
439. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), e-mail to the author (June 14, 2017).
440. Thomas Lee Dobbs, certified public accountant, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 714.
441. Christina Marie Mills (Pradhana-Gopika devi dasi), *Trial Transcript I* (November 19, 1986), 23.
442. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 942.
443. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 948.
444. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Interview about women's sexploitation at New Vrindaban," *The Guru Business*, 146.
445. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 890.
446. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 2, e-mail to the author (June 13, 2017).
447. Madhudvisa dasa, "Ramesvara Clears up the Book Changes Issue," *The Hare Krishna Movement* (January 17, 2015), <https://theharekrishnamovement.org/2015/01/17/ramesvara-clears-up-the-book-changes-issue/> (accessed June 14, 2017).
448. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (August 13, 2003).
449. Bhima-Karma, telephone conversation with the author (January 29, 2013).
450. "Security Meeting," *New Vrindaban News* (November 6, 1985), 3-4.
451. Prabhupada, Govardhana Puja lecture, New York (November 4, 1966).
452. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1737.

453. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 515.
454. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 125.
455. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *Violence in ISKCON: Caution*, 14-15.
456. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "Cross Examination File," a hand-written document (undated), 2.
457. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
458. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), "A Letter from Tirtha in Prison," *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
459. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Swami: attacker under influence of ex-follower," *The Times Leader* (December 5, 1985), 17.
460. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Cristina Rouvalis in "Krishna Chief Blames 'Crazy Man' On Attack," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (December 5, 1985).
461. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), letter to UPI (December 6, 1985).
462. Donald Bordenkircher, cited in "Krishna Swami Off Critical List," *Wheeling News-Register* (November 12, 1985).
463. Donald Bordenkircher, cited in "Swami: attacker under influence of ex-follower," *The Times Leader* (December 5, 1985), 17.
464. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
465. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
466. Tim Lee (Puranjana), "David Attacks Goliath, Part 2."
467. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 3, conversation with the author (June 28, 2017).
468. T. A. Drescher (Tirtha dasa), *100 Monkeyz*, manuscript.
469. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon by phone from Malaysia" (March 22, 1990).
470. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 454.
471. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 23, 2003).
472. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), transcript of a tape recorded conversation with a close personal friend (c. 1994), from "Correspondence to Richard Dezio, Esq. from Amy Adelson, Esq." (February 20, 1996), 7.
473. Lenny Rader (Narada Muni), telephone conversation with the author (March 26, 2003).
474. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 49.
475. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 474.
476. During his testimony at the Martinsburg trial, Kuladri used the word "hired" instead of "engaged," but the word "hired" is incorrect. Tirtha was not hired to kill Sulochan. The money was for his traveling expenses, not for his service of killing Sulochan. Kuladri may have used the word "hired" because prosecutors may have pressured him to use the word so they could charge Tirtha (and Bhaktipada) with "murder for hire."
477. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), "De-Briefing."

478. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
479. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), "Interview of Tirtha dasa by Hrishikesh dasa (Henry Doktorski)," manuscript (October 12, 2004).
480. Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), "Mother Paurnamasi's Statements" (September 5, 1992).
481. Typewritten document (undated).
482. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Bill Moushey and Carl Remensky in "Crimes in Question: Federal probe begins of Krishna town in West Virginia," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (September 15, 1986), 3.
483. Robert H. McWilliams, *Trial Transcript II* (December 2, 1986), 75.
484. Paul Ferry (Parambrahma), *Trial Transcript II* (December 4, 1986), 569.
485. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript II* (December 4, 1986), 581.
486. Typewritten document (undated).
487. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in "Press Conference: Pittsburgh International Airport, June 26, 1987," *Brijabasi Spirit* (c. July 1987), 5.
488. Tirtha confirmed: "Probably the luckiest person was Janmastami—they easily could have taken him but instead they were focused on K. He really did get a free pass." Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (October 12, 2004).
489. In 1982 Reverend Moon was convicted by the U. S. government for filing false federal income tax returns and conspiracy. His conviction was upheld on appeal in a split decision. He was given a prison sentence and spent 18 months in the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut. Many individuals, organizations and religious figures protested the charges, saying that they were unjust and threatened freedom of religion and free speech. Based on this case, reporter Carlton Sherwood wrote the book *Inquisition: The Persecution and Prosecution of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon*.

On October 23, 1985, a federal grand jury issued a thirty-five-count indictment charging Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and several other disciples with conspiracy to evade immigration laws. Rajneesh, on the advice of his lawyers, entered an "Alford plea"—through which a suspect does not admit guilt, but does concede there is enough evidence to convict him—to one count of making false statements to an immigration official, and one count of conspiracy to have followers stay in the country illegally by having them enter into sham marriages. Under the deal his lawyers made with the United States Attorney's office, he was given a 10-year suspended sentence and placed on five years probation; in addition, he agreed to pay \$400,000 in fines and prosecution costs, to leave the United States and not to return for at least five years without the permission of the United States Attorney General.

In October 1986, the FBI and Virginia state authorities raided Lyndon LaRouche's headquarters in Leesburg, Virginia, in search of evidence to support

- accusations of fraud. He and six associates were charged with conspiracy to obstruct the investigation and mail fraud related to fundraising. After many delays it became a mistrial. A different grand jury charged LaRouche with conspiring to hide his personal income since 1979, the last year he had filed a federal tax return. In December 1988, a federal jury in Alexandria, Virginia convicted LaRouche and his associates, and he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. LaRouche served five years of his sentence and was paroled.
490. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 22, 2008).
491. On November 14, 1978, Congressman Leo Ryan, a democrat representing a district in Northern California, flew to Georgetown, Guyana (150 miles from Jonestown), along with a team of 18 people consisting of government officials, media representatives and some “concerned relatives” of Jonestown members. Ryan and the others intended to investigate allegations that included daily human rights violations, charges of false imprisonment and the forced confiscation of money and passports, mass suicide rehearsals, and the murder of seven attempted defectors. After visiting Jonestown, the Congressman and four others were murdered on November 18th when members of the Temple’s Red Brigade security squad open fired upon their plane on the runway of the Port Kaituma airstrip.
492. “Statements of Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman,” *The Cult Phenomenon in the United States*.
493. “Statement of Jackie Speier,” *The Cult Phenomenon in the United States*.
494. Daniel Reid (Daruka), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 275-276.
495. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1737.
496. Geraldo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), telephone conversation with the author (July 2, 2017).
497. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “New Vrindaban History, for the Record,” *The Sampradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006).
498. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), cited by John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “Chapter 7: Knowledge of the Absolute is not Absolute Knowledge.”
499. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “Chapter 2: Contents of the Palace, Itemized.”
500. Frankie Lyons (Priyavrata), conversation with the author (September 14, 2003).
501. Gerardo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), handwritten document (March 10), no year listed.
502. Anonymous former New Vrindaban devotee No. 1, telephone conversation with the author (July 19, 2017).
503. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 475.
504. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), cited by Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.

505. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), letter to Hans Kary (Hamsadutta) (August 26, 1994). See http://hansadutta.com/ART_NAMHAITA/prSPMAY18.html.
506. Interview with Arthur Villa (Kuladri), Villa GJ2, p. 15. (undated, c. September 1989).
507. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), transcript of a tape recorded conversation with a close personal friend (c. 1994), from "Correspondence to Richard Dezio, Esq. from Amy Adelson, Esq." (February 20, 1996), 7.
508. Totally unexpected in Tirtha's list was Radhanath and Kuladri's alleged involvement in the murder of Chakradhari. This is extremely interesting, but that investigation will have to wait for another time.
509. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (January 24, 2008).
510. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (5.9.17), purport.
511. Prabhupada, *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Madhya 15.261), translation.
512. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (1.8.27), lecture, Los Angeles (April 19, 1973).
513. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (7.9.8), lecture, Mayapura (February 28, 1977).
514. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), "Istagosthi," *Brijabasi Spirit*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 5, 1975), 2.
515. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Lindsey Gruson, "Friction Over Krishnas In West Virginia's Hills," *New York Times* (October 1, 1986), 10.
516. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
517. Tim Lee (Puranjana), *PADA History of ISKCON*, Part 3.
518. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), conversation with the author (November 3, 2008).
519. Bob Zubeck, cited by Ruth Semour and David McHugh, "Slain ex-Krishna crusaded against gurus," *Detroit Free Press* (May 25, 1986).
520. Jeffrey Michael Cornia (Yudhisthira), *Trial Transcript I*, 7-8, 10.
521. As reported by Jeffrey Michael Cornia in *Trial Transcript I*.
522. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "Cross Examination File," a hand-written document probably written for his attorney after he had been apprehended by Federal authorities (undated, c. 1990), 2.
523. Typewritten document (undated).
524. Martin Hausner (Mahatma), *Trial Transcript I*, 3-4, 5.
525. Martin Hausner (Mahatma), cited by Officers Tippin and Orozco, "Second Interview" (December 5, 1989).
526. Jeffrey Michael Cornia (Yudhisthira), *Trial Transcript I*, 7-8, 10.
527. Affidavit and Complaint for Search Warrant, Exhibit No. 1.
528. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Diary."
529. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 453.
530. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 508.

531. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), “De-Briefing.”
532. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), “A Letter From Tirtha In Prison,” *The Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
533. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
534. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), testifying at Tirtha’s trial in Los Angeles, cited by T. Red Jacket (Tirtha), *Desperation of the Angeles*, 106.
535. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 564.
536. Helga Bryant, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1422.
537. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), letter to Alfred “Pinky” Clark, (undated, c. April 1986).
538. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (March 25, 2006).
539. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 475.
540. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 2 (March 12, 1991), 465-466, 454.
541. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 50.
542. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
543. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
544. Helga Bryant, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1423-1428.
545. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Casey Cohen.
546. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
547. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
548. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1131-1134.
549. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1135-1137.
550. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 52.
551. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1138-1139.
552. In the hand-written manuscript, Tapahpunja wrote “Beckley,” but Gorby actually lived in Bethany.
553. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
554. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), “De-Briefing.”
555. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), “Diary.”
556. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), “Diary.”
557. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1255.
558. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), “The Bryant Surveillance Episode.”
559. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1255-1256.
560. Randall C. Gorby, untitled transcript, 100.
561. Randall C. Gorby, untitled transcript, 105.
562. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 53.
563. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 54.

564. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (April 7, 2017).
565. Gabriel Alon, co-owner of Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car, Los Angeles Airport branch, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 1097-1093, 1102.
566. Government exhibit 109.
567. Government exhibit 107.
568. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), in the article by David Sharp, "Testimony: Former Swami Knew of Plan to Kill Dissident" newspaper clipping (c. 1996).
569. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Diary."
570. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Diary."
571. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "The Bryant Surveillance Episode."
572. Randall C. Gorby, untitled transcript, 105.
573. Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), "Mother Paurnamasi's Statements" (September 5, 1992).
574. Randall C. Gorby, untitled transcript, 104-105.
575. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), "De-Briefing."
576. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1268.
577. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1269.
578. Randal C. Gorby, cited by Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1270.
579. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
580. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "The Bryant Surveillance Episode."
581. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "The Bryant Surveillance Episode."
582. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), "De-Briefing."
583. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), "Demon Discredited: The Inside Story," *New Vrindaban News* (February 10, 1986), 2-3.
584. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Diary."
585. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1141-1142.
586. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), Warrant, cited in "Police Arrest Ex-Hare Krishna On Assault, Weapon Charges," *News-Register* (February 7, 1986).
587. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), "Diary."
588. Summary of "Alfred W. Clark's Phone Conversation with Steve Bryant on February 5, 1986, between 3:33 and 4:00 p.m."
589. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), "Demon Discredited: The Inside Story," *New Vrindaban News* (February 10, 1986), 2-3.
590. Marshall County Sheriff's Department Watch Commander's Journal, Midnight Shift (February 6, 1986).
591. Donald Bordenkircher, Memo to John Kudlak (March 12, 1986).
592. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), "The Bryant Surveillance Episode."

593. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 55.
594. Dick Dezio (Tulsi) cited in “Ex-Hare Krishna Devotee Arrested,” *Wheeling Intelligencer* (February 7, 1986).
595. As explained by Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 524.
596. Actually it *was* a coincidence that Byrant arrived in West Virginia just as Bhaktipada returned from India. Bryant didn’t keep track of Kirtanananda Swami’s movements.
597. The sikha is the tuft of hair at the back of male devotees’ heads. Kuladri decided NOT to inform the sheriff of Sulochan’s location until later. In essence, Kuladri was saying “We keep his location under our hats for now.”
598. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), “Demon Discredited: The Inside Story,” *New Vrindaban News* (February 10, 1986), 2-3.
599. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, “Murder.”
600. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 467-469.
601. Perhaps Randall refused to go into the sheriff’s office because he was afraid that Gaura-Shakti might notice that he was on friendly terms with Sheriff Bordenkircher and Chief Deputy Hummel.
602. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1258-1259.
603. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “New Vrindaban History, for the Record,” *Sampradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006).
604. T. A. Drescher (Tirtha dasa), *100 Monkeyz*, manuscript.
605. Tracy Roberts, “Sheriff: Handling of Krishna Address Book Not Hidden,” *Wheeling News-Register* (April 6, 1987).
606. William Kolibash, cited by Tracy Roberts, “Sheriff: Handling of Krishna Address Book Not Hidden,” *Wheeling News-Register* (April 6, 1987).
607. T. A. Drescher (Tirtha dasa), *100 Monkeyz*, manuscript.
608. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
609. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), “A Letter from Tirtha in Prison,” *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
610. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
611. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “The Yogi’s Movements: Travels with Swami Radhanath” (April 28, 2011), <http://theyogismovements.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 23, 2014).
612. Mathew Goldman (Puskar), telephone conversation with the author (September 28, 2008).
613. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 123.
614. Typewritten document (undated).
615. Michael Scheffer (Premadatta), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1300-1301.

616. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), "A Letter from Tirtha in Prison," *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
617. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1367, 1372.
618. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (October 12, 2004).
619. David Fuller (Mahamantra), "Another Witness Reveals," *Sampradaya Sun* (December 31, 2006), <http://www.harekrnsna.com/sun/editorials/12-06/editorials1081.htm> (accessed November 1, 2016).
620. David Fuller (Mahamantra), "Another Witness Reveals," *Sampradaya Sun* (December 31, 2006), <http://www.harekrnsna.com/sun/editorials/12-06/editorials1081.htm> (accessed November 1, 2016).
621. Conversation between Robert Grant (Ramesvara) and Henry Doktorski on a post on the "Killing for Krishna" Facebook page (September 23, 2017).
622. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
623. David Gold, cited by Elizabeth Fernandez in "Mysterious Murder Silences a Maverick Krishna," *San Francisco Examiner* (July 6, 1986), A-12.
624. Mathew Goldman (Puskar), e-mail to the author (September 26, 2008).
625. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, "Murder."
626. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), "Chapter 7: Knowledge of the Absolute is not Absolute Knowledge."
627. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), "New Vrindaban History, for the Record," *Sampradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006).
628. Terry Sheldon (Taphpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
629. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 63.
630. Alvin Marsden (Agnideva), cited by John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (March 24, 2017).
631. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (March 24, 2017).
632. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (August 28, 2004).
633. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 15, 2003).
634. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 55.
635. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
636. David Fuller (Mahamantra), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1400-1402.
637. Government exhibit 109.
638. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Purvacitti devi dasi in Columbus, letter to Gadai in Buffalo (January 10, 1980).
639. Michael Scheffer (Premadatta), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1281-1288.
640. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1324-1328.

641. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
642. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1328-1330.
643. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1334-1337.
644. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), "A Letter from Tirtha in Prison," *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
645. David Fuller (Mahamantra), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1400-1402.
646. Tim Lee (Puranjana), "ISKCON HISTORY, detailed account, part 3."
647. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (September 2, 2017).
648. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 58.
649. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
650. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1696, 1700.
651. My godbrother Ananda asked me not to reveal his legal name. He joined ISKCON at New Vrindaban in 1980 and was initiated by Kirtanananda Swami in 1981. He served in construction and helped build Bhaktipada's new house between Palace Road and the Old Vrindaban Farm. He also served on traveling sankirtan. Ananda was doing the "pick" with the author in January, 1985, when Cediraja and Mathura prabhush died from carbon monoxide poisoning in their van at an Ohio truck stop during a frigid winter night. We served together out on the road together for three or four months. Eventually, Ananda was transferred to Cleveland ISKCON to assist Tapahpunja in constructing a kitchen at Radhanath Swami's Kent preaching center.—Ananda, Facebook message to the author (August 28, 2017).
652. Marshall County Jail Inmate Grievance Form, (February 21, 1986).
653. "Ex-Devotee on Hunger Strike," *The Intelligencer* (February 26, 1987).
654. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by John Dart in "Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect," *Los Angeles Times* (July 20, 1986), 3.
655. Suicide Watch Report for Steven Bryant.
656. William Van Scyac, Richard Colvin and Kim Mouder, letter to Chief Hummel (February 22, 1986).
657. "Inmate Accounting Sheet" for Steven L. Bryant.
658. Helga Bryant, letter to Steven Bryant (March 15, 1986).
659. Bryant's Library Books (March 21 to April 8, 1986).
660. Marshall County Jail Inmate Grievance Form (March 3, 1986).
661. Inmate Logbook for Steven Bryant.
662. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), handwritten letter to the sheriff (undated).
663. Helga Bryant, letter to Steven Bryant (March 15, 1986).
664. Inmate Logbook for Steven Bryant.

665. Inmate Logbook for Steven Bryant.
666. Inmate Logbook for Steven Bryant.
667. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), letter to Chief Hummel (March 20, 1986).
668. Inmate Logbook for Steven Bryant.
669. Inmate Store Purchase Form for Steven Bryant (undated).
670. Marshall County Jail Inmate Grievance Form (April 5, 1986).
671. Marshall County Jail Inmate Grievance Form (April 7, 1986).
672. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 16, “The Krishnites.”
673. Thomas Westfall, e-mail to the author (May 28, 2017).
674. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, “Murder.”
675. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1738.
676. Helga Bryant, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1431.
677. Donald Bordenkircher, Memorandum to Mary Wiedebush, Clerk of the Magistrate Court (April 7, 1986).
678. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 58.
679. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 60-61.
680. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
681. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon by phone from Malaysia” (March 22, 1990).
682. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1144-1146.
683. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), “A Letter from Tirtha in Prison,” *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007). See <http://www.hareKrishna.com/sun/editorials/01-07/editorials1129.htm>.
684. Randall C. Gorby, cited in “Pre-Trial Hearing, Thomas Drescher Case” (Los Angeles: undated), 109.
685. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1144-1146, 1183.
686. Jack Byrant, *Holy Cow, Swami*.
687. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 62.
688. Helga Bryant, *Lion Television*.
689. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Harold Nicolet” (September 3, 1989).
690. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with David Peterson” (September 3, 1989).
691. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Donald Griffith” (September 3, 1989).
692. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with William Smith” (September 3, 1989).
693. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Gary Cochran” (September 3, 1989).
694. Nathan Baruch Zakheim (Naranarayan), conversation with the author at Los Angeles ISKCON (June 28, 2017).

695. Tom Hopke (Nalinikanta), cited in “Sulochan’s War,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (April 5, 1987).
696. Nathan Baruch Zakheim (Naranarayan), conversation with the author at Los Angeles ISKCON (June 28, 2017).
697. Nathan Baruch Zakheim (Naranarayan), conversation with the author at Los Angeles ISKCON (June 28, 2017).
698. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 4, telephone conversation with the author (October 12, 2017).
699. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1340.
700. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), “A Letter from Tirtha in Prison,” *Sampradaya Sun* (January 8, 2007).
701. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), “Mother Paurnamasi’s Statements” (September 5, 1992).
702. Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), “Mother Paurnamasi’s Statements” (September 5, 1992).
703. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
704. Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), “Questions and Answers from Mother Paurnamasi,” (September 28, 1992).
705. Jayananda is the son of Jai-Nitai and Pundarik (Jacob and Phyllis Lennon).
706. Kuladri, during his testimony at the trial in 1991, erroneously said that Bhaktipada was headed to India. Actually, he was going to Germany and the Netherlands. According to Bhaktipada’s personal servant, Chaitanya-Mangala, Bhaktipada and his entourage spent the first day of their trip in The Netherlands, where they visited a bell foundry and a tulip farm; the second day in Germany to visit Ludwig II’s Neuschwanstein castle; the third day to visit the ISKCON farm Nrsimha Ksetra, and the fourth day in Frankfurt, where they stayed at the ISKCON temple. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), e-mail to the author (December 6, 2016).
707. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 475-477.
708. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), cited by Emil “Eddie” Sofsky (Adwaitacharya) in a letter to Dick Dezio (Tulsi) (August 1, 1990).
709. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Arthur Villa” (March 22, 1990).
710. Van Charnell (Rochan), “As the Incense Burns and the Temple Turns,” *Sampradaya Sun* (January 16, 2007), <http://www.harekrishna.com/sun/editorials/01-07/editorials1173.htm> (accessed June 10, 2017).
711. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832.
712. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
713. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 64-65.

714. Randall C. Gorby, cited in “Pre-Trial Hearing, Thomas Drescher Case” (Undated, Los Angeles), 113.
715. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha). *Trial Transcript VI*, 65-66.
716. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), “Interview of Tirtha dasa by Hrishikesh dasa (Henry Doktorski),” manuscript (October 12, 2004).
717. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
718. Gabriel Alon, co-owner of Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car, Los Angeles Airport branch, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 1097-1099.
719. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), from an unpublished manuscript (1994) “concerning mostly the activities that I was personally involved in at New Vrindaban.”
720. Thomas Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Michael Scheffer (Premadatta), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1290.
721. Bhagavati was initiated in Saint Louis in July 1971. With the help of a mutual friend, I contacted her and talked to her on December 30, 2016 by telephone about my book. During our conversation she mentioned that for the past thirty years she has called Mrs. Bryant on the phone frequently, to keep in touch. I requested an interview with her. I was especially interested to hear about Sulochan’s early life, as Mrs. Bryant must have told Bhagavati many stories about her son’s childhood. She asked to see my manuscript, which I mailed to her. I never heard back from her. Our mutual friend told me that she probably declined to be interviewed because she thought my book is about negative things that happened so many years ago and will not help anyone with their Krishna consciousness or in their appreciation of Prabhupada. My book dwells on the past and she didn’t want to talk about it.
722. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), cited by Gail Conger, “Life and Death Among the Krishnas at New Vrindaban,” *Akron Beacon Journal* (February 7, 1988).
723. Eric Harrison, “Crimes Among the Krishnas,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (April 5, 1987), http://surrealist.org/jpgspdfs/crimes_krishnas.pdf (accessed July 14, 2015).
724. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), United Press International (February 1986), cited by Thomas Ferraro in “Krishnas Involved in Seamy Accusations, Including Murder,” *Sunday News-Register* (July 6, 1986).
725. Lilia Aguirre Williams, Facebook comment (September 30, 2017).
726. Tim Lee (Puranjana), “ISKCON HISTORY, detailed account, part 3.”
727. David Fuller (Mahamantra), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1406.
728. Gabriel Alon, co-owner of Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car, Los Angeles Airport branch, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 1097-1104.
729. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1342.
730. Steven John Forbes (Nistraigunya), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1437.

731. Steven Bryant (Sulochan), *Lion Television*.
732. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1343.
733. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (October 12, 2004).
734. David Fuller (Mahamantra), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1417, 1416.
735. Nori J. Muster (formerly Nandini), e-mail to the author (August 3, 2017).
736. Steven John Forbes (Nistraigunya), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1438.
737. Nori J. Muster (formerly Nandini), e-mail to the author (August 3, 2017).
738. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1149-1150.
739. Tirtha reported Sulochan's last activities to both Randall Gorby and Tapahpunja.
740. "Thomas Drescher-PC 187" (May 21, 1989), 1.
741. Dr. Lakshmanana Sad Yavagiswaran, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 637-638.
742. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1149-1150.
743. Steven John Forbes (Nistraigunya), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1439-1440.
744. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1342-1343.
745. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (November 29, 2016).
746. Helga Bryant, cited by Robert A. Fernandez, "Krishna dissident is slain on coast," *San Francisco Examiner* (undated, c. May 1986).
747. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 67.
748. Gabriel Alon, co-owner of Ugly Duckling Rent-A-Car, Los Angeles Airport branch, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 1097-1099.
749. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 4, 2017).
750. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
751. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), Facebook comment (May 12, 2017).
752. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), Facebook comment (May 13, 2017).
753. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "The Hidden History of ISKCON," Part 4.
754. Jane Seward (Jamuna dasi), *Lion Television*.
755. Loetitia S. Lilot (Saradiya devi dasi), e-mail to the author (November 22, 2016).
756. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 1, Facebook message to the author (October 3, 2017).
757. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 4, telephone conversation with the author (October 12, 2017).

758. Richard Cousineau (Ramachandra), conversation with the author at the funeral for Ronald Burstein (Muktakesh) at the Grisell Funeral Home in Moundsville, West Virginia (April 10, 2007).
759. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Tom Greenspan” (September 3, 1989).
760. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
761. Of course, Tapahpunja may have been surprised but not shocked after hearing the news of Sulochan’s murder. He was “in the loop”—he had helped “engineer” the murder, as he later admitted to the ISKCON temple president of Inis Rath Island in Ireland. In this e-mail, Tapahpunja attempts to deceive the author into believing that Tirtha acted alone.
762. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
763. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (July 29, 2008).
764. “Thomas Drescher-PC 187” (May 21, 1989), 1.
765. Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall C. Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).
766. Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall C. Gorby and Suzanne Bludeau (undated).
767. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1190.
768. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon by phone from Malaysia (March 22, 1990).
769. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
770. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 69.
771. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
772. *Trial Transcript V* (p. 9) states that Tirtha made two telephone calls to Dharmatma on Friday, May 23rd.
773. Sandy Fitzgerald, “Drescher Ordered Extradited,” *The Intelligencer* (August 14, 1987).
774. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), telephone conversation with the author (August 5, 2003).
775. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
776. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1149-1150.
777. Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), cited in “Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality,” typewritten document.
778. Mark Meberg (Madhava-Ghosh), cited in “Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality,” typewritten document.

779. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), e-mail to the author (November 22, 2016).
780. Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), cited in “Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality,” typewritten document.
781. Berkeley police officer Joe Sanchez, cited by Elizabeth Fernandez in “Mysterious Murder Silences a Maverick Krishna,” *San Francisco Examiner* (July 6, 1986), 1.
782. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 17, “Murder.”
783. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), telephone conversation with the author (August 3, 2017).
784. Thomas Westfall, *Lion Television*.
785. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), “The Hidden History of ISKCON,” Part 4.
786. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (April 5, 2015).
787. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), “New Vrindaban History, for the Record,” *Sanpradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006).
788. Robert Grant (Ramesvara), cited by John Dart in “Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 20, 1986), 32.
789. Michael Grant (Mukunda Goswami), cited by Robert A. Fernandez, “Krishna dissident is slain on coast,” *San Francisco Examiner* (undated, c. May 1986).
790. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 95.
791. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 138.
792. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 120.
793. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 138.
794. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 138.
795. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Thomas Ferraro in “Krishnas Involved in Seamy Accusations, Including Murder,” *Sunday News-Register* (July 6, 1986).
796. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “The Fire’s Getting Hotter,” *New Vrindaban News* (October 14, 1986), 2.
797. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in “Srla Bhaktipada’s Press Conference (December 4, 1985),” *New Vrindaban News* (December 7, 1985).
798. Tim Lee (Puranjana), “ISKCON HISTORY, Detailed Account, Part 3.”
799. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
800. Yasodanandan Swami challenged the zonal acharyas to a debate at the February 1979 GBC meetings in Vrindaban, India. Kailasa-Chandra, who was regarded as a philosophical pundit, was asked to write a position paper for the challengers. This debate will be discussed in detail in my forthcoming book, *Eleven Naked Emperors: The Crisis of Charismatic Succession in ISKCON (1977-1987)*.
801. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (March 27, 2015).
802. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
803. Eric Johanson, e-mail to the author (February 8, 2015).

804. Mark Goodwin (Kailasa-Chandra), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
805. Unidentified New Vrindaban employee, cited by John Dart, "Killing Sparks Federal Probe of the Krishna Sect," *The New York Times* (July 20, 1986), 3.
806. Alfred "Pinky" Clark, cited by Colin McNickle, "Marshall Official Gets Gun Permit For Fear of Violence by Krishnas," *Wheeling News-Register* (June 15, 1986).
807. Alfred "Pinky" Clark, cited by Lindsey Gruson, "Friction Over Krishnas In West Virginia's Hills," *New York Times* (October 1, 1986), 10.
808. Dick Dezio (Tulsi), cited by Colin McNickle, "Marshall Official Gets Gun Permit For Fear of Violence by Krishnas," *Wheeling News-Register* (June 15, 1986).
809. David Gold, *After the Absolute*, Chapter 18, "The Gun."
810. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (August 21, 2003).
811. Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).
812. Jay Matsya (Devamrita Swami), "A Word To The Wise Is Sufficient." *New Vrindaban News* (June 1, 1986).
813. "Maintain the Purity," *New Vrindaban News* (June 14, 1986)
814. "Be Careful Who You Talk To, Prabhus—" *Brijabasi Spirit* (March 24, 1987)
815. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), interview with investigators (undated, c. 1989), Villa GJ2.
816. "Overt Acts Related to Steven Bryant Murder."
817. Photocopied pages from unnamed Trial Transcript (undated).
818. Page from unnamed Trial Transcript (undated).
819. Transcript of State Police wiretap of a telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
820. Transcript of State Police wiretap of a telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva) (undated).
821. Susan Joseph (Purnamasi), "Mother Purnamasi's Statements" (September 5, 1992).
822. FBI Interview with Randall Gorby (June 18, 1986).
823. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 6, 2015).
824. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 70.
825. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
826. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.
827. Tapahpunja's frank and open conversation with Dharmatma suggests that Dharmatma was also privy to the murder plot.
828. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), telephone conversation with the author (August 5, 2003).
829. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 478.

830. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (August 21, 2003).
831. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
832. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Terry Sheldon by phone from Malaysia" (March 22, 1990).
833. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (November 29, 2016).
834. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 473.
835. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), telephone conversation with the author (Sept 30, 2008).
836. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Trial Transcript VI*, 63-64.
837. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *Holy Cow*, Swami.
838. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), cited by David Sharp, "Testimony: Former Swami Knew of Plan to Kill Dissident" newspaper clipping (c. 1996).
839. Interview with Arthur Villa (Kuladri), Villa GJ2, p. 15. (undated, c. September 1989).
840. I lived in the basement of this building with other brahmacaris for about a year-and-a-half, from approximately 1983 to 1985, as I recall, when I served on the "pick" in New York City. The living conditions were incredibly spartan, at least in the basement, and the prasadam was mostly inadequate, in my opinion. Every night we had to lock the hood of our van, parked on the street, with a chain and padlock, to discourage thieves from stealing our auto battery. Once, our battery was stolen, and we had to buy it back at the pawn shop.
841. Law enforcement eventually caught up with Adwaita, and he was incarcerated at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City. The January 31, 1990 *City of God Examiner* printed a notice requesting New Vrindaban residents to write letters to him.
842. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), cited by Emil Sofsky (Adwaita) in a letter to Dick Dezio (Tulsi) (August 1, 1990).
843. Handwritten post-it note in file about Daniel Van Pelt (Devananda).
844. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (October 12, 2004).
845. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1737.
846. Geraldo Altamirano (Hari-Venu), telephone conversation with the author (July 2, 2017).
847. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), telephone conversation with the author (August 5, 2003).
848. Donald Ferry (Mahabuddhi), cited by Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI Interview" (September 16, 1986), 3.
849. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.

850. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1741.
851. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), telephone conversation with the author (August 5, 2003).
852. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), interview with investigators, Villa GJ2 (undated, c. 1989), p. 63-64.
853. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 4, 2017).
854. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1190.
855. "A Pure Devotee Faces a Fallen Nation: Srila Bhaktipada Meets CBS News," *Brijabasi Spirit* (January 1987), 9.
856. Donald Ferry (Mahabuddhi), cited by Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI Interview" (September 16, 1986), 3.
857. After leaving New Vrindaban, Mrgendra studied law at the Brooklyn Law School. He graduated in 1990 and was subsequently admitted to the New York State bar.
858. Harvey Mechanic (Mrgendra), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 3 (March 13, 1991), 578.
859. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), *Grand Jury Interview*.
860. Melanie Nagel (Malati), "A Factual Timeline of Events," *Sampradaya Sun* (October 24, 2008).
861. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), "A Response To Malati Mataji's 'Factual Timeline,'" *Sampradaya Sun* (October 28, 2008).
862. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
863. Transcript of State Police wiretap of a telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha) (c. Monday, May 26, 1986), *Holy Cow, Swami*.
864. Telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher, taped at 7:00 p.m., Monday, May 26, 1986, taken by Trooper W. I. Knight, West Virginia State Police, Wellsburg, West Virginia.
865. Terry Sheldon's notes, cited by Ronald L. Piatt, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1473.
866. Nori J. Muster, e-mail to the author (August 4, 2017).
867. Ronald L. Piatt, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1465-1466.
868. Ronald L. Piatt, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1475.
869. Dennis W. Jesse, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1388.
870. Ronald L. Piatt, cited in "Killing Sparks Probe of Krishna Sect," *The Cult Observer* (September 1986).
871. Cynthia Shaffer became Bhaktipada's disciple, Rukmini, in September 1986.
872. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Cynthia Shaffer" (June 27, 1989).
873. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), e-mail to Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma) (November 17, 2016).

874. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (April 3, 2015).
875. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), e-mail to the author (November 16, 2016).
876. "Name: Dan Van Pelt, aka Devanananda," investigative report, 2.
877. Emil Sofsky (Adwaitacharya), cited in "Bryant Death Reports: Gorrick Account vs. Reality," typewritten document.
878. Emil Sofsky (Adwaitacharya), letter to Dick Dezio (Tulsi) (August 1, 1990).
879. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 1, 2008).
880. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Cynthia Shaffer" (June 27, 1989).
881. Cynthia Shaffer (Rukmini) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1822.
882. Cynthia Shaffer (Rukmini) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1824, 1826, 1827.
883. Peter Brinkman (Prthu), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1509-1525.
884. Cynthia Shaffer (Rukmini) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1828, 1829.
885. "Suspect in Krishna Murder Scheme Taken Into Custody," *Wheeling News-Register* (June 20, 1990).
886. "Get the Swami!" *The Religious Freedom Fighter*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (c. September 1987).
887. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to Anthony Alves (Daivata) (September 9, 1986).
888. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to Anthony Alves (Daivata) (October 28, 1986).
889. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 19, 2004).
890. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited in "Krishnas May Face Charges," *The Parkersburg News* (April 12, 1987), V-55.
891. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), cited by Thomas Ferraro, "Krishna Swami, Convicted Killer," *UPI News Service* (August 23, 1987).
892. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Patty (Purvacitti devi dasi) in Columbus, letter to David Shenk (Gadai dasa) in Buffalo (January 10, 1980).
893. John Dart, "Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect," *Los Angeles Times* (July 20, 1986), 3.
894. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 12: "Exile."
895. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 11: "Rainbow Swami."
896. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 11: "Rainbow Swami."
897. Transcript of telephone conversation between Randall Gorby and Thomas Drescher (undated).
898. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
899. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 4 (March 14, 1991), 832-837, 941.

900. In this conversation, Radhanatha (like Tirtha in Chapter 7) used the incorrect word “mountain” instead of the correct “ridgetop.” The Radha-Vrindaban Nath temple at the Vrindaban farm is located near the crest of a ridge, not a mountain. For more about the geography of New Vrindaban, see Endnote 423.
901. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
902. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
903. Interview with Arthur Villa (Kuladri), Villa GJ2, p. 15. (undated, c. September 1989).
904. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), *The 26 Qualities*, Part 12: “Exile.”
905. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), *Grand Jury Interview*.
906. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), letter to Tirtha Swami (October 1, 1989), from Pune, India.
907. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 9, 2003).
908. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 15, 2003).
909. Jeffrey M. Banwell, FBI agent, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1689-1690.
910. Randall C. Gorby, *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 5 (March 15, 1991), 1152.
911. “Bordenkircher Standing By Remarks,” *Wheeling News-Register* (July 21, 1986), 11.
912. Gregory Carlson (Gaura-Shakti), *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 6 (March 18, 1991), 1709-1710.
913. Richard Lonsford Investigations, “Witness Interview” with William Jones (June 26, 1989).
914. Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, “FBI interview with Randall Gorby” (June 24, 1986), 2.
915. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 21, 2016).
916. “West Virginia Department of Health, Vital Registration Office: Physician’s/ Medical Examiner Certificate of Death,” for Randall Clark Gorby (July 22, 1990).
917. Kathy Shriner, “Carbon Monoxide Is Cause of Death,” *Wheeling News-Register* (July 24, 1990).
918. “Trial Update,” *The City of God Examiner*, No. 27 (July 25, 1990), 2.
919. T. Red Jacket (Thomas A. Drescher, Tirtha Swami), *Desperation of the Angeles*, 99.
920. According to Janmastami, the Kupfers are an influential West Virginia family who own properties in Marshall and Wetzel Counties. In the 1980s, Jim Kupfer worked for New Vrindaban as a salaried employee in construction and heavy equipment. Jim’s older brother Ronnie was friendly to the devotees from the very beginning; it was Ronnie who got Hayagriva’s Power Wagon up and running after it blew up

- on the way to Old Vrindaban during Srila Prabhupada's first visit to the community in May 1969 (as described in Hayagriva's *The Hare Krishna Explosion*).—John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (March 19, 2017).
921. Susan Joseph (Paurnamasi), "Mother Paurnamasi's Statements" (September 5, 1992).
922. FBI Interview with Randall Gorby (June 18, 1986), 3.
923. Frankie Lyons (Priyavrata), conversation with the author (September 14, 2003).
924. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
925. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (August 22, 2008).
926. Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI Report" (September 21, 1986).
927. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Mark Meberg" (June 25, 1989).
928. Cynthia Shaffer (Rukmini) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1830.
929. Shirley Prins (Sacimata) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1838.
930. Cynthia Shaffer (Rukmini) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1830.
931. Shirley Prins joined ISKCON in Philadelphia around 1974. She and her husband moved to New Vrindaban in 1980.
932. Shirley Prins (Sacimata) *Trial Transcript IV*, Day 7 (March 19, 1991), 1836-1841.
933. "Arthur John Villa" *Instant Checkmate*, <https://www.instantcheckmate.com/people/arthur-villa/> (accessed July 5, 2017).
934. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Arthur Villa" (March 22, 1990).
935. Nori J. Muster, *Child of the Cult* (2012).
936. Nori J. Muster, e-mail to the author (August 4, 2017).
937. Peggy Kelly, "SPPD Cmdr. Hanson: Nothing in background precluded hiring ex-officer," *Santa Paula Times* (August 29, 2001). http://www.santapaulatimes.com/news/archivestory.php/aid/2699/SPPD_Cmdr._Hanson:_Nothing_in__background_precluded_hiring_ex-officer.html (accessed February 2, 2015).
938. Jeffrey Breier (Krishna-Katha), telephone conversation with the author (August 3, 2017).
939. Timothy Hughes, "Officer's Past Puts His Credibility in Question," *Los Angeles Times* (August 27, 2001). <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/aug/27/local/me-38905> (accessed February 2, 2015).
940. Jeffrey Breier: About Me, <https://about.me/jeffreybreier> (accessed August 2, 2017).
941. Sergeant Thomas Westfall, e-mail to the author (March 7, 2014).
942. Gerard J. Koechel, letter to Arthur Villa (Kuladri) (October 27, 1987).
943. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), *Trial Transcript III*, Day 3 (December 9, 1987), 657.
944. Richard Lonsford Investigations, "Witness Interview with Arthur Villa" (March 22, 1990).
945. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (August 21, 2003).

946. Greta Van Susteren was listed as the 94th most powerful woman in the world by Forbes in 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/greta-van-susteren/> (accessed March 4, 2017).
947. Irene White (Sheldon), letter to Dick Dezio (Tulsi) (September 18, 1989).
948. “Bhaktipada and ISKCON,” *New Vrindaban News* (c. August 1986).
949. Michael Grant (Mukunda Maharaja), cited in “Murder Quickens Wider Crisis in Krishna Sect,” *Hinduism Today* (September/October 1986), 17.
950. Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*, 144.
951. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), “The Hidden History of ISKCON,” Part 4.
952. Thomas Allin (Toshan-Krishna), cited by Tracy Roberts in “Krishna Commune to Lay Off 187 Payroll Employees,” *Wheeling News-Register* (September 11, 1986), 5.
953. “New Vrindaban Layoffs,” *New Vrindaban News* (September 14, 1986).
954. “Palace Gardens Win Top Award,” *New Vrindaban Worldwide* (c. September 1988).
955. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Rebecca Strowger (Rupamesvari devi dasi), “Sweet Surrender,” *As It Is* (c. March 1985).
956. William Kolibash, cited by Bill Moushey and Carl Remensky in “Crimes in Question: Federal probe begins of Krishna town in West Virginia,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (September 15, 1986), 1.
957. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Thomas Ferraro in “Krishna Probe Welcome,” *The Intelligencer* (June 19, 1986), 15.
958. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), “The Hidden History of ISKCON,” Part 4.
959. *Petition For Writ of Habeas Corpus*, 2. *
960. Lawrence Burstein (Lokavarnattama), “Another View,” *Wheeling News-Register* (May 27, 1988).
961. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited in *Petition For Writ of Habeas Corpus*, 2.
962. “Missing Skull Split at Autopsy,” *The Intelligencer* (March 6, 1987).
963. Thomas Westfall, cited by Lynn Hudson, “Scandal and Fight for Control Boil Over at Krishna Center,” *India Abroad* (May 29, 1987).
964. “New Strategy Eyed For Krishna Trial,” *News-Register* (December 9, 1986).
965. Steve Waterson, “Krishnas to Exhume, Move Bodies,” *The Intelligencer* (March 4, 1987).
966. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (July 24, 2017).
967. *Los Angeles Times* (December 6, 1986), Part I, p. 14.
968. Thomas White, cited by Don Smith, “Conviction Has Done Little To Quiet Krishna Problems,” *News-Register* (December 8, 1986).
969. *Los Angeles Times* (December 6, 1986), Part I, p. 14.
970. “Hare Krishna Guilty of Killing Another,” *Los Angeles Times* (December 6, 1986).

971. Thomas White, cited by Don Smith and John Penney, "Possible St. Denis' Remains Are Discovered in Stream Bed Grave," *Wheeling News-Register* (January 7, 1987).
972. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by Don Smith, "Conviction Has Done Little To Quiet Krishna Problems," *News-Register* (December 8, 1986).
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a practitioner of Holistic Energy Medicine, Intuition, and Spirituality. Ana and Phillip Jones are the co-owners/operators of Questing Spirit, LLC. Today Phillip Jones provides services such as: Personality Type & Life Purpose Discovery Session, The I Ching Destiny Reading, Multi-Faith Spiritual Counseling: A Personal Consultation, Stages of Life TRANSITIONS Counseling, Holistic Psychotherapy, and Animal Archetype Discovery Session to clients for a fee of \$150 per 90-minute session. <http://www.questingspiritretreats.com/AboutUs.html> and <http://www.phillipjonesonline.com> (accessed August 12, 2017).

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1168. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), cited by David Sharp, "Swami Says He Is At Peace, The Sun Will Break Through," *Wheeling News-Register* (April 21, 1996), 10.
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1170. Saudamani devi dasi, cited by David Sharp, "Swami Says He Is At Peace, The Sun Will Break Through," *Wheeling News-Register* (April 21, 1996), 10.
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1173. Thomas Westfall, e-mail to the author (March 7, 2014).

1174. *Srila Bhaktipada Newsletter* (January 10, 1997), 1.
1175. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (September 9, 2003).
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1177. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 4, 2017).
1178. ISKCON GBC Resolutions (1975-2016), <http://pratyatosa.com/?P=3p> (accessed March 28, 2017).
1179. New Vrindaban managers, after sixteen years, decided not to renew their annual contract with Tapahpunja's Small Farm Training Center to grow vegetables in the community gardens, after the 2013 growing season. The next year, in 2014, Tapahpunja moved his operation from New Vrindaban to New Talavan in Mississippi. He explained, "I've transplanted my farming/teaching operation, the Small Farm Training Center, to the New Talavan Community site in Southern Mississippi. New Talavan is a sleeping giant, replete with 67 cows, about 100 devotees, 1200 acres of land and gorgeous Deities named Radha-Radha Kanta. The apprentice program is up and running and I have requests to grow micro-greens from four devotee-run restaurants in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast." Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (November 15, 2014).
1180. Anonymous ISKCON devotee, a former Radhanath Swami disciple, e-mail to the author (July 5, 2017).
1181. Arthur Villa (Kuladri), cited in *Trial Transcript III*, Day 3 (December 9, 1987), 657.
1182. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (October 13, 2004).
1183. Geoffrey Walker (Anuttama), "Kuladri Prabhu's Change of Service" *Sampradaya Sun*, <http://www.harekrnsna.com/sun/editorials/11-06/editorials918.htm> (accessed June 10, 2017).
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1186. *Krishna West*, <http://krishnawest.com/people/meet-the-team> (accessed June 10, 2017).
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1190. Van Charnell (Rochan), "As the Incense Burns and the Temple Turns," *Sampradaya Sun* (January 16, 2007), <http://www.harekrnsna.com/sun/editorials/01-07/editorials1173.htm> (accessed June 10, 2017).

1191. Ven Sharma, *Holy Cow, Swami*.
1192. One source (Shirley Sinkowski) claimed the gross receipts from Janmastami's flower business totaled in the millions of dollars, but Janmastami thought the amount he sent to New Vrindaban was much, much less.
1193. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (March 3, 2017).
1194. Shirley Sinkowski (Merciful), comment at a public meeting at New Vrindaban (October 1993).
1195. Although neither Janmastami nor Merciful personally threatened me, I did receive a death threat from a distraught godbrother in Malaysia who called me on the phone and warned me that if I did not stop my blasphemy against Bhaktipada I would be "dead meat." As I recall, I expressed defiance on the phone, but after I hung up, I thought of my wife and children and decided it would not be good for them if I was murdered, so I called my godbrother back on the phone, at which time he apologized profusely for threatening me.
1196. Anonymous female Brijabasi, letter to Michael Stein (October 23, 1993).
1197. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), cited in "GBC Statement Regarding Accusations Against Radhanath Swami," *Sampradaya Sun* (January 10, 2007), <http://hareKrishna.com/sun/editorials/01-07/editorials1142.htm> (accessed May 17, 2014).
1198. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
1199. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (April 6, 2008).
1200. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), *The Journey Home: Autobiography of an American Swami* (2008), 60.
1201. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (February 23, 2017).
1202. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (March 10, 2017).
1203. It is quite possible that Mr. Slavin gave his son this credit card during the Spring of 1993 when Radhanath visited his father in Chicago, after he was subpoenaed to appear before the Grand Jury, at which time his father allegedly promised to help him "get off the hook."
1204. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (May 16, 2003).
1205. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (April 18, 2014).
1206. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (January 23, 2017).
1207. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
1208. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 29, 2016).
1209. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 29, 2016).
1210. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 16, 2016).
1211. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 24, 2016).
1212. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (December 29, 2016).

1213. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 5, e-mail to the author (May 26, 2016).
1214. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 5, e-mail to the author (December 28, 2016).
1215. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 5, e-mail to the author (December 28, 2016).
1216. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), telephone conversation with the author (February 22, 2017).
1217. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (January 9, 2017).
1218. Thomas Westfall, telephone conversation with the author (February 21, 2017).
1219. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (February 23, 2017).
1220. Terry Sheldon (Tapahpunja), e-mail to the author (March 29, 2015).
1221. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), telephone conversation with Saunaka-Rsi (October 2008).
1222. Richard Slavin (Radhanath Swami), "A Telephone *Istagosthi* from Bombay, India" (March 24, 1994), original typewritten transcript. Portions of this transcript were published as "Just Live by the Truth: A Telephone *Istagosthi* from Bombay, India with His Holiness Radhanath Swami," *Brijabasi Spirit* (May 1994), 6.
1223. I had the pleasure of visiting my godbrothers Nathji and Hridayananda at their homes in Bombay in 1988 and 1994. Another influential Indian godbrother, although not wealthy, was the advocate (attorney) Mahaprabhu dasa (Rama-Krishna Maheshwari), my father-in-law.
1224. 1994 GBC Resolutions, <http://www.dandavats.com/wp-content/uploads/GBCresolutions/GBCRES94.htm> (accessed May 17, 2014).
1225. ISKCON GBC Resolutions 1997, <http://vnn.org/world/970816-1006/index.html> (accessed May 17, 2014).
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1227. "New Vrindaban Rejoins ISKCON," *Hare Krishna World* (July-August 1998), 1.
1228. "Upcoming Classes by Swamis," Bhaktivedanta Manor website (December 23, 2014), <http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/?tag=chandramauli-swami> (accessed May 12, 2017).
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1230. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (November 22, 2006).
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1232. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), "New Vrindaban History, for the Record," *Sampradaya Sun* (December 22, 2006). The article can be seen at <http://iskcon-times.com/new-Vrindaban-history> (accessed May 18, 2014).

1233. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (February 25, 2017).
1234. For Giri-Nayaka's side of the story, see "WHY ARE THE GBC SILENT ON ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THEIR TOP MOST GURU RADHANATH SWAMI MAHARAJA. ???" *rodpush-ISKCON* (April 18, 2015), <https://rodpush.wordpress.com/2015/04/18/why-are-the-gbc-silent-on-accusations-against-their-top-most-guru-radhanath-swami-maharaja-by-giri-nayaka-das-bvs/> (accessed November 28, 2016).
1235. William H. Deadwyler, III (Ravindra-Svarupa), "New Vrindaban History, For the Record," *Dandavats.com* (January 3, 2007), <http://www.dandavats.com/?p=2608> (accessed May 17, 2014).
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1241. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 5, e-mail to the author (December 28, 2016).
1242. John Sinkowski (Janmastami), e-mail to the author (April 7, 2017).
1243. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter to John Sinkowski (Janmastami) (November 17, 2002).
1244. Keith Gordon Ham (Bhaktipada), letter to John Sinkowski (Janmastami) (November 26, 2002).
1245. Anonymous New Vrindaban resident No. 2, telephone conversation with the author (January 12, 2017).
1246. David Van Pelt (Dasaratha), telephone conversation with the author (February 8, 2017).
1247. I also happened to attend that seminar (June 20-22, 1997), as my former wife had become a Landmark Forum devotee and she graciously paid my fee to take the course, thinking that I would benefit from it as she had. During a break in the seminar, Shirley Sinkowski and I chatted, and she more-or-less apologized for her threats against me uttered four years earlier. As I recall, she appeared stressed out, as she was at the time wrestling with her mind and trying to decide whether or not to divorce her husband.

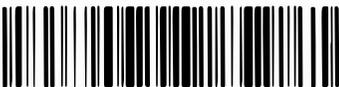
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1252. Dennis Gorrick (Dharmatma), telephone conversation with the author (December 3, 2016).
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1281. Anonymous Prabhupada disciple No. 2, e-mail to the author (June 13, 2017).
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1284. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (February 11, 2013).
1285. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (April 20, 2017).
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1287. Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (June 9, 2017).
1288. Readers interested in writing to Tirtha may contact him at: Thomas A. Drescher 3568280, Mount Olive Correctional Complex, 1 Mountain Side Way, Mount Olive, WV 25185.
1289. Sarva Bryant, e-mail to the author (December 14, 2016).
1290. Sarva Bryant, e-mail to the author (December 14, 2016).
1291. Prabhupada, room conversation, Delhi, India (December 12, 1971).
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1293. Prabhupada, audio transcript: discussion with Howard Wheeler (Hayagriva) regarding Thomas Henry Huxley, the English biologist who advocated Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.
1294. Prabhupada, conversation in a car traveling between Pittsburgh International Airport and New Vrindaban (June 21, 1976).
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1300. Prabhupada, *Srimad-bhagavatam* (7.15.27), purport.
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1302. Randall C. Gorby, cited by Special Agent Jeffrey M. Banwell, "FBI interview with Randall Gorby" (June 19, 1986).
1303. Elsie and F. Gerald Ham, conversation with the author in Madison, Wisconsin (June 30, 2003).
1304. Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities* (1997), 161.
1305. Christopher Walker (Chaitanya-Mangala), e-mail to the author (December 4, 2016).
1306. During my April 2008 conversation with Madhava-Ghosh, he admitted that he had been involved in Adwaitacharya's drug-smuggling operation in the late 1970s, but he asked me to keep that information secret for the time being. He said he didn't want his children to discover that their father had been involved in

illegal activities from reading my book; he wanted to tell them personally. I do not know if he ever spoke to his children about this, but since he died two years ago, I see no harm in sharing his confession.

1307. Matthew Brian Berresford (Mathura), Gmail chat with the author (October 25, 2012).
1308. Matthew Brian Berresford (Mathura), Gmail chat with the author (October 25, 2012).
1309. I'm sorry to say that two years after I met my godbrother at his home in East Berlin, Pennsylvania, Matthew Berresford entered an Alford plea of guilt to committing a third-degree sex offense against a 5-year-old boy in a North Frederick Elementary School restroom. *The Frederick News-Post* (Maryland) noted, "Judge G. Edward Dwyer, Jr., at the sentencing hearing in Frederick County Circuit Court of Matthew Brian Berresford . . . followed the recommendation of Assistant State's Attorney Tammy M. Leache—and supported by the child's parents—to suspend a 10-year prison sentence and place Berresford on five years of supervised probation. The judge, the prosecutor and the parents were satisfied that by law, because of his conviction, the former teacher will have to remain registered as a child sex offender for life." Kate Leckie, "Ex-teacher labeled child sex offender for life," *The Frederick News-Post* (July 23, 2010). Since that time, my godbrother has moved to Maryland and legally changed his name.
1310. See "Ham, F. Gerald, Compiler. Records Regarding Kirtanananda Bhaktipada Swami (Keith Gordon Ham)," <https://findingaids.lib.wvu.edu/cgi/f/findingaid/findingaid-idx?c=wvcguide;cc=wvcguide;ql=ham;rgn=main;view=text;didno=3830> (accessed March 6, 2017).
1311. Bhaktipada actually honored two of his disciples for their literary output: the author and Jadabharata dasa (Jean Thibeault), whom he called, "My Literary Disciples."



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12 January 2018

The brutal murder of Steven Bryant, the devotee dissident who exposed corruption within the Hare Krishna movement, was arguably the darkest moment in the 52 year history of ISKCON—a new branch of the Chaitanya-Bengali-Vaishnava religion founded in New York City in 1966 by an elderly Indian holy man: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. A mere nine years after the passing of this beloved spiritual father, one of his own disciples was hunted down and assassinated through a cooperative effort by the “spiritual” leaders, senior managers and hit men enforcers from ISKCON temples in West Virginia, Ohio, and Southern California.

The author, himself a former ISKCON devotee, chronicles the danger of the deranged devotion that practically ensured that bloody tragedy would eventually occur. His years of research culminate in an extremely engaging and well-documented treatise revealing the hidden inside story of the murder conspiracy.

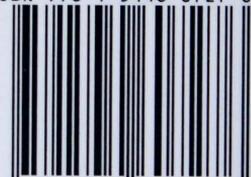
Praise for *Killing for Krishna*:

“*Killing for Krishna* is a nuanced, intelligent, and impeccably researched work on events and developments which continue to haunt ISKCON to this very day. An extremely well written, and important and timely work. One would hope that it will be instrumental in opening an honest and unbiased reflection within a movement which so far has been somewhat reluctant to meet up to its past and responsibility.”—Alexander Batthyany, the International Academy of Philosophy, Liechtenstein

“*Killing for Krishna* will go a long way to reconcile ISKCON’s most notorious crime, the murder of Steven Bryant. In the spirit of the biblical quote, ‘The truth will set you free,’ Henry Doktorski offers ISKCON followers the truth about their organization’s dark history.”—Nori Muster, former ISKCON Public Relations Assistant and author of *Betrayal of the Spirit*

“Bryant was a martyr for his faith. He was one lone voice in the wilderness and he was killed because he talked about corruption. He went up against the heavyweights and he lost.”—Officer Joe Sanchez, Police Department, Berkeley, California

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