

Dear Maharajas, Prabhus and Didis,

Dandavat pranamas. Jaya Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga.

On July 28, 2000, approximately twenty-nine years after the historic visit of Srila Prabhupada to Russia in the summer of 1971, Srila Narayana Maharaja blessed that largest country in the world with his historic first day there. By the time his plane reached the Moscow airport at 7:15 am, about 200 devotees had gathered at the old family campground site called Unost, located in the village of Kurilova near the town of Podolsk, just one hour outside of Moscow. The campsite consists of several humble and slightly deteriorated buildings which are now used for Srila Maharaja's nine-day residence, as well as that of all the visiting devotees who, although mostly from different cities in Russia, had also come from about ten other countries — America, India, Finland, Germany, Holland, Sweden, etc. The very large rooms of one of the buildings are used as a prasadam hall, and also a hall for kirtans and lectures.

A large number of the Russian devotees had come because of the sincere efforts of Urukrama Prabhu and Jnanadas Prabhu, along with eight other Russian devotees headed by Jagat Mohini dasi, Yasoda Kumara Prabhu and Sadanugraha Prabhu who, during the seven weeks previous to Srila Maharaja's visit, accompanied and assisted them in their preaching tour of nine cities. They all met with hundreds of devotees who had joined the Krsna consciousness movement years earlier — some over twenty years earlier, with a yearning to meet and serve Srila Prabhupada in a very real way, and who now felt great hope of this becoming a reality. These devotees, some of whom were the original Russian devotees from the mid-eighties who had spent years in the communist government's prison, and who then opened temples, preached with vigor all over the country, and helped print and distribute millions of Srila Prabhupada's books, now wept simply by the thought of meeting Prabhupada's dearest friend and disciple, what to speak of when they actually met him for the first time.

Devotees had also come due to the preaching, organizing and advertising of Srila Maharaja's disciples at the Moscow Gaudiya Matha, headed by Ananta Krsna, Rasasindhu, Kaviraja Krsna, Ananta Ram, and Dharani Dhara Prabhus. In the one week preceding Srila Maharaja's visit, five Gaudiya Vedanta Press devotees did a five-day day and night marathon to complete the translation and printing of the first Russian Gaudiya-giti-guccha song book, and also a new book translated from Srila Maharaja's recent English classes given in Australia, America, and Wales, as well as articles written by Mithiladisa Prabhu and Sripad Aranya Maharaja which clearly show that the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and Srila Maharaja are in total harmony. (These articles had previously been published in the English language on VNN.) Another three Russian books had also just come from the

printers: Going Beyond Vaikuntha, My Siksa-guru and Priya-bandhu, and Nectar of Govinda-lila. In that same week, two of the main organizers of the festival, Anta and Syamananda Prabhus, began getting the old campsite ready. It is a cause for lamentation that due to time and space the author of this report cannot properly glorify the services of the above-mentioned devotees, and especially the devotees who have not been mentioned. But Krsna and His associates know all about them.

Srila Maharaja was first greeted in the VIP lounge at the Sheremethovo-2 airport, where he was garlanded by Ananta Krsna Prabhu. Apparently surprised, he said, "This is the first time I've been received in this way." After embracing the men and blessing the women, he sat on a sofa, in between Urukrama and Jnanadas prabhus, and surrounded by grateful devotees, while airport officials arranged for the special care of his luggage. After hearing about the devotees' recent preaching efforts, he told one of his newer disciples, Anuradha dasi, who had been helping to translate his books, that she should also go out and preach. When she said she couldn't because she was too shy, Srila Maharaja said, "You can do it. Russians can go up to the sky. If Russians can go to the moon, they can certainly go here and there in Russia to preach."

Then, when asked about the success of his just completed two-week visit back to Mathura, he said that about fifty thousand devotees had come to the Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha to celebrate guru-purnima, and therefore, instead of being the usual one-day festival, it became a two-day festival. Practically all of Mathura had come. He said he could not even count the number of devotees from Mathura and other parts of India who received hari-nama initiation during those two days. He explained that these Indian devotees had no trouble with the habits of the westerners — meat, fish, eggs, onion, garlic, smoking and carrots. Their only fault was that, along with worshipping Krsna, they also worshipped Kali and Durga. "It is very hard," he said, "to get them to give this up."

Srila Maharaja then briefly shared the incidences which took place in relation to the new grandiose Durvasa Muni temple-ashrama project which is situated just across the Jamuna River from the Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha. For the past year, local villagers who were opposed to the project, had been creating great disturbances. Knowing that the new temple had cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to build, and thinking that they would be able to get a large out-of-court settlement for their personal use, they had filed a court-case on the grounds that the real Bhagavan is Durvasa Muni, and the devotees were being offensive to him by placing him on the side altar, and Radha-Krsna on the center altar. This past May, although the court-case was going on, the magistrate and police allowed the devotees to have their pran-prathistha function (installation of the Deities). About 1000 devotees attended, and so many had come all the way from Bengal. The morning after the ceremony was

the first Mangala Arati for the newly installed presiding Deities. During the arati, 100's of furious villagers came and began to beat the devotees with broken bottles, clubs and stones. One of the leading sannyasis and famous Gaudiya Vedanta Samhiti kirtaniya, Sripad Sadhu Maharaja, was severely hit on the head with one of the bottles and had to be rushed to the hospital.

Newspapers ran front-page articles saying that the devotees were ready to risk their lives for Krsna, and in this way gave a million dollar's worth of publicity to the Durvasa-tila Mandira. The police also took the side of the devotees, arresting many of the villagers and putting them in jail. They were about to arrest more, when Srila Maharaja returned from Europe two weeks ago. At that time the frightened villagers fell at the feet of Srila Maharaja and prayed, "Trayi! Trayi! Save us! Save us!" Srila Maharaja now related to the fifteen devotees in the airport lounge that as soon as the villagers prayed to him in this way, he told them, "I don't want to give you any distress. What's done is done. I just want to change your hearts." He then requested the police not to arrest any more of the villagers, and to release the ones who were already arrested. He told the police also that he simply wanted to change the hearts of the villagers. Since then, the villagers have been very favorable to the devotees.

Urukrama prabahu told Srila Maharaja that the villagers say they are devotees of Durvasa Muni, and now they have followed in his footsteps. Srila Maharaja agreed and said that by the grace of Durvasa Muni himself a miracle had occurred.

Srila Maharaja explained to the eager-to-hear group at the airport that in the case of this lawsuit, or in the case of any preaching endeavor, there must be opposition — otherwise there cannot be a wonderful victory. He then began to speak about the opposition he faces in the form of the apasiddhanta being spread all over the world in the name of Krsna consciousness and Gaudiya Vaisnavism. He requested Jnanadasa Prabhu to hurry and publish the two articles that Prabhu was in the process of writing: the first about Srila Prabhupada's omniscience and the second about the fact that the jivas never fell from Goloka Vrindavana. Moving his hands back and forth as though he were expertly preparing capatis, he said he wants all articles which are establishing proper siddhanta to be produced very soundly and very quickly.

He then spoke about the recently published claim that Nitya-lila Pravista Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja tried to establish that Sri Gadadhara Pandita Prabhu is what remains of Srimati Radharani after Krsna takes away Her left-wing bhava and appears as Mahaprabhu — what remains is only right-wing Rukminidevi. Srila Maharaja said, "They do not understand the inner mood of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. They can never quote scripture. The only thing they can say as 'proof' of their misunderstanding is that Srila Sridhara Maharaja is the guru of my guru." Srila Maharaja continued to say

that he himself knows Srila Sridhara Maharaja best, because he had been hearing his classes since 1946, and had many intimate siddhantic discussions with him due to his being such a close friend of his own Guru Maharaja, Nitya-lila Pravista Srila Bhakti Prajnana Kesava Gosvami Maharaja. He then reiterated that opposition is very good because, when there is a dam in the river, only then does the river have a chance to gush over it and show its own glory. Similarly, glory best goes to proper siddhanta in the face of opposition.

As though reading the minds of the devotees present who might have believed that we can solve problems, which occur during preaching, publishing and organizing, by managerial meetings, Srila Maharaja then said, "We are not interested in any management meetings. All problems can be solved only by bhakti."

Comfortably seated on the now saffron cloth-covered sofa, Srila Maharaja said, "I never thought I would come to Russia." He then shared with the devotees that a Russian devotee named Ashutosha (who had many disciples) had come to him in India several years before, begging him to give him initiation, and also requesting him to accept his own disciples. Srila Maharaja had replied at that time, "I cannot accept you as a disciple. I cannot initiate you. I don't know Russian." Urukrama Prabhu then said that by chance he had met that same devotee in the streets of Moscow for the first time just a week before. He was very pleased to see the followers of Srila Narayana Maharaja. And now he also came to the festival.

Sripad Madhava Maharaja indicated that Srila Maharaja had spoken long enough. One hour had already passed and the flight's luggage still hadn't come off the plane. It would take another half hour. Ananta Krsna Prabhu therefore arranged for Srila Maharaja to rest in a separate VIP resting room.

After leaving the VIP lounge Srila Maharaja was greeted by the kirtana of another seventy-five devotees, who escorted him outside to the van. On the way, Urukrama Prabhu introduced Srila Maharaja to Baradvaja Prabhu, one of the very first Russian preachers, and one of the devotees who had been imprisoned in the eighties. Srila Maharaja immediately embraced him.

The van-ride from the airport to the festival site took about two hours, during which time the conversations begun at the airport continued. Srila Maharaja said that he was not actually interested in building many temples in different places. He is more interested in establishing temples in everyone's heart and having nama-hatta programs everywhere.

Srila Maharaja smiled as he turned towards Srila Prabhupada's Dristadyumna Prabhu and told the others, "Now Dristadyumna Prabhu is with us. Dristadyumna will defeat all the Kauravas, especially Dronacarya. Then,

referring to the senior disciples of Srila Prabhupada in England, headed by Asta-sakhi didi who, with the slogan 'Sankirtan: not Bankirtan', were currently protesting the Bhaktivedanta Manor's ban of devotees who had taken shelter of Srila Maharaja, Dristadyumna replied, "I don't think there is any need for me. The Kauravas are already afraid of the ladies."

As the devotees had previously heard Srila Prabhupada challenge all false philosophies during his manifest stay in this world, now they were experiencing the same thing. Sprinkled in between periods of soft chanting, Srila Narayana Maharaja now reiterated many of the strong and powerful statements he had made in recent classes. He again brought up the new theory that devotees can preach better if they spend four or more years attending the atheists' universities like Cambridge or Oxford. As a challenge to this theory, he said that devotees who attend such universities become atheists and historians themselves, and begin thinking that Krsna is merely an historical personality. Referring to such persons and making a slicing gesture with his right hand, Srila Maharaja said that if Srila Prabhupada were physically present he would be cutting heads.

He then began repeating some of the points he had been making in an evening class in Wales a few weeks earlier. Responding to the statements made by some persons that one should not hear Tenth Canto Srimad Bhagavatam, particularly the pastimes of Krsna and the gopis, until one is no longer a conditioned soul, Srila Maharaja said that such persons will have to wait millions of births before they are liberated, and still they won't be liberated. This is because they are offensive: to Sri Sukadeva Gosvami, to Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, to our Srila Prabhupada, and to the entire disciplic succession. Seated in the third row of the crowded and fast-moving van, he quoted from Caitanya Caritamrta, Adi-lila 4.34. There, Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami is quoting Sri Sukadeva Gosvami (SB 10.33.37): 'anugrahaya bhaktanam manusam deham asrita, bhajate tadsih krida yah srutva tat-paro bhavet.' Speaking as though he had Srila Prabhupada's purport to this verse in front of him, he explained that one must not imitate the beautiful pastimes of Krsna, but one must certainly hear about them under proper guidance. Then, having heard such pastimes, one should serve Him. The word 'bhavet' is in the imperative mood. Therefore, to not do so would be an abandonment of duty.

Srila Maharaja then said that one of the first books Srila Prabhupada published and distributed was the Krsna Book, which contains all the chapters on Rasa-lila. Besides this, Caitanya Caritamrta contains rasika truths and lilas which even Srimad Bhagavatam cannot touch. Does this mean we conditioned souls should not read Caitanya Caritamrta? He then rhetorically asked if this means that Srila Prabhupada had made an offense by translating and publishing it. Once again he met the challenge of those who say that one must become perfect before he can hear Tenth Canto, and that anyone who quotes

the verse (which Srila Maharaja himself often quotes) beginning 'vikriditam vrajabadhubhir' (which states that if one hears about Rasa-lila, with faith, from pure devotees, he becomes free from lust and all other diseases of the heart) is a sahajiya. Like a thunderbolt Srila Maharaja said that this would mean that Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, who wrote the verse, and Srila Rupa Gosvami who inspired it, and our Srila Prabhupada who quotes it, especially in Krsna Book, would all be sahajiyas. Srila Maharaja then responded to the claim that the Tenth Canto verse about not imitating Lord Siva's drinking poison meant that one should not hear about or remember Rasa-lila — otherwise one will be imitating Siva's smoking of marijuana — and he will be destroyed. Srila Maharaja replied that this is not at all the meaning of this verse. It means that one must hear Rasa-lila through the disciplic succession. However, if one tries to imitate those pastimes, even by mind, then he will be destroyed. Such persons have no faith in the disciplic succession.

In this way, on the long journey to the festival campsite, Srila Maharaja spoke about his desire that the devotees assist him in widely broadcasting — also on VNN and other internet websites — the true Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya philosophy, so that people may become happy.

Over two hundred ecstatic and weeping devotees met Srila Maharaja when he arrived at the campsite at about 11am. Tapan Misra Prabhu lead the kirtana with his guitar, as devotees ran to the van. Several devotees had been waiting for one and a half years to meet Srila Maharaja, and so the first moments of seeing him were quite emotional. Srila Maharaja thanked all the devotees who suffered in prison, and told them that when he had long ago heard that they had been imprisoned, he had prayed for their welfare. Like an ocean of mercy, he then began to embrace the male devotees, as more and more ran to him to embrace him and be embraced.

Now I am looking for a final paragraph for this tour report. I hope this example of one devotees first impression will do: A few days before Srila Maharaja arrived, an uninitiated Russian devotee had asked me a question about the fall of the jiva. He said, "When we made the choice to come to this material world, we didn't actually have the where-with-all to make that choice. We didn't have the intelligence or the developed consciousness with which to decide about Krsna or Maya. It seems that there is a lack of mercy on Krsna's part. He shouldn't have made us like that." I answered the best I could, but told him he could only be satisfied by the realized answer of Srila Maharaja. Then, on the day Srila Maharaja arrived he said to me, "Do you remember my question?" I said, "Yes, will you ask Gurudeva?" He answered, "No, I don't have to. I just looked at him and my doubts went away."

Your servant, Syamarani dasi