

Volume 3, July-September 2016

## ISKCON Sannyasa Ministry Newsletter

### **From the Sannyasa Minister:**

I am happy to introduce our third sannyasa newsletter. Recently, a devotee sent me a correction of Srila Prabhupada's purport from Caitanya Caritamrita, Madhya Lila, chapter 7, text 130.

**Original misinterpreted version:** *"One has to learn humility and meekness at home, following the instructions of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and in that way one's life will be spiritually successful. One should not try to be an artificially advanced devotee, thinking "I am a first-class devotee" Such thinking should be avoided. It is best not to accept any disciples. One has to become purified at home by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and preaching the principles enunciated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Thus one can become a spiritual master and be freed from the contamination of material life."*

**Current and correct version:** *"One has to learn humility and meekness at home, following the instructions of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and in that way one's life will be spiritually successful. One should not try to be an artificially advanced devotee, thinking "I am a first-class devotee, so it is best not to accept any disciples." Such thinking should be avoided. One has to become purified at home by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and preaching the principles enunciated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Thus one can become a spiritual master and be freed from the contamination of material life."*

One may take the instruction above that a devotee should become a *diksa* guru and initiate disciples. However, I understand this in the light of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings that whomever we meet we should instruct them about Lord Sri Krishna and in this way become a guru. The *diksa* guru is certainly a foundation for a disciple's spiritual advancement, but before and after initiation neophyte devotees require a variety of *siksa* gurus to engage them in pure devotional service. A sannyasi who has completely dedicated his life in the service of Lord Sri Krishna naturally becomes a *siksa* guru for members of the Krishna consciousness movement.



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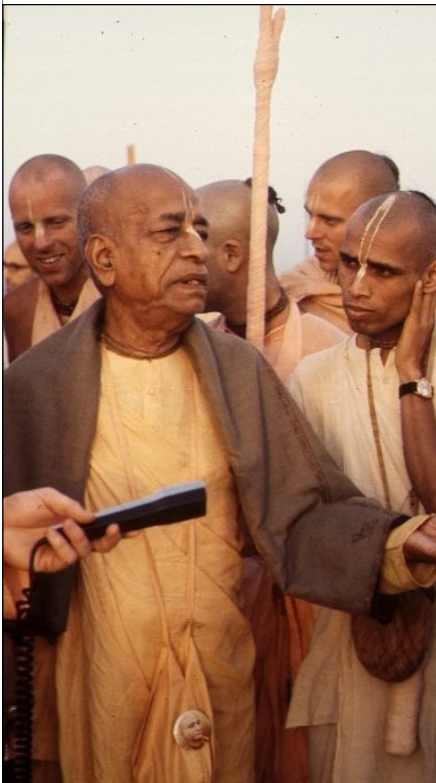
**Srila Prabhupada writes in the Nectar Of Instruction:** “Every devotee should be ready to take instructions from a superior Vaisnava, and a superior Vaisnava must be ready to help an inferior Vaisnava in all respects. One is superior or inferior according to his spiritual development in Krsna consciousness. (Nectar of Instruction Verse 6)

Devotees learn from their superiors instructions and behavior how to become more steady and enthusiastic in devotional service. This is the way of receiving the mercy of Lord Krishna. “*dadami buddhi-yogam tam*” - “*I give them the intelligence how to come to Me.*” (Bhagavad-gita 10.10) and the “*shining lamp of knowledge to destroy the darkness born of ignorance*” (Bhagavad-gita 10.11)

So it is the duty of a sannyasi to become advanced in Krishna consciousness by trying to please the Supreme and serve His mission, by cooperating with other devotees to spread Krishna consciousness to the innocent, and by defeating atheistic propaganda. Srila Prabhupada writes in NOI 5 that “*this is the way to cultivate devotional service properly.*” Sannyasis teaching these methods of spiritual advancement to the those cultivating pure devotional service, whether acting as *diksa* or *siksa* gurus are bona fide spiritual masters. *amara ajnaya guru hana tara' ei desa* (Adi 12.73)

In this issue, we will hear from Srila Prabhupada about sannyasa, learn about Bhakti Marg Swami, take a spiritual trip to the Middle East, and learn about the departure of an ISKCON sannyasi. Please let us know what you think about the newsletter. We welcome your contributions

Your servant,  
Prahlanananda Swami



## *There is No Other Business*

*By Lokanath Swami*

A few days before our sannyasa initiation, Sridhar and I had taken a train from Mumbai to Mathura followed by a horse-cart ride from Mathura to the Krishna Balarama Mandir in Vrindavan. We had arrived a bit early to prepare our saffron cloth for the initiation next day and to arrange for bamboo and covers for our tridandas.

On the morning of December 3rd, despite the cold weather, Srila Prabhupada went for his morning walk as usual. He spoke to the devotees about the processes of surrendering to Krishna. He returned to the temple within half an hour. A *yajna* pit had been prepared in the courtyard of the temple and the initiations were scheduled to begin after the morning program. There were three of us taking sannyasa initiation

that day - Sridhar, Prthu-Putra and me. Several others were to

receive *harinama* initiation. The necessary preparations had been made. All the candidates were seated and the courtyard was filled with devotees singing kirtan as Srila Prabhupada arrived and took his seat on the *vyasasana*.

We offered our new cloth to Srila Prabhupada and the assembled sannyasis and asked them to give their blessings by touching it and then went off to put on our new cloth.

We returned in our sannyasa attires after which Srila Prabhupada smilingly asked us to come forward one by one and handed us our respective *tridandas*. The sounds of karatalas and mrdangas, accompanied by cheers of “Jaya, Haribol,” filled the temple courtyard.

Aknayananda Swami led us in a repetition of the sannyasa mantra, ‘*etam sa asthaya paratma-nistham...*’ which means, “I shall cross over the insurmountable ocean of darkness of ignorance simply by taking shelter of the lotus feet of Lord Mukunda, who gives all kinds of liberations and was worshiped by many great previous acaryas.”

Sridhar, Prthu-Putra and I offered our obeisance to Srila Prabhupada, holding our *dandas* erect in our hands for the first time. When the three of us took our seats Srila Prabhupada began his initiation address, “*etam sa asthaya paratma-nistham. Paratma-nistham*. This sannyasi life means to simply devote oneself to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to keep firm faith in Him. There is no other business,” he said. “*Visnoh padopasarpanam* refers to the whole system of how to approach the lotus feet of Vishnu. So this is the last ceremonial performance and it is not a new thing. Before us there were so many exalted *acaryas*, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacharya, Vishnu Swami, Nimbarka, and, in our line, Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Our process is to follow the predecessor *acaryas. Mahajano yena gatah sa pantha*. That is the way...” continued Srila Prabhupada.

He advised us further, “Although you are young men, there are many difficulties in keeping sannyasa, but if you keep faith, full faith in Krishna, then *maya* will not be able to touch you. So you should always keep yourself fixed in Krishna consciousness by strictly following the rules and regulations. And as sannyasis, you should increase your chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra and go on preaching. Then you will be fixed.”

He continued to explain, “Caitanya Mahaprabhu also took sannyasa at a very early age. He was twenty-four years old only. So He has practically shown by His activities how to preach Krishna consciousness all over the world. He gives this order to everyone, *amara ajnaya guru haya tara ei desa*. In whichever country you may live, it doesn’t matter, try to deliver them by becoming their guru. The sannyasi is supposed to be guru of all other divisions. Sannyasa is the topmost stage. So if you become guru, teacher, remembering the order of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, then you will never fall down.”

“You haven’t got to manufacture anything. Simply try to repeat the instruction of the Bhagavad-gita, Krishna *upadesa. Man-mana bhava mad-bhakto mad-yaji mam*

*namaskuru*. Everyone can say this. You can say, ‘My dear sir, my only request is that you think of Krishna’ and nobody will kill you for saying this. You do it personally and teach them. Then you become guru.”

“When Prakashananda Sarasvati inquired from Caitanya Mahaprabhu, “*You are a sannyasi and you are not studying Vedanta, but simply chanting Hare Krishna, what kind of a sannyasi are you?*” to which Caitanya Mahaprabhu replied, “*My dear sir, I am a great fool. My guru saw me as the greatest fool, therefore he has chastised Me*”. We know Caitanya Mahaprabhu was not a fool or a rascal but He compared Himself to a fool because we are fools. *Bharata bhumite manusya janma haila jara, janma sarthaka kari kara para upakara*. It is Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s mission that every Indian should learn what Krishna consciousness is and preach it all over the world. That is His order. But our Indians are not taking care of it. Therefore it doesn’t matter - Indian, European or Canadian, anyone who carries the order of Caitanya Mahaprabhu will be benefited, and be glorified. So don’t hesitate, because the soul is neither Indian nor American. By executing the order of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu you will be glorified, the country will be glorified, and the whole world will be benefited. Thank you very much.”

Srila Prabhupada’s instruction to us was to execute and maintain the highest standard of devotional service as a sannyasi. His order was that we simply devote ourselves to Krishna and keep firm faith. He warned that we must strictly follow the rules and regulations and chant to keep *maya* at bay. I have always maintained my sixteen rounds, of course, and at times I have increased beyond sixteen. But while compiling the book *My Prabhupada*, I once again stumbled upon this instruction more than 20 years later. I realized how continuously relevant these words were and I have increased my daily chanting. I understand fully that with those instructions, Srila Prabhupada is guaranteeing me protection from the forces of the age of Kali. Sannyasi is, after all, the guru of all other divisions.

Of course, with the order of sannyasa comes responsibility. At the time of our initiation, Srila Prabhupada asked us to reflect on this position, making us think about it, reminding us of the additional roles and responsibilities, preparing us for the future.

Another point of significance on that day of my initiation was the fact that my two associates who received initiation with me, were not of Indian origin. Sridhar was Canadian and Prthu Putra was German. Their upbringing was so far from India that it was an amazing feat to have them there – a testament to how Srila Prabhupada had expanded Bharat (India) through Mahaprabhu’s words. What is commonly known as Bharat is a shrunken version of the original Bharat. The original Bharat encompassed the whole planet. Srila Prabhupada had expanded it back to its actual size by taking Krishna consciousness to the Western world. So Srila Prabhupada did not just appeal to Indians – he repeatedly asked his European and American boys and girls to make their lives perfect by practicing and propagating Krishna consciousness.

*“Although you are young men, there are many difficulties in keeping sannyasa, but if you keep faith, full faith in Krishna, then maya will not be able to touch you. So you should always keep yourself fixed in Krishna consciousness by strictly following the rules and regulations.”*



He achieved the remarkable feat of walking across Canada four times, beginning with his first walk in 1996, covered in a documentary called 'The Longest Road' by the National Film Board, Canada. His pedestrian pastimes include trekking across Ireland, the Fiji Islands, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Israel. In ISKCON's 50th anniversary year, Maharaja began a walk from Boston to San Francisco.

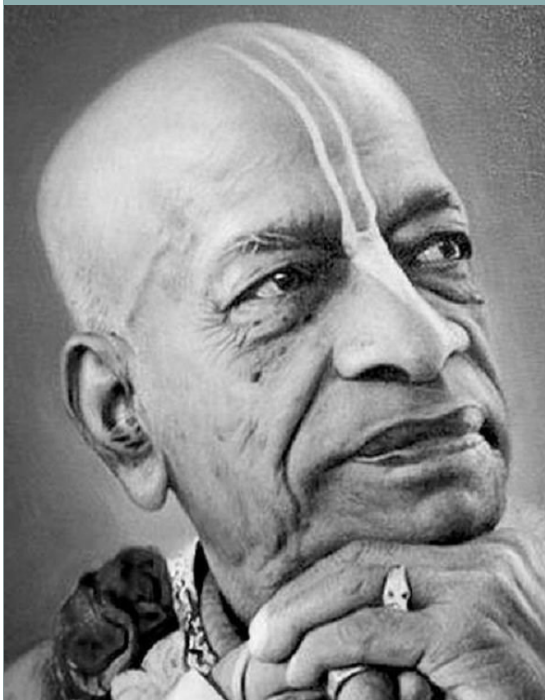
## SANNYASI PROFILE: BHAKTI MARG SWAMI

Bhakti Marga Swami was born on October 5, 1952. He first encountered devotees in Toronto, at the college campus where he studied fine arts. He invited them over to his apartment for an overnight stay, and gradually with their association he started visiting the temple, and never left. He was initiated by Srila Prabhupada in 1975.

Bhakti Marga Swami served ISKCON as Bhakta Leader, sankirtan leader, director of devotional plays, and, between 1985-1995, as the temple president in Toronto, where he received sannyasa in 1984. He teaches bhakti-yoga, mantra meditation, kirtan, and interactive dance. Widely known for his passion for the performing arts, he has taken an active role in writing and directing modern theatrical productions that are presented all over the world. Productions scripted and directed by him are as follows: The Jagannatha Story, Demon, Dhruva, Three Lives of Bharat, Ramayana, Krishna the Eighth Boy, Marichi, God Is, Gods and Demons, Grandsire, Vamana, The Gita, Chaitanya's Verses, Lonely People, The Witness, Brother I Need You, Pancha Tattva, Canto Ten, Rolling the Dice, and Kunti and Karna. He has also directed ISKCON Classics such as The Boatman, Big Fish, Little Fish, and The Age of Kali.

Bhakti Marga Swami began his GBC duties in the early 2000s — first as a GBC candidate, then as acting GBC, then as a full voting member.

## SRILA PRABHUPADA ON SANNYASA



*"Now you are sannyasi, sannyasi means responsible, you must be responsible for the spiritual progress of the devotees, to see that the right standard is being observed in all departments. Just as I am doing. Sometimes I go to the bank, sometimes keep accounts, sometimes preach, hold the class, write books, sometimes cook—sannyasi should be expert in all departments, and he should distribute his experience to others, that's all. So I think you are the right man for assisting me in this way in the European continent, and Krsna has brought you to the right place, so with great enthusiasm go forward. Thank you very much."*

(Srila Prabhupada's letter to Pusta Krsna Swami, 8th November 1972)

## *In Memoriam: HH Krishna Dasa Swami*

*By Bhakti Caitanya Swami*



One day in late January, or perhaps early February, in 1973, a devotee named Caranaravindam Dasa came into the main brahmacari room in the ISKCON temple at 7 Bury Place, London, and told us how he had just met an amazing devotee while he was preaching in East London, I think in an area named Forest Gate. The devotee was named Krishna Dasa, and he was from India, and he did not know about the existence of ISKCON or Srila Prabhupada, but as soon as he saw our brahmacari he became extremely excited and inspired, and wanted to know where in London he could find our devotees and temple.



Shortly after that Krishna Dasa visited Bury Place and took part in the programmes. George Harrison had recently donated Bhaktivedanta Manor, and Srila Prabhupada spent some time there during that year. While Srila Prabhupada was staying in the Manor Krishna Dasa met him and was deeply impressed by him. Prabhupada asked him about his background and if he was initiated, and Krishna Dasa told him he was already initiated in the Brahma sampradaya, and Srila Prabhupada told him that he should join the temple, and that after some time he would give him sannyasa. Krishna Dasa was deeply affected by the meeting, and would sometimes tell us about it. It was a life changing experience for him.



Not long after that, I think around July or August 1973, he left his family and his school teaching and moved into the temple. He was considerably older than the brahmacaris, being around 40 years of age, whereas the other asrama residents were from their late teens to about 25 or so at the oldest, but everyone was very impressed with his sincerity and dedication from the outset, and he was greatly respected by all. We had a queuing system for the shower in the brahmacari asrama, and there were about fifty of us, but he patiently waited his turn with the other, much younger men.

He became close to the Temple President, Vicitravirya Dasa, and they would regularly go out and do programmes with

Indian families around London. Vicitravirya would sometimes tell us how Krishna Dasa would preach very strongly to these people, and insist they become life members and donors. I saw him in action during festivals at Bhaktivedanta Manor. He was literally like a transcendental lion, roaring at the people and powerfully arousing their sense of responsibility as people from Indian backgrounds. He glorified Srila Prabhupada very nicely, sometimes referring to him as the thirteenth Mahajana, and would tell the people that Prabhupada was the real representative of their culture and tradition.

In 1979 he went to the Mayapur festival with a group of us, led by Vicitravirya prabhu. Part of the mission was that he was going to visit his older family members in Punjab, where he had been born and spent his early life. They were deeply disturbed that he had left this family and joined ISKCON full time, and Krishna Dasa was to meet them and try to make amends and pacify them. Vicitravirya went with him, and later told us that it had been a hair raising experience. The family had tried to force Krishna Dasa to go back to his wife and children in London, but Krishna Dasa would not hear of it at all. They then wanted to attack Krishna Dasa, but somehow he and Vicitrivirya managed to escape.

This greatly impressed all of us. We were all from hippy type backgrounds, and leaving our families had been no problem for us, but here we saw someone from a completely different social environment, a cultured person who had been brought up as a devotee. And when he had been put under severe pressure to give up his dedication to Lord Krishna he had adamantly refused. His resolve in Krishna consciousness struck us deeply.

Time then separated us for some years, but in around 1986 or 1987 he started visiting South Africa, on the invitation of Giriraja Maharaja. The yatra there had just lost their GBC and zonal acarya guru, Bhagavan Dasa, and it was a trying time. By now Krishna Dasa was Krishna Dasa Swami, having been formally given sannyasa by Sivarama Maharaja in the interim period. He preached in his characteristic powerful way, sometimes giving classes to Indian audiences until late at night. His influence helped stabilize the yatra after Bhagavan's departure.

I remember one time he told a small group of us (it may have just been Giriraja Maharaja and me) how as a boy of about eleven, he had gone with a group of pilgrims to Sri Vrndavana-dhama. While walking through the town he saw Krishna appear to him, and became stunned, and remained in the same place for hours, becoming separated from his pilgrimage party. Later the party came looking for him, and found him, still anchored to the same place, unmoving.

He often lamented the degradation of modern day India, always fondly referring to it as "Bharat" which of course is the traditional name for the country. In the late 80's, when

a gentleman named V.P. Singh was Prime Minister of India, and was trying to update the country to become some sort of modern Westernized state, Krishna Dasa Maharaja would sometimes rail against him in his public programmes, calling him “Chandal Singh”. In his heart, Maharaja wanted India to really become the Bharat of its ancient tradition, and knew that Krishna consciousness was the only thing that could help achieve that.

In the last few years I did not see Maharaja often, and I regret that very much. But he always continued preaching powerfully, and glorifying Srila Prabhupada as the savior of humanity. His contribution to Srila Prabhupada's movement was outstanding, and will always be fondly remembered.

## *Harinam Creates History in the Middle East*

*By Ekalavya Dasa, Sannyasa Candidate*

Harinam Sankirtan or the congregational chanting of the Holy Name, initiated and propagated by Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself, continues to be carried out throughout the world with great pomp and splendour. However, the Middle Eastern countries, being slightly sensitive towards religious matters and public display of devotion, had never before witnessed a performance of public Harinam. Despite different home programs and weekly satsangs being carried out in different parts of the region, respecting the religious views of the ruling Government, devotees prohibited from doing so. But things seem to be taking a smooth turn as Bahrain witnessed the first public Harinam in the region. What a great way to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ISKCON and provide a brilliant prelude to World Holy Name Week (July 28 – August 16, 2016).

*“This is the first time ever that we have been given permission by the honourable Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain to perform Harinam Sankirtan publically”,* exclaimed Sridhari Madhav Dasa, the organizer of ISKCON Bahrain’s presence at the event called *‘Bahrain for All, All for Bahrain’*. Held on Friday, April 29, 2016, from 4 pm to 10 pm, the event was sponsored and patronized by the office of Bahrain Prime Minister – His Highness Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa.

Fifty thousand fortunate residents of Bahrain turned up for the festival and were in for a treat when two hundred and fifty members of ISKCON Bahrain took over the stage, fulfilling the prophecy of Lord Caitanya that the chanting of the Hare Krishna Mahamantra will be heard in every town and village of the world.

On April 29<sup>th</sup>, as the sun shone bright and strong, dancing on the water, a small group of devotees and I arrived at the venue to check the lighting and other arrangements. It was there that we met the Event Manager, Ms. Nivedita, who told us that we were free to dance on the stage, in front of the stage, and anywhere we wanted to. *“You are free”* she said with a smile. *“But you only have fifteen minutes, you won’t have much time”*, she warned.





Around 4pm, Sridhari Madhav Dasa and I met the Master of Ceremonies, Wada Svar, a professional voiceover actor, and comedian who lives in Hollywood, California. Wada asked us how we wanted him to introduce us. We replied, *“Just tell them that we are a spiritual and religious group from India that are practicing peace and unity through singing and dancing”*.

The first group on the stage was a collection of “special needs” children in wheelchairs with their family members and teachers. They performed along with a song by the Beatles, *“A Little Help from my Friends”*. In my opinion, this was highly auspicious, as the Beatles had played a major role in the spreading of Krishna consciousness in the west during the 1960s and 1970s.

As the last notes of the Beatle’s song completed, the Master of Ceremonies began to introduce ISKCON Bahrain and invited us on stage. I was feeling so exhilarated that I practically ran up onto the stage. The people in the audience began to applaud and cheer.

Sridhari Madhav Dasa had arranged for a slide with the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra to be displayed on the massive 50’ x 80’ hi tech LED display. I was worried that the display would be dim in the bright sunlight, but instead the high tech display boldly and clearly showed the Mahamantra in three languages - English, Sanskrit, and Arabic. I felt thrilled to see the Maha Mantra revealed to thousands of the public in the audience, probably 95% of which were seeing it for the first time.

I began by expressing my gratitude to His Highness Prince Khalifa and the festival organizers. Then, I introduced our group to the audience. I explained that we are ISKCON Bahrain and that the Hare Krishna Mahamantra is a great song for peace and unity. I invited everyone to sing with us after which I requested the audience to repeat after me, which many of them did, with confidence and enthusiasm.

It was the first time I wore a *dhoti-kurta*, draping an orange *chadar* over my shoulder, with a bold Vaishnava *tilak* on my forehead in public, and many of the other devotees in attendance were also in full *vaisnava* attire. We were about twenty male devotees on stage right with three *mridangas* (drums), some *karatala* players (small cymbals), two response singers with microphones and one devotee with a big pair of cymbals called *whompers*. On stage left were around twenty-five female devotees neatly arranged in five consecutive lines of five devotees per line. The younger girls and children were in the front dressed in colourful *saris* and *gopi* dresses. Two of them were responsive singers sharing a microphone. The age of the devotees on the stage were from four years old to forty plus.

Below the eight-foot high stage, on the ground directly in front of us, were two more groups of devotees of approximately one hundred in number. ISKCON Bahrain, like ISKCON itself, is a highly international blend. Devotees present represented India, Nepal, Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and The United States of America. States of India represented Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Telegana, Bihar, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, New Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Members of the public participating in the festival were amazed at the number of participants that we had, as well as the enthusiasm that we were manifesting. Most of the other groups had maximum twenty or thirty members whereas we had around two hundred and fifty.

The *kirtan* started slowly, and gradually built up. I was singing a traditional Bengali melody, and the instruments were also all traditional. As the *kirtan* began to build, the devotees seated in the audience rose and joined the dance.

The *kirtan* was building up with the volume and speed increasing by every beat. I could see groups of devotees dancing in the audience. Catching the hands of the local people and tourists, the devotees were bringing the newcomers into the *kirtan*.

All of a sudden, one of the members of the organizational staff came up behind me, and shouted in my ear, “*Keep going!!! The next group is not ready yet. Keep going!!!*” I was surprised – practically shocked. In retrospect, I think we were the only group of the thirty groups that performed that was allotted additional time. Later, I was informed that our *kirtan* lasted for more than twenty-three minutes. I felt unlimitedly blissful to hear that the *kirtan* could continue indefinitely longer.

Holding the wireless microphone in my hand, I jumped down from the eight-foot stage and entered into the group of devotees dancing below. I motioned to one of the devotees to put his hands on my shoulders. We formed a snake with each devotee putting his hands on the next devotees’ shoulders. We moved forward, along the barriers.

The feeling was joyous as we moved through the crowd. We were the focus of television cameras. Members of the audience were taking photos and videos. We went around the



audience, and so far from the stage, that I could hear the echo from the stage with a time delay, so that I knew that we had to return closer, to keep the sound of the *kirtan* musical, tight and attractive to the audience. I gradually started to move back towards the stage.

I received the two minute warning from Sridhari Madhav Dasa. As the *kirtan* came to an even higher climax, all the devotees on the stage and in the audience were exuberantly dancing. Hands rose high in the air. Jumping and leaping about, their feet barely touched the ground. I felt elated and jubilant. Seeing the wide eyes of the people in the audience, I was sure that most of them had never witnessed *Harinam Sankirtan* before. Their lives would never be the same. As the last notes reverberated throughout the park, I appealed to the entire audience to chant along with us just one more time.

The audience chanted along with us and then gave a warm round of applause. I concluded by thanking His Highness Prince Khalifa and the organizers and urged everyone to visit our bookstall. Concluding the presentation by speaking about *Harinam Sankirtan* and the Hare Krishna *Mahamantra*, I felt that we had just made history.

The Master of Ceremonies, Wada Svar, a local Bahrani expressed his appreciation, and sang out a loud and enthusiastic "*Haribol!*" He asked Sridhari Madhav Dasa to make an announcement about our prasadam stall, and book table. He then translated that into Arabic. Our group was the only group that received that special privilege of having information about their stall announced from the stage.

ISKCON Bahrain devotees were excited with faces bright and flushed. We were all speaking about the historical event, and basking in the glory of Lord Caitanya's sankirtan movement. Everyone who was present expressed that his or her heart was touched by the experience. The event was televised and covered in newspaper articles with prominent photos.

Sridhari Madhav Dasa met Mr. Amer Al Blooshi, IT head for the event. "*Wow! You broke the stage!*" he exclaimed. A large framed gentleman dressed in the traditional kandoora invited me into his tent. He handed me a book to sign, asking me to write a message for His Highness Prince Khalifa.