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**HARE KRISHNA
IN
THE
U.S.S.R.**

December 1988

The Committee to Free Soviet Hare Krishnas

HARE KRISHNA IN THE U.S.S.R.

December 1988

An Information Bulletin From:

The Committee to Free Soviet Hare Krishnas (CFSHK)

International Society for Krishna Consciousness

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THE COMMITTEE TO FREE SOVIET HARE KRISHNAS would like to extend its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the help and encouragement received from the following individuals and organizations: Amnesty International, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Helsinki Watch, Cronid Lubarsky, Vladimir Bukovsky, The Bukovsky Foundation, Keston College, Center for Democracy, Rysskaya Mysl, Alexander Ginzburg, Italian Helsinki Committee, The Committee for Human Rights in Eastern Europe, Center "Ecumenical Russia", His Holiness Mukunda Goswami and the ISKCON Office of Public Affairs, ISKCON World Review, American Psychiatric Association, The Royal College of Psychiatrists (U.K.), International Society for Human Rights, Back to Godhead magazine, Resistance International, PSI Research, Samzidat Bulletin, Sri S.L. Sharma, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Swedish Parliament, European Council of Hindu Organizations, Hindu Alliance of America, Friends of India Society International, Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Indian Council for International Cooperation, BBC, Voice of America, Radio Liberty, ISKCON members worldwide and many other friends and supporters too numerous to mention.

We're Registered!

The Hare Krishna Movement in the Soviet Union won a major victory in the struggle for its religious rights. In May, the Council for Religious Affairs granted official recognition to the movement by approving their application for registration as a bona fide religion. Following this approval, Krishna devotees in other Soviet cities and territories are entitled to register their congregations with local authorities.

Keston College, an organization studying religion in communist countries, stated that "this is the first time the Soviet authorities have granted legal recognition to an entire religious group since the war, though there have been some indications in recent years that the legalization of the Jehovah's Witnesses may be under consideration." (Keston News Service No. 302, 9 June 1988)

Receiving a positive answer to the application for registration, on June 20, 1988 the *Moscow Society For Krishna Consciousness* was founded by 20 members of the Soviet capital's congregation. Three devotees were elected by those 20 to form the Society's Council and they are: Sergei Kurkin (Satananda dasa), Sergei Zuev (Sucharu dasa), and Alexsei Mikheev (Krishna Kaumara dasa). Satananda and Sucharu previously served terms in labour camps for their preaching activities for two and a half years and two years respectively.

This amazing achievement was only possible because of the sacrifices and determination of the Soviet Hare Krishna devotees and the worldwide campaign in their support. One official in the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs remarked that the international pressure upon the Soviet Government by protesting supporters of the Hare Krishna Movement played a decisive role in the registration of the Krishna Consciousness Society in the USSR.

Registration, as important as it may be, cannot be considered the culmination and answer to everything. Many registered religious organizations have been under intense pressure for many years by the Soviet authorities.

Controlling and suppressing believers has been the standard operational procedure of the Council for Religious Affairs. Freedom of religion for devotees of Krishna means being able to preach in public, to profusely print and distribute spiritual literatures, and to travel outside the Soviet Union for religious education and pilgrimage, to name a few.

According to the Pueblo Institute, a lay Catholic human rights group focusing on religious freedom, "despite the

move toward reform in several key areas of Soviet life, repression remains the overall policy on religious activity. . . worship by "legal" religions is banned unless it takes place in state-approved buildings by a state-approved congregation. Registration continues to be granted sparingly, and can be withdrawn arbitrarily at any time."

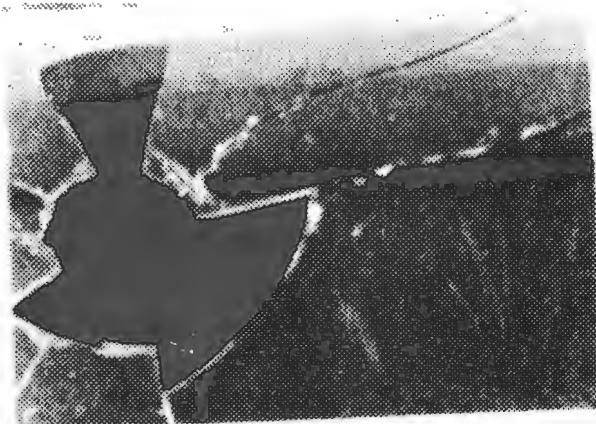
In a June 8, 1988 Los Angeles Times article entitled "State-Stamped Religion Isn't Free" more information is revealed about the life of religious believers in the



USSR, "The state routinely interferes in the designation of religious leaders and in day-to-day church operations. Pervasive KGB infiltration of ecclesiastic administrations, long suspected by human rights groups, was confirmed last June by a former KGB informant. Professed religious believers are barred from top jobs and are discriminated against and are harassed in schools and work places. In short, the Soviet regime retains its role as the supervisor of the daily life of religious communities—a role marked by militant atheism and overt hostility toward religion."

Summing up the situation, the Times article ends, "In and of themselves, the recent changes, when taken in the context of ongoing widespread repression, are pitifully inadequate."□

BROKEN WINDOWS



Window of Yagna's apartment.

In Moscow on the Appearance Day of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, March 3, 1988, two officials from the Council for Religious Affairs attended the devotees' observance of this special holiday. The apartment of Iza-bella Buchae (Yagna devi dasi), a popular preaching center and ashram for the Soviet yatra, was the location of the celebration. However at 10 o'clock at night, as the devotees were ending the festivities, some athletic youths threw stones, breaking all the windows of Yagna's apartment. She lives on the fourth floor.

RETURN OF POSSESSIONS

Beginning in February, 1988, many Soviet devotees whose possessions were confiscated by the KGB in the past were able to get their things back.

LENINGRAD TELEVISION

On March 18, the Leningrad devotees were invited for a television interview which would be broadcast at a later time on Leningrad TV. The director of the show was very unfriendly and did everything he could to make the devotees look bad. His questions were provoking and he did not allow the devotees to say what they wanted, while letting other participants with opposing views speak at length. Devotees who were prepared to answer specific questions were not allowed to speak, but only those who were new and unprepared were given a chance to say anything. The director of the program's name is Nevzorov. The whole motivation behind the show was to humiliate and insult the devotees.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

On March 31, 1988 in the city of Tula in the Russian Republic a discussion was held in a metalurgical research institute. Some of the positive aspects of a religious approach to life were mentioned by one of the main speakers. He referred to how the Krishna Consciousness Movement was propagating abstinence from alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Although present, the devotees were not allowed to speak there.

DUTCH SUPPORT

Olga Kiseleva (Premavati devi dasi) met with a delegation from the Netherlands consisting of several members of the Dutch Parliament. This took place in April at an apartment in Moscow. The delegates were given a full description of the problems the Hare Krishna devotees in the Soviet Union are experiencing. The Ambassador of the Netherlands was also present with his wife and according to Premavati, the Ambassador's wife is very interested in the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness.

YAKOV DZHIDZHEVADZE DEVELOPS TUBERCULOSIS



Yakov Dzhidzhevadze

Sometime in March, Yakov Dzhidzhevadze (Yamaraja dasa) was diagnosed for tuberculosis. He must have developed the disease while imprisoned in labour camp. He was released in January 1988 from the labour camp. He is supposed to go to a sanatorium for treatment of his tuberculosis.

Soviet Cities and Towns Where Krishna Devotees Live

In the Russian Soviet Republic: (Central European area) Moscow, Leningrad, Voronezh, Vladimir, Tula, Rzhev, Tolyatti, Kursk, Gorky, Kuibyshev, Naberezhnye, Chelny, Kazan, Cheboksary. (Southern European area) Rostov, Krasnodar, Krasnodar Territory, Adler, Essentuki, Armavir, Stavropol, the settlements of Kurjino and Mednogorsky in the Stavropol Territory. (Urals, Siberia, Far East) Sverdlovsk, Perm, Novokuznetsk, Kemerovo, Semipalatinsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Vladivostok, and Khabarovsk.

In the Ukrainian Soviet Republic: Kiev, Vinnitsa, Kharkov, Chernigov, Dnepropetrovsk, Zdanov, Simferopol, Novorossisk, Kerch, Odessa.

In the Latvian Soviet Republic: Riga, Yurmala and the Upekai settlement in the Ludzinsky region.

Lithuanian Soviet Republic: Vilnius, Shaulyai, Palanga, Panevezhis, Kaunas, Klaipeda and villages and towns outside these cities.

Estonian Soviet Republic: Tallin

Georgian Soviet Republic: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Sukhumi

Armenian Soviet Republic: Yerevan, Kafan, Kirovakan, Idzhevan, Megri, Asharak and Shatin village of the Yehegnadzorsky region.

Azerbaijan Soviet Republic: Baku

Uzbekistan Soviet Republic: Tashkent

Turkmenian Soviet Republic: Alma-Ata

Tadzhikistan Soviet Republic: Dushanbe

Kazakhstan Soviet Republic: Aktyubinsk

Hare Krishna Chronicle

In the middle of February Moscow devotee Ivan Fedorovich Matushkin (Indradyumna dasa) began the *Hare Krishna Chronicle of the Krishna Consciousness Movement in the USSR*. In his fifties, Matushkin is working actively with several public affairs projects along with Olga Kustrya (Udara kirti dasi), Valeri Tarasenko and others. Matushkin was supplying news about the Soviet Hare Krishna Movement to *Express Chronicle*.

Beginning with only brief news, the *Hare Krishna Chronicle* was small. However, it soon became a 30 page monthly publication as Matushkin's staff grew. A weekly edition is also published to cover ongoing events. It has aroused much interest even outside the community of devotees. The *Hare Krishna Chronicle* is in great demand by other groups who publish their own typewritten magazines, from human rights to youth groups.□



Cover illustration of *Hare Krishna Chronicle*.



Mamu Thakura dasa with Leningrad devotees.



A folkgroup called "Sankirtana".



"Sankirtana" has programs throughout Leningrad.

Ecstasy in Armenia

On Sunday April 3, a group of 10 devotees from Armenia went downtown in Yerevan (capital of Armenia) to have *Hari Nama Sankirtana* (public chanting of God's Holy Names). They chanted near to the Opera House where a few weeks before there had been huge demonstrations of about one million people. The devotees came, chanted, distributed books and *prasadam* (holy foodstuff) and eventually they were surrounded by a large crowd.

The general attitude was very favourable and the people asked many questions. Of course there were questions about the recent political situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The devotees informed them that if the people of both republics took to Krishna Consciousness that there would be peace and happiness.

Many of the onlookers were aware of the Armenian devotees' hardships of imprisonment from hearing broadcasts on the Voice of America, BBC and the Armenian government's propaganda against them. The police did not attempt to stop the chanting devotees, although the city was infested with many policemen, ready to stop any nationalistic demonstrations. The Yerevan *Sankirtana* lasted for three and a half hours.

On April 12, the same Armenian devotees participated in an official discussion in the Yerevan House of Atheism. The atmosphere of the program was very favourable and several people from different institutes and organizations invited the devotees for similar functions.

30 kilometers from Yerevan, in the town of Garni on April 17 the devotees performed *Hari Nama Sankirtana*. Garni is a popular tourist center because it is the site of an ancient Roman temple. Taking advantage of the situation, the devotees held *Sankirtana* right at the historic temple.

One busload after another brought fascinated tourists to see the devotees singing and dancing. Everyone appreciated and many joined in. Many of Srila Prabhupada's books were distributed and a lot of *prasadam* was given out as well. Hundreds of people were involved in the event.

A marriage procession of 400 people came and joined the *Sankirtana* party. Their already happy mood was magnified when they jumped into the chanting and dancing devotees. *Prasadam* sweets were given to the newly weds and others in the procession. It is considered auspicious by Armenians to give sweets on such occasions and everyone became very happy. A huge crowd assembled, most taking part in the chanting. One of the relatives of the bride was not able to stop chanting and dancing, he kept repeating loudly, "Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!"

Officials in Yerevan were informed about the Garni *Sankirtana* party and a helicopter appeared and started flying over the crowd. It soon left, but after some time a car arrived with the KGB. They presented their authoritative documents and ordered everyone to stop chanting and told the devotees never to return.□



Party of the Krishna conscious congregation in Armenia.

Soviet Devotees Visit American Embassy in Moscow

April 19, 1988

At 8 o'clock in the evening Soviet Krishna devotees were received at the American Embassy in Moscow. Those attending were Karen Saakyan (Kamala mala dasa), Yuri Fedchenko (Japa dasa), Saulys Dagis (Sanaka Kumara dasa), Svetlana Lyubinskaya (Kirtida dasi), Valeri Tarasenko, Grigory Azizyan, Farai Kokerai and one other.

The American dignitaries who received the devotees were headed by Assistant Secretary of State Ambassador Richard Schifter, the White House Director of Soviet and East European Affairs Lisa Jameson, Daniel Grossman of the State Department's Soviet Desk and Susan Wagner of the American Embassy.

The Soviet devotees presented a letter for President Reagan along with an album containing photographs of the activities of the Hare Krishna Movement in the Soviet Union. Ambassador Schifter told the devotees that he would personally give the gifts to the President.

Also given to the American officials was a copy of Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad gita As It Is* in the Russian language. They were very pleased with this gift and amazed to see it.

Persecution experienced by the Soviet devotees in the past and present was described to the American delegation. They were shocked to hear about the death of Premavati's baby. The meeting lasted longer than the scheduled one hour and the delegates were all impressed. They all felt they had discovered something very important. Richard Schifter was personally taking notes of the various cases, particularly Yevgeny Lyubinsky's (Amala Bhakta dasa) as his wife, Svetlana, revealed the details of the family's problems.

This meeting was extremely important in helping the devotees, relationship with American human rights officials and their eventually being invited to meet President Reagan during his visit to Moscow at the end of May.□

Speech at the White House

May 3, 1988

given by Valentin Yurov at a seminar on Religious Rights in the Soviet Union.

Ladies and gentlemen! We have heard many times today reference to the words of Mr. Gorbachev, who has said a few days ago that the Soviet State made mistakes in the past regarding religious believers in the country. He promised that in the future, believers would be granted religious freedom.

There is one group in the Soviet Union that needs this religious freedom very much. I am speaking about Hare Krishna followers in the country, who I belonged to myself before emigrating from the Soviet Union and who I joined in 1982.

The persecution of Hare Krishna followers in the USSR started in the 80's and about 50 people were arrested and sent to psychiatric hospitals, prisons and labour camps. Up to this very moment seven of them remain prisoners of conscience. Two are imprisoned in labour camps and five are serving sentences of compulsory labour in distant locations in the Far East of the country.

Since 1985 to 1987 three persons died as the result of this persecution. One of them was 11 month old baby girl Marika. She died in the children's section of the labour camp in Mozhaisk where her mother, Olga Kiseleva was serving her 4 year sentence for practicing Hare Krishna faith. Another person died in July 1986 in Armenian capital Yerevan. His name was Martik Zhamkochyan. He died after five days of incarceration in Sovetashenskaya psychiatric hospital. There he was injected with neuroleptic drugs so heavily that he could not survive. And just some months back, in December 1987, another Hare Krishna follower died, this time in labour camp in Orenburg territory. He was also from Armenia, and his name was Sarkis Ogadzanyan.

Now, why did these people have to die when there are "perestroika, democratization and glasnost?" Now, how long do their friends have to wait in labour camps and compulsory labour for the freedom of religion?

On behalf of the imprisoned Hare Krishna devotees I request the participants of this seminar and I request the President of the United States R. Reagan to appeal to Mr. Gorbachev to please stop the persecution of Hare Krishna devotees immediately.

The test for promised freedom of religion in the USSR will include the situation of the Hare Krishna devotees, who have been denied registration of their religion throughout this period of "new thinking" in their country. They have been applying for registration, for official recognition of their faith and up to this moment they have not been granted such recognition.

The Hare Krishna devotees in the Soviet Union have been particularly persecuted for distributing "*Bhagavad gita As It Is*," the book which explains the essence of Vedic philosophy, and I have a copy of the book printed

by Hare Krishna devotees in the Soviet Union which I would like to show you. (with these words the Russian "*Bhagavad gita As It Is*" was shown to the participants of the seminar)

The Soviet Hare Krishna devotees wrote a letter to Mr. Reagan requesting him to bring up the issue of their persecution at the coming meeting in Moscow between the President and Mr. Gorbachev. Three Hare Krishna women, whose husbands still remain prisoners of conscience, also wrote a letter to Mrs. Reagan asking her to please appeal to Mrs. Gorbachev to kindly contribute to the immediate release of their husbands.

The situation of Hare Krishna devotees in the USSR has been described in the brochure prepared by the Committee to Free Soviet Hare Krishnas for this seminar. Two copies of the brochure are copies of Soviet devotees' letters to Mr. President and Mrs. Reagan I would like to give to the chairman of this seminar for Mr. and Mrs. Reagan. (after these words the envelope containing materials for the President and his wife were handed to the chairman of the seminar)

We'll see in the near future if there will be any change in the plight of those 7 Hare Krishna followers who remain prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union. Their situation will provide the world important evidence on whether recent promises of religious freedom for Soviet citizens by Mr. Gorbachev is indeed something that we should take seriously. □

ANOTHER PSYCHIATRIST'S OPINION

Karen Saakyan (Kamala mala dasa), Suren Karapetyan (Sannyasa dasa) and Armine Htryan (Damayanti devi dasi) have records with the Soviet authorities with medical diagnoses of psychiatric problems associated with the practice of Krishna Consciousness. K. Saakyan and S. Karapetyan were forcibly interned for almost two years in Soviet Special Psychiatric Hospitals. A. Htryan was used as a "victim" of Krishna Consciousness in trials to convict other devotees to imprisonment.

On April 20, 1988 these three devotees met with American psychiatrist Lawrence Roth at the American Embassy. Dr. Roth is with Pittsburg University. He examined the three Soviet devotees for about 3 hours and concluded they are of sound mind. □

**IMPRISONED SOVIET HARE KRISHNAS DEVOTEES
AS OF DECEMBER 1, 1988**

SENTENCE IN YEARS

KUSTRYA, Vladimir Alexeiyeich.....	Prison.....	5
LYUBINSKY, Yevgeny Nikolayevich.....	Labour Camp	1
ARUTYUNYAN, Agvan Nikolaiyevich	Compulsory Labour	3

DEMANDS OF THE Committee to Free Soviet Hare Krishnas

1. Release of all 3 devotees serving their sentences (one in prison, one in labour camp and one in compulsory labour).
2. Registration of the Hare Krishna Movement in the Soviet Union, where Hare Krishna congregations are practicing their faith.
3. Devotees should be allowed to chant in public places, ie. streets, squares, parks, etc.
4. Soviet devotees should be allowed to publish Krishna conscious literature in the country and receive literature from abroad.
5. All slanderous propaganda against the Hare Krishna Movement in the Soviet news media must stop.
6. All discrimination against Hare Krishna devotees in their places of employment and educational institutions must stop.
7. Soviet Hare Krishna devotees should be allowed to make pilgrimage to holy places in India and to travel abroad for religious education and training in ISKCON centers.
8. Senior Hare Krishna devotees from other countries should be allowed to visit the USSR to meet Soviet devotees to educate them in Vedic philosophy and religious practices.
9. Soviet devotees should be allowed to explain their religious views to their children without fear of persecution.
10. Any Soviet devotee convicted under Article 227 of the RSFSR Criminal Code and corresponding articles in other Soviet republics should be fully exonerated.

* * * * *

President Reagan and Svetlana Lyubinskaya

Moscow—Human rights activists, dissidents and religious believers were invited to a reception for US President Ronald Reagan on May 30 at Spaso House, the residence of the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union. The wife of imprisoned devotee Yevgeny Lyubinsky (Amala Bhakta dasa), Svetlana (Kirtida devi dasi), and their three children were included in the guest list. Around 100 guests were invited and everyone first met at the American Embassy where buses waited to deliver them to the reception.

Svetlana arrived accompanied by her three children, Natasha (10), Vladimir (6) and Valentin (3) bearing gifts for President Reagan. A specially baked cake was flown up from Armenia with the words "Hare Krishna" iced on the top; and two large bouquets of roses were brought from Soviet Georgia so that Svetlana could present them to President Reagan. She also had a copy of the Russian language *Bhagavad gita As It Is* and a list of those devotees of Krishna who were currently imprisoned for their faith. Security officials said they would make sure the cake was delivered, after it was checked. Everything else was permitted to be taken to the reception by her.

Svetlana's entourage also included other Soviet devotees, who staged a demonstration outside the American Embassy to draw attention to the plight of their imprisoned friends. Their banners said boldly, "FREE THE HARE KRISHNA BELIEVERS, RETURN IMPRISONED FATHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN, and BELIEVERS SHOULD HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS ATHEISTS." Another banner questioned, "WHO WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF MARTIK ZHAMKOCHYAN AND SARKIS OGADZHANYAN?" The demonstration drew the attention of TV teams from Canada, America (ABC, CNN) and Spain. It is verified that ABC included it in their news program.

Svetlana, her children, and the other guests arrived at the American Ambassador's residence by bus and were shown inside to tables with name cards indicating where everyone should sit. Svetlana was introduced to her translator and took her seat at the same table as the Ambassador's wife. The ladies spoke at length, with Svetlana making sure her hostess was duly informed about the situation of her husband and the other imprisoned devotees.

Speeches were given about the situation of religion, human rights and Jewish immigration before President Reagan addressed the guests at the reception. Mr. Reagan said, "I have come here to give you strength, but it is you who have strengthened me. . . While we press for human lives through diplomatic channels, you press with

your very lives, day in and day out, year after year, risking your homes, your jobs and your all."

The Los Angeles Times covered the reception and acknowledged the devotees with this excerpt: "The guests included 10-year-old Natasha Lubinskaya, who came by train from Kiev with her mother, clutching a bouquet of roses for the President. Her father, Evgeny Lubinsky, is serving a four-year term in a labor camp for promoting the Hare Krishna faith. He is reportedly suffering from tuberculosis."

Svetlana Lyubinskaya and her three young children now have greater hope that their husband and father will be released soon with the intervention of the American President. They attracted a lot of attention at the reception, many photographs and interviews were taken. And while the Soviet devotees were waiting outside Spaso House for Svetlana and company to come out many reporters from around the world took information from them about the situation of Hare Krishna devotees in the USSR. □



Svetlana (Kirtida devi dasi) and her three children.

Vladimir Kustrya's Situation Worsens



V. Kustrya (Vrindavana dasa) in Kurdzhinovo 1984.

JUNE 1, 1988

On March 25, 1988 Vladimir Kustrya was transferred by train from the labour camp in the Kirovskaya Territory to a prison in the Ulyanovskaya Territory. His present address:

USSR
433510 Ulyanovskaya oblast
g. Dimitrovgrad
Uch. YUI-78/ST-2

Shortly after Vladimir's arrival at the prison he sent a letter to his friends describing his situation. He told of how his legs are so badly swollen that he can barely walk. When leaving the Kirovskaya labour camp Vladimir was not able to get into a car and onto the train without the assistance of others. Travelling in such a weak condition of health caused him great suffering.

Vladimir's relocation to prison was new punishment for him on account of his "disobedient" behaviour in the labour camp where he refused the hard labour of cutting wood because such engagement simply aggravated his already poor health.

The circumstances of the prison where Vladimir is now are worse than in the strict regime labour camp where he was previously imprisoned. The poor conditions and the mistreatment he received from the authorities in the labour camp are the causes of Vladimir's debilitated state. While in the labour camp Vladimir was denied the dietary supplements necessary to restore his

health and now the prison diet is even more austere. The food is insufficient and cooked only in water, without fat.

It is not known how many prisoners share the same cell with Vladimir Kustrya, but the conditions are that of a strict prison regime. He can send only 1 letter to his wife or friends in two months and he can receive only 1 parcel from them within a six month period.□

TWO DEVOTEES LOSE EMPLOYMENT

Discrimination against Hare Krishna devotees at their jobs continues throughout the Soviet Union. In May two devotees lost their employment.

Valentin Yaroshchuk (Baradraja dasa) was fired by his employer at a coal heating facility in Riga. This action is reported to have resulted from an article appearing in a Latvian youth newspaper slandering the Hare Krishna devotees. Yaroshchuk was the main target of the newspaper's severe criticism, due to his active participation in the movement.

Another devotee, Anna Chernyak, lost her employment as a doctor with a children's clinic in Chernigov. Anna Chernyak belongs to a family of Hare Krishna devotees in Chernigov. The Chernyak family has been under vicious attack by the local newsmedia. Previously Anna's son Lev Chernyak (Govardhanadhari dasa), a very active devotee and a qualified, well-respected engineer, lost his employment at a research institute in Chernigov.□

Anatoli Pinyayev, His Story of Pain



Anatoli Pinyayev maning the Bhaktivedanta Book trust booth at the 1979 Moscow International Book Fair.

Anatoli, Fedorovich Pinyayev (Ananta Shanti dasa) was the first Soviet Hare Krishna devotee. On account of his active preaching throughout the USSR and spiritual influence on many people he was subjected to severe persecution. The following excerpts of an interview with him in February 1988 contain some startling details of the five and a half years he spent in Soviet Special Psychiatric Hospitals.

I started preaching Krishna consciousness after Srila Prabhupada visited Moscow in 1971. Gradually people in the Soviet Union became more and more attracted to Krishna consciousness and it became quite widespread. The authorities, however, became afraid because at that time the situation in our country was not very good. Everything spiritual was considered to be criminal and thus they started repressions. They were concerned that so many from the intelligentsia were interested in Krishna consciousness.

It was just like an explosion of Krishna consciousness in the Soviet Union. The authorities were terrified so they tried to discredit the movement and present it as simply a group of crazy criminals. Because I was the first one to preach and the only disciple of Srila Prabhupada, they tried to repress me and present me as a

crazy criminal. The court accused my Godbrothers and me of teaching vegetarianism, which they said is harmful for the body, and that chanting mantras and praying is harmful for one's mental condition. On this ridiculous pretext they were accusing us.

I was imprisoned and they tried to present every person who was following Krishna consciousness in this country as crazy. They then put me into a mental prison, a mental jail. There the doctors said that they were taught that religious believers are insane, only insane persons can think that there is God, that there is spirit, that we are not these bodies but spiritual sparks.

I was given courses of medicines for many months. They gave me drugs three times a day. It was so bad that I was only able to lie on the bed. This drug was special, it made it impossible to concentrate on anything. If I tried to chant loudly they would give me such large doses that I could have died there because of it. Lying on the bed I had so much material discomfort, because these drugs force you to change the position of your body all the time. I was feeling very weak and so much discomfort, so much trouble, it was just like torture. The only pause in the torture was when I was sleeping at night. All these months and years were just like torture.

Initially when the psychiatrists considered me crazy they brought me from the regular prison to a psychiatric prison in Smolensk. It was on the same grounds as the ordinary prison, but it had special cells. It had the bad aspects of both a mental asylum and prison. We were living in closed cells with about twenty people in each. The cells were quite small and there was not enough fresh air. We took baths irregularly, sometimes not for 23 days. Many people there found that they had insects on their bodies.

The whole place was very dirty. The food was very dirty and prepared very badly. People there often had their teeth fall out or their gums would bleed. I was taking very little food. Everything was a problem there. Even the janitors were criminals. It was a place for crazy criminals and there was constant fighting amongst them. There was pressure from the doctors, the janitors, the criminals; from everyone there was pressure. Everyone was very much disturbed. My relatives were told that I would never be released.

The prisoners were punished for everything. I was trying to wash my clothes and every morning trying to wash at least some parts of my body, but I was punished many times for this. They did not like this. The janitors tried to beat me up some times.

There was psychological pressure all the time. Drugs were given for any reason, on any pretext. Somehow or other the doctors considered that I was eligible for release from this special psychiatric prison to a normal



Anatoli Pinyayev in Moscow, December 1987, shortly after his release from Oryol Special Psychiatric Hospital.

psychiatric prison. The KGB did not like this because their aim was to keep me there for my whole life, so instead I was transferred to another special psychiatric prison in the city of Oryol.

Everyone in that place was astonished by the fact that I was imprisoned for preaching about religion. They saw that I was given special pressure there, the authorities were especially oppressive towards me and the others could not understand it.

I found out from my mother that my Godbrothers all over the world had started a campaign for my release, as well as the release of the other imprisoned devotees in the Soviet Union. The situation changed a little. During the last half year in Oryol some changes were expected, so I started to preach more at that time.

In Smolensk I was kept in one ward where there was a doctor who was famous for his sadistic inclinations. In Oryol, however, there were different doctors and my last doctor told me that I was completely sane. He said he understood that because of the political situation, before "perestroika", every kind of spiritual and intellectual life was oppressed in our country. So he understood why I was in the mental prison. He said, "Time is working for

you. Because of the changes in our society and because of the help from abroad, sooner or later you will be released." He was a little compassionate to me and I preached to him. I am very thankful to my Godbrothers and the people all over the world who did something to somehow release me.

I was released from the Oryol psychiatric prison in a very strange and unusual way. One day my doctor called me in and he was a little bit agitated. He told me that some papers had come from Moscow saying that I

"Time is working for you. Because of the changes in our society and because of the help from abroad, sooner or later you will be released."

should be released. He said that there would be a special professor coming from Moscow and they will have a medical commission especially to release me.

When the professor came my doctor talked with him a long time about me, without my being present. In the end he told my doctor, "Yes, he is completely sane. We will release him now, but we will leave his diagnosis for now because who can say that in the future this condition will not happen again." When my doctor told me about this I requested him to ask this professor, "Who can guarantee that YOU will not go crazy after some time?" My doctor told me, "Yes, I asked him this question and he told me that he also finds the symptoms of mental disease within himself."□

Vladimir Kritsky's Labour Camp Experience

I was born in Moscow in 1951 and I graduated from Moscow University in 1974. My specialty is physics. I worked on calculating mathematics at the Calculating Center of Moscow University for six years. In 1980 I became acquainted with the Krishna consciousness movement.

My work continued at the Calculating Center of Moscow University as a scientific collaborator. I was doing my dissertation, I was publishing articles on my specialty which had something to do with the spectrocity of nuclear resonants. However, in 1981 when my scientific chief came to know about my dealings with Krishna consciousness and about my "communications abroad", he asked me to leave Moscow University.

For several months I remained without work, so I used this time for Krishna consciousness. I went to Georgia and Armenia and preached there. After that I returned to Moscow where I got another job in line with my specialty.

In 1982 a criminal prosecution began against me and my close friend, Sergei Kurkin (Satananda dasa). We were accused under Soviet law, Article 227, which forbids illegal religious activity when it hampers social order or causes harm to the health of people. My home was searched for the first time in 1982 and in July I was arrested for the first time. I was put in jail in Moscow and I spent five months there until the trial in December 1982. We were accused of damaging the health of some citizens by our activity of Krishna consciousness. There were some people who were recognised by the court as 'victims'. But all these 'victims' did not admit themselves as being 'victims', they did not acknowledge that the theology of Krishna consciousness had caused them any harm.

Exactly the same scene was repeated several years later in 1985 when I had my second criminal case. After

the first trial I was found guilty and I was sentenced to four years imprisonment. I spent almost a year and a half in a labour camp before I was conditionally released. I began to work together with free men and I continued to preach Krishna consciousness. Thus, a second criminal case was started by the authorities. The second trial, taking place in April 1985, was to some extent a repetition of the first one: the same accusations, the same sham victims, sham witnesses, witnesses who gave their evidence under severe pressure from the authorities, from the prosecution, from the judge, and so on. In this way they were obliged, compelled, to give

their testimony against a criminal, namely me. The second court sentenced me to three years of imprisonment.

In the labour camps they had never met such a 'criminal' as me. They were all astonished that now in the Soviet Union it was possible that people were being sentenced for their religious activity. Very often some members in the administration of the prison and labour camps invited me privately and secretly to their own cabins to ask me questions about my case and about Krishna consciousness. Of course I answered them frankly, I told them that it is really my conviction. They

were interested. They asked about literature, about where they could read something and I would advise them about some books which were available. They very quickly understood that the cases of Krishna devotees were not ordinary. We were not ordinary criminals who killed, robbed, or stole. From their point of view we were more or less innocent.

When I arrived in the labour camp the administration, perhaps acting according to an order from above,



Vladimir Kritsky (Vishvamitra dasa) before his arrest.

Continue on page 15. See Vishvamitra.

How My Daughter Died



Olga Kiseleva (Premavati devi dasi) before her arrest in 1983.

Olga Kiseleva (Premavati devi dasi) was arrested while pregnant in 1983 for her participation in the Soviet Hare Krishna Movement. Her daughter Marika was born in prison, and after eleven months she died. Here are excerpts from a Moscow interview with Olga Kiseleva in August 1987 where she describes her persecution and the death of her daughter. Olga was conditionally released from her imprisonment two years early because of publicity and pressure from abroad.

Olga Kiseleva, "History must be known; people must know the truth about everything, especially about people who were prosecuted for nothing other than chanting the names of God, the Hare Krishna mantra. Now I understand that the main charge against me was because of my contact with Hare Krishna devotees in the West. They did not accuse me of anything else.

"At the time of my arrest I was very busy with my family. I was not preaching so openly and widely. I was arrested in August 1983. It was very strange for me. I was 3 months pregnant and I showed the police a document attesting to this fact. Nevertheless, they arrested me. I thought that pregnant women would not be put into prison, but I was wrong.

"I was put into a cell with 10 other pregnant women. It was difficult to say we were sitting in prison because we were lying down all the time. There was no place to go or to sit, only to lie down. In a normal cell the prisoners received 28 kopecks worth of food every day. Pregnant ladies received food worth 32 kopecks per

day. We received extra eggs, meat and pickle. I was not eating meat or eggs, so I was very hungry.

"The interrogators asked me when I was going to deliver my child and I told them. They scheduled the trial just before I was to have my child. Four days after the trial ended my daughter was born. I was sentenced to four years in a labour camp.

"When my daughter was four months old we were sent to the labour camp. She was very little and it was very strange to move her somewhere. I was taken away from her and forced to work. I saw my daughter once day for about an hour. It was very little time and gradually I noticed that my daughter began acting like I was not her mother. It was a very terrible feeling, but I could not do anything about it.

"The place where my daughter was living was called the House of Mother and Child. In this house there were more than one hundred children whose mothers were working in the camp. There was only one nurse who had to feed about 24 little babies. They moved with great speed, and sometimes the babies could not eat much. I cannot understand how they did it because I remember when I was feeding my other daughters I spent a lot of time. I do not know how they could feed all those babies in a period of an hour and ten minutes on their busy schedule.

"The most unbearable thing was the air in the nursery. It was very bad. The mothers could not stand it, but the babies lived there all the time. Of course they tried to make some ventilation by opening the windows, but this did not help. The air was unbearable.

"She died because she had a lung disease. Even now I do not know exactly why. Many times I asked what happened and they told me, "afterwards, afterwards, afterwards". They did not want to tell me. Everything seemed



Marika, the daughter of Olga Kiseleva.



Kirtiraja dasa with Premavati devi dasi in Moscow 1979.

Vishvamitra.

made an announcement among the other criminals that a dangerous person was going to enter their community. They said, "he is a very dangerous preacher of Krishna consciousness, which is very dangerous. You should not even come close to him. You should not make acquaintance with him, you should not make friends with him." But this announcement only served to spark an interest in Krishna consciousness. They tried to avert people from me, but this really only aroused more interest.

Several times I was put into a special cell, an isolation cell, which was for criminals who do not obey the administration. Of course they were rather severe times. The standard term of isolation is fifteen days. I was put in this type of cell four times.

There was some kind of pressure from the administration to have me searched constantly. This was because we were not allowed to have any religious books. We were permitted to have only standard books from the library or Soviet magazines and newspapers. For example, if I had a personal notebook and for my own memory used it to write down prayers and verses in order not to forget them, and if the administration found such a notebook during a search they would take it. The first time I was put into an isolation cell was just for doing this. My notebooks where I had been writing about Krishna consciousness were confiscated and I was punished for fifteen days in an isolation cell.

Very soon the whole area where the isolation cells were came to know that there was a Krishna conscious devotee in one cell and that I was preaching about Krishna, that I was chanting and singing the Hare Krishna mantra. When I was put in these cells for the second, third and fourth times they knew in advance and they had questions ready for me. From the first day I arrived they said that they had heard something about me,

all right, but she was coughing. There was a stomach disease in the nursery that infected all the babies. She also had this stomach disease along with the coughing. Then the doctors said it was pneumonia and her heart was not working properly. They wanted to take her to the hospital. On the way to the hospital she died.

"They made a little coffin for her. They put her into this coffin in very bad clothes. Her better clothes were taken off of her and given to the other children. They allowed me to stand before the coffin for ten minutes and then they did not let me stand there. The funeral was held without me. When I stood with her body I chanted Hare Krishna and prayed that the Lord would take care of her.

"Of course it is strange that such things happen in such a great country as the Soviet Union. I think that to imprison pregnant women should not be done, not here or any place in the world. Children must have their mothers. I would like to appeal to all people to ask our government authorities to stop imprisoning people who believe in God and who chant His holy names."¹²

about Hare Krishna. I told them shortened versions of the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and stories about Krishna and Rama.

During the last year (1987) I felt that the attitude of the administration had changed. It was to a great extent a result of the help from my Godbrothers abroad. They did not search me any more. They did not try to punish me any more. They only waited and said, "My dear Kritsky, when will you leave us? When will you go home? We are awaiting this time. Please do not cause any disturbances, do not preach Krishna consciousness. Our only desire is that we do not want you to preach Krishna consciousness. Do not tell the other prisoners about Krishna. Keep silent. You may believe whatever you like, Krishna, God or Lord, but do not preach. Don't tell anyone about it."

At the end of 1986 I spent three months in a special hospital. Even though it was a special hospital for sick people the conditions were not very good. The administration there put great pressure on me. They not only did not allow me to preach, they did not allow me even to open my mouth. They searched me several times. I was forced to work although I was considered a sick person. But in this special hospital sick people were expected to work, and the work was rather hard. I had to work shoveling coal into a furnace. The conditions were very much harder than at the labour camp. I saw with my own eyes such hellish conditions. I would say that those three months in the special hospital for sick people was the hardest time I spent during the entire five and a half years of my detention.

Finally in December of 1987 I arrived at Moscow station and was met by the Moscow devotees with flowers. It was one of the happiest days of my life when my friends met me at the station. I was very happy.¹³

Karen Saakyan Describes His Persecution

Karen Saakyan (Kamala Mala dasa) is a Hare Krishna devotee from the Soviet Republic of Armenia. He was arrested in 1985 for his preaching activities, especially book publication and distribution. Karen Saakyan was released on December 31, 1987 from a Special Psychiatric Hospital in Yerevan. The following is taken from an interview with Karen Saakyan in Moscow in February 1988 where he describes his experience of persecution with his fellow believers, Suren Karapetyan, Armen Saakyan (his brother) and Armen Sarkisyan.

Karen Saakyan, "After our trial we were put into a psychiatric hospital in Yerevan. There we were given drugs. During our trial we had been fasting and were consequently very weak. They began to inject us with haloperidol and other neuroleptic drugs. This caused us to fall into a very bad condition. We just wanted to end our lives, but there was no way to do it. They stopped giving us these drugs after one of our friends told our story to a reporter from the *Washington Post*.

"They forcibly fed us with eggs through a tube in-

"If we had no support from foreign countries, maybe they would have killed us."

serted down our throats. Then they injected us with drugs because they thought that this would make us give up our religious principles. They tried to force us to stop chanting our prayers. The drug haloperidol has such an effect that you cannot stay in any position. You cannot sit, you cannot lie down, you cannot stand, you do not know what to do. It is very difficult to chant prayers after an injection of this drug. This drug is meant to cause mentally ill people to reject their unreal thoughts. They wanted to convert us from our religious thoughts and from chanting prayers, but by the mercy of Lord Krishna and our spiritual master, we continued to chant the Hare Krishna mantra.

"They injected us with these drugs three times a day. There was no time for the drug to wear off before the next dose was administered. They were very strict about this.

"Some of the hospital staff were very much against Krishna Consciousness, but many of them could not understand why we were being persecuted. They all had orders from higher authorities to torture us. They were only instruments in the hands of their authorities. If they did not fulfill their desires, then they could not remain working there.



Karen Saakyan (Kamala Mala dasa)

"We were together with many prisoners. Our preaching was appreciated by them because they were also tortured. It was a very horrible place. Some of them committed suicide in the cells. Many of them were murderers.

"The doctors were afraid to do anything to us when they found out that we had support from people in foreign countries. They were very much afraid of that. If we had no support from foreign countries, maybe they would have killed us. Our country wants to show the world that there is justice here, but if men are imprisoned because of their religious beliefs, what kind of justice is that?

"When we were in the prison in Yerevan they put us separately into cells with crazy men and kept us in very intolerable conditions. We were in cells with eight or nine insane murderers. In these cells there were no toilets or washing facilities. The air was very dirty, they were all smoking and using very bad language towards each other. The atmosphere was like hell because everything was so dirty. The authorities torture one psychologically with such conditions. They told us that if we did not give up our religious beliefs and activities we would stay there till our death. We took shelter of our knowl-



K.G.B.

Krishna Conscious books confiscated from Saakyan's apartment in Yerevan.

edge that everything is temporary in this material world, and ignored their threatening words.

"When we were in the psychiatric hospital some of the doctors wanted to release us because not all of them were corrupt. Some of them were honest men under the influence of corrupt authorities, basically innocent people. The Chief Doctor was not at all positive towards us and did not want us to be released.

"A psychiatric commission came from Yerevan and decided not to release us. Later, a commission came from Moscow and they decided to release us. The doctors in the Yerevan hospital were astonished because they could not understand why we were being released. The commission said that there was a lot of noise being made around the world because of our trial and imprisonment. To stop this propaganda they were releasing us. "We knew that this noise was made by people around the world who wanted to help us. I do not know how

they did it because it is a very difficult process. They don't know me nor are they connected to me, but I am very thankful to them.

"We associated with many prisoners who were innocent men. That is the way it is in our country. In such suffering condition many of them began to think about God and why they were in such a situation. This made a very favourable atmosphere for preaching.

"What can we do when we live in such a country where you can only feel afraid? You do not even understand what you are afraid of, or why you are afraid, but you only know that you must feel afraid."

"When we had to travel in the prison train from one prison to another, they put us together with prisoners who were suffering from tuberculosis. This is always done by prison or camp authorities. They do not take care of prisoners. They take better care of the pigs and dogs. They know that there are many

innocent men who are imprisoned. What can we do when we live in such a country where you can only feel afraid? You do not even understand what you are afraid of, or why you are afraid, but you only know that you must feel afraid."□

My Ordeal

By Sanatana Kumara dasa



Sergei Priborov (Sanatana Kumara dasa)

Sergei Priborov (Sanatana Kumara dasa) was released from labour camp in March, 1988. Here he reminisces about his experiences.

First I would like to say that I accept my persecution as something that should have happened. In the Soviet Union before the KGB began persecution, the Krishna Consciousness Movement was spreading rather slowly. But as soon as they started putting the devotees in prison the entire world came to know about Krishna. Maybe this is Krishna's plan.

According to the law, Hare Krishna believers should be registered, but the authorities choose another way - to kill this movement. Our first search by the police was on the Appearance Day of our spiritual master. As soon as we started to chant, the police came and began beating down the door. "That's all! Stop it! Priborov, open the door, we know you are at home!" They burst into the room and took everyone's passport. We were all told not to leave the village (Kurdzhinovo), otherwise we will have problems. They confiscated the mrdanga, pictures, worship paraphernalia and literature. They took us to the police station. We noticed that many police there

were not local men, but that they were guests (KGB). Their confidence in what they were doing was proof that they had sanction from their superiors.

Then everything started. They told us that some citizens approached them from the Kurdzhinovo village to free them from the devotees' influence. And they protected. But from what? The lawyer during the trial questioned, "What harm did they (devotees) do?" "They are so strange, they say hello to everyone." To say hello means that you are strange. Intellectuals, or cultured people, they are also strange. Devotees don't drink and they don't smoke, it is obvious that something is wrong. This was their criterion. During the trial many people were shocked by this.

We realized that the persecution was beginning and prison for us was not very far away. There was nothing we could do about it, so we should just continue our business: chant the Hare Krishna *mahamantra*, follow the four principles, and study Krishna's philosophy.

October 31, 1985, the day Indira Gandhi was assassinated, about six o'clock in the morning the police and KGB simultaneously and unexpectedly swooped down upon all the Krishna devotees in Kurdzhinovo. They broke in rudely, tramping around the flats with dirty boots, rummaging in every corner, taking everything without any discrimination. They were looking for anything that proved connection with Krishna Consciousness. They started rumours that they found radio transmitters, which caused considerable interest to the police and KGB in the whole territory.

Several days passed. I did not have my passport. At any minute they could come and arrest me. I made a trick by putting a big lock on the outside door which looked like I was not at home. I would enter my house through the window.

I would speak with my wife and son in a whisper. We would listen to devotional tapes and in a soft voice have kirtan. Soon we heard a bus coming. I was thinking, "it should be the police bus." And I felt they were coming for me. It was true. They came to our gate. The dog started barking and we heard the sound of heavy boots coming to our house. "Oh! Look, company's coming!" They immediately surrounded the house and started beating on the doors and windows. I didn't answer. They waited for an answer for a minute and then they turned around and left. I figured out later that they went to Anatoli Samoilov's home.

He was not there, but Vrindavana dasa was there and they arrested him. They took Vrindavana to his house, made a search, confiscated many things, and then took him to the police station. On the way to the station there was an accident and the car with Vrindavana turned over. He was thrown from the car and the police could

not find him. Then he revealed where he was. Later, he regretted he did not escape.

In the morning we gathered with the devotees and decided that it would be better if I go somewhere because I could be arrested at any moment. I left. First I visited my devotee friends in Sukhumi, then I went to Yerevan to visit Kamala mala and Sannyasa. Then I decided I should go back because I did not feel any guilt for my activities and I was not doing anything against the law. My conscience was clean. I wanted to come to them and say, "See, here I am. What do you want from me? What do you want? I have not broken the law. Let me live peacefully."

I came back. I stayed several days at home. I did not go out. Once in the morning I heard the doorbell. We did not answer. They started beating the door, yelling and threatening to break down the door. They climbed onto the balcony, I don't know how they did it, but somehow they opened the door. They came in. I was trying to be polite with them. I did not want to disturb their brains, because the situation was tense enough already. After they searched my home and confiscated a lot of things they brought me to the Procurator of the Urupskovo District.

At the Procurator's office, everyone was really into their jobs. There was mountains of confiscated things and bundles of literature. Two prosecutors, two KGB men, and one procurator carefully studied all this stuff. Interrogating, analyzing and breaking their heads trying to figure out how to trip us up and to give a long sentence in prison. They wanted to wipe us off the face of the earth.

I continued chanting the *mahamantra* and I had a lot of time for it. The guards regularly came to my cell and listened with their ear to the door. "What is he doing there? Oh, he is praying." I chanted *mantras* rhythmically beating on the floor to imitate a *mrdanga*. I was singing and my neighbour in the same cell could not contain himself and he started dancing joyfully. The atmosphere in our cell became very happy. One guard could not bear it and he said to my neighbour, "What are you doing stupid? I can understand this one, he is sectarian. But what's your excuse for dancing to his music?" My neighbour, continuing his dance, answered, "what's wrong with it? I like it!" In this way people naturally express their taste for hearing the holy names.

Being in prison I still maintained my Krishna Conscious activities and Krishna even gave me opportunities to preach. "Please, here are people for you. Talk with them." Of course the situation in prison was not so pleasant, but people there had interest in Krishna consciousness. I could not refuse to answer their questions. As soon as we started to speak about Krishna consciousness the entire cell became quiet. The people's mood in the cell changed for the better. They were happy and whenever anyone had to leave they would all wish that person happiness.

I wanted them to understand that they were human beings and not animals. Some of them expressed the desire to be in the same cell with me, they liked to speak about Krishna consciousness. Sometimes they asked, "how can we be happy like you?" They saw that the prison atmosphere did not influence me, despite the bad circumstances I was optimistic from chanting the holy name. Many prisoners would bring me bread and butter saying, "please take this and eat it. We know you do not eat meat." Even the most hard-hearted people could not be indifferent.

But not everything was smooth sailing, in one cell they were not at all friendly with me; the *mantra* disturbed their sleep and my offering food to Krishna irritated them. They did not openly express it, but I could sense it. I never ate anyone's remnants, only if they gave me something which was not previously eaten from would I offer it to Krishna. But if someone touched the food, I apologized and asked them to not give me such food. I explained that I offer everything to Krishna first and His

food should be untouched. Sometimes it really offended them. Their attitude changed towards me.

Everyday I took a cold shower, even during the winter. I was accustomed to this for many years. I would go to the toilet room with a cup and take a bath from the sink there. It confused everyone, but I continued to do it in front of them.

Then, at the peak of their indignation, they said, "yes! We don't like you. You are constantly praying."

They found a reason to challenge me, they said that because the cup I was using to bathe with was dirty, therefore I was also dirty. From this we quarreled and they said, "OK, we would like to smash you in the face, but we can't do it. We are ready to kill you, but we want to check with the people downstairs (the hardened criminals) about what to do with you." It was a heavy situation. I was thinking, "my dear Krishna, what is my guilt in front of these people? What did I do to make them think this way about me?" I kept chanting and was pacified. "I should do something to prevent them from making any offenses."

After a short time they got an answer from downstairs and when all my cellmates read it they all came to me and apologized. "Sergei, why don't you forgive us for what has happened." The answer that they received stated, "It looks like you are really stupid that you do not recognize that he is a saint, we also have one down here (Vrindavana dasa was there). He also takes a shower everyday and prays. Why don't you want to accept him? Actually, you should protect him and not bother him." After this the situation completely changed, many of them became very polite with me. Those who were the most against me, before they would go to sleep, would ask me, "you know Sergei, we like your singing. Please sing a little bit and we'll listen."²⁴

Our Experiences



Kamala Mala dasa and Sannyasa dasa

The following is an amazing story told by three devotees from Armenia. These three sat down in February 1988 and recorded this account of their experiences in Krishna consciousness. Karen Saakyan (Kamala Mala dasa KM), Suren Karapetyan (Sannyasa dasa S) and Armen Saakyan (Atmananda dasa A) all have a remarkable history:

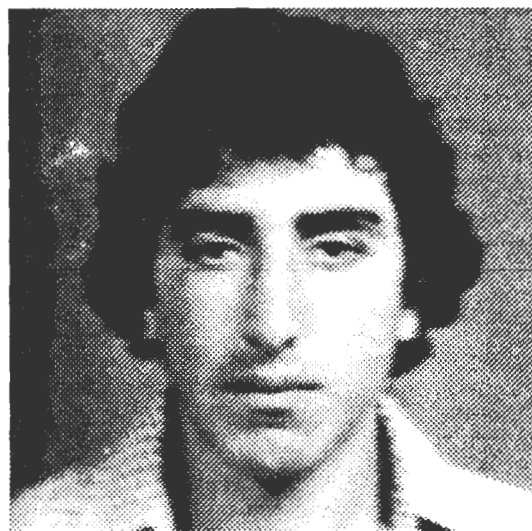
KM: First of all, we would like to offer our respectful obeisances unto our spiritual master Harikesa Swami Vishnupada, who, after all that has happened to us, we want to glorify more and more. In 1981 we first made contact with Krishna consciousness and we moved to Georgia to peacefully realize the teachings of the Lord. At that time the persecution of Krishna devotees in the USSR began. The authorities were trying to take away all opportunities for Krishna consciousness. Before 1985 we did not experience very serious persecution from the authorities, except the trouble they were making through our parents. This trouble from our parents was actually heavier than through the government because parents have more influence over their sons. In Georgia the authorities searched our place, kicked us out and sent us back to Armenia. We took this as the mercy of Krishna.

In 1983, a desire to spread the teachings of Lord Krishna on a wide scale appeared in our hearts. Soon after this one devotee found facility to arrange for producing Srila Prabhupada's books. It was really incredible because never in the history of the USSR were so many books produced unofficially. We were feeling great protection from following our spiritual master's instructions at that time. This gave us strength and enthusiasm. At that time we were not devotees in the real sense of the term, but there was a small sincere spark of desire to engage in devotional service. This was completely satisfied by our spiritual master. He gave us the opportunity to serve unlimitedly and many wonderful things happened to us.

We did not have money or experience. We were never involved in any type of underground enterprises. We never had any contact with this kind of illegal business in our lives. We had a desire to serve Krishna and we understood that people are headed towards hell, they are living like animals. If we would not preach to them then we would also go to hell. Therefore, our spiritual master mercifully gave us the opportunity to render devotional service.

S: In 1983, during one of our *kirtans* in Georgia, I prayed to my spiritual master, "What is the most important and valuable thing that I can ask from you? The one thing which is the most wonderful?" Then the answer came to my heart, and it was devotional service. I often prayed to my spiritual master, "I want only devotional service and nothing else." Then we came back to Yerevan in 1983 and at that time we began our devotional service. During that period we were so busy that we did not even have time to rest. When we were arrested we thought that it was the time to take a little rest in prison.

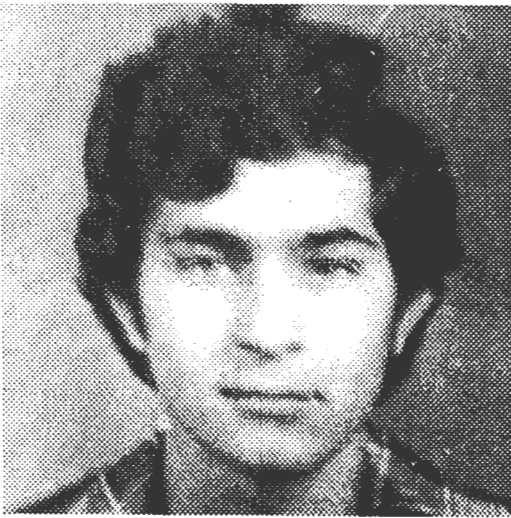
We had no experience with book production and we never imagined that we would take books out on the street and sell them. However, we knew it was the desire



Saci Suta dasa

of our spiritual master, therefore we started. Of course it was not so easy, but Krishna always gave us opportunities to progress step by step to fulfill the desire of our spiritual master. Simultaneously our desire to serve increased.

The first books appeared and shortly later came the first attempt to distribute them on the street. Before this time no one had ever distributed literature on the streets of our Soviet cities. It had never happened before in the history of the USSR that books and leaflets were dis-



Sarvabhavana dasa

tributed in such a way. Of course other books and leaflets have been distributed, but not those that would change the ideology of the people. We understood that Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted His mission spread to every town and village. We found a nice map of the USSR and decided to go to different areas of the country. At that time nice devotees like Saci Suta (Sarkis Ogadzhanyan), Adwaita Acarya (Agvan Arutyunyan) and Sarvabhavana (Gagik Buniatyan) distributed books with great enthusiasm.

A: During a two month period they distributed more than one thousand books.

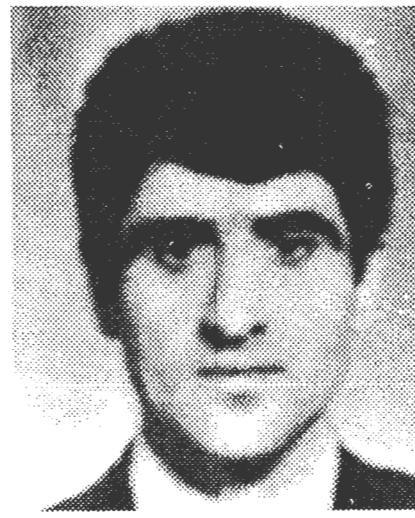
KM: We never thought that such nice devotees would come, they were so determined, even when they were persecuted. They would sometimes offer the KGB and police Srila Prabhupada's books and because they were so sincere the authorities did not want to do anything against them. However, they were sometimes arrested and often they were beaten. Adwaita Acarya was in jail for one month where he would eat only one piece of sugar every day in a very cold cell.

They remembered that by following the 4 regulative principles and chanting 16 rounds every day that they would receive the protection of Krishna, and the guru would also take responsibility for them. Sarvabhavana always followed these principles.

A: Srila Prabhupada said that when you are in a dangerous situation the best thing to do is to preach about the holy name of the Lord. When I saw trouble coming I found myself preaching more and more.

KM: In 1985 we were arrested. Before then we did not have so much trouble. Krishna fulfills everyone's desires, even the KGBs'. The KGB agents are also His part and parcels. Some KGB agents openly expressed their sympathy. They told devotees, "You are doing good, but be careful." They would even call first sometimes to warn us that they were coming to search our apartment.

S: When we started making books we sensed some dissatisfaction because we had not made enough of them. It was as if some energy inside us was saying that we should do something more, and it was possible. In the beginning we made 10 or 20 books and it seemed like a real achievement. Then we decided to make 100 books and when we did that it was a huge triumph. Then



Adwaita Acarya dasa

we made 200 *Easy Journey to Other Planets* and it was complete ecstasy. (laughing)

A: I was concerned that if we continued at such a pace how we could possibly distribute them all.

S: Our money increased the more we published, first ten, then hundreds, then thousands, ten thousands. When the Russian language *Bhagavad gita* first appeared we thought that it was necessary to have a large quantity of them. Each devotee in the USSR should have it, what to speak about the other people. We should make at least one thousand for the devotees alone. With the facility we had at that time it was impossible to make so many books. If there is a sincere desire, then Krishna surely will provide. Soon we got the opportunity to make many books. We then printed several thousand *Bhagavad gita*s. These books were very expensive at that time.

A: When we started to distribute books in different cities people used to tell us that this was exactly the book they were looking for. We felt that if not everyone took a *Gita* they should at least have a leaflet about Krishna consciousness, so we distributed them to every mailbox in the different cities.

KM: The basis of our activities was from our guru's lectures which said, "even a small quantity of Srila Prabhupada's books can change the demoniac face of society." That is exactly what was happening. I do not have any doubt. If there is any democracy in our society it is only thanks people who know about Krishna consciousness and want to practice it. We always try to remember this quote in all circumstances.

In 1985, the authorities became very concerned about the Soviet Hare Krishna Movement. They caught us in Novosibirsk, a city in the middle area of our country. In several different cities we were discovered by the police, even in the Russian Republic, where people are heavier, they were quite nice with us. When they caught devotees they would usually let them go and always made sure to take books for themselves. Sometimes they did not confiscate our books. When we really started spreading Krishna consciousness on a big scale we were sending books and leaflets by mail because we were afraid that it was getting dangerous and any moment something terrible could happen. Therefore, we mailed the books because we wanted everyone to know the science of Krishna consciousness. We felt it was a very urgent situa-

tion. At that time the authorities became very concerned about the devotees.

The Lord gave us tremendous opportunity to serve Him. We tried our best, but much more could have been done in our huge country. Maybe we were arrested because we did not take full advantage of this opportunity. The Armenian KGB received an order from the Moscow KGB and on their order the persecution began. They followed us everywhere. Other devotees who wanted to come and get books from us were unable to because our place was always under close surveillance. They not only followed us, but also everyone who visited us.

A: For instance, Mamu Thakur dasa was followed by 6 black KGB cars all day.

KM: In 1985 they began investigating the Hare Krishna Movement in Yerevan, but they did not arrest us until the appearance day of our beloved spiritual master. When the KGB, police and other investigators came into our apartment they were completely astonished because according to the reports they received from Moscow they were expecting to find some very dangerous, low-class criminals. Instead they found peaceful and kind gentlemen. Mountains of illegal books were everywhere.

A: The Armenian KGB said, "You guys really have a big business here and you must have gone to a lot of trouble, how is it that you were discovered?"

KM: One procurator picked up some headphones and started listening to a cassette tape of our Krishna conscious music and he liked it so much he could not stop. We met this procurator later and he was so captivated by Krishna that he organized a kirtana right in his office. He also invited all of his subordinate workers, as he was the chief. He told us to start *kirtan*. We started and he joined us and all the workers were confused as to what to do. Should they chant like the boss or should they not take part? They were confused.

A: We put pictures of Lord Krishna and our guru on his desk and had the *kirtan* in front of them.



Armine Hrtayan (Damayanti devi dasi)

KM: The procurator then telephoned Armine Hrtayan and told her to bring all the *prasadam* that Sannyasa cooked for *Vyas Puja* and never got to taste. She brought it and we had a feast, unfortunately it was four days after *Vyas Puja*. Everyone in the Procurator's office was very disturbed by our having to go to prison and said they would do everything possible to help us.

The Deputy Chief Procurator of Armenia was asked by the local procurator to help us. This Deputy Chief Procurator said, "If these Hare Krishnas just reject their faith in Krishna consciousness formally, then they can go home." He did not demand that we make a statement for the newspaper or go on the television. He only asked that we make a one sentence statement, "I do not want to be Krishna conscious any more."

Then we asked, "why should we reject it? What is the reason?" He answered, "people in general do not believe in Krishna, why should you be different? Better to be like everyone else and do not show that you are different." Then we thought it over and told them, "Yes, there are more animals than humans, so according to your philosophy we should all be animals." After this the Deputy Procurator was very serious with us and told us that it was our choice, then he sent us to prison. As we were leaving everyone from the local Procurators office followed us to the door because they were all upset that we had to go to prison.

A: They even advised us, "It is better for Krishna if you reject Him formally and go out, because then you can even do more for Him."

KM: They sent us to the KGB prison where our adventures in Krishna consciousness continued. At that time we had a strange feeling that our devotional service would go on even in prison. The KGB knew that we never had association with criminals and thus, to teach us a lesson, they put us with the worst type. The mood of the prison was constantly tense. Externally it is quite peaceful and it is a good place for chanting Hare Krishna. For instance that is exactly what Sannyasa dasa was doing there. One time the Chief of the prison told me, "Oh, Kamala mala you are not a good devotee, Sannyasa dasa is a real devotee because he chants all day."

I was put into a cell with a very terrible criminal. He had committed all kinds of crimes, killed people, etc. But when I first came into the cell he was singing a song from an Indian cinema, "Where are you Radha? Where are you Krishna?"

Prison was a new experience for all of us. We did not know how to behave with the criminals. We woke up in the morning and did not know how loud to chant because if we chanted a little bit too loud someone might come and beat us. Towards the end we decided to depend on Krishna and each day we woke up early and chanted quite loudly, despite any circumstance. Then the other prisoners became attracted. It was very surprising that when it came to the point where we did not have anything more to say to the prisoners in our cell, Krishna would send us to another cell with fresh people to preach to.

A: Our experience was that almost everyone wanted to chant Hare Krishna, I remember only one person who did not want to chant.

KM: We were in that prison for four months and we did not feel so bad there. What about food? Well, for the first month Sannyasa dasa ate only a small piece of cabbage every day.

S: I did not know exactly when Ekadasi was, so twice a month I fasted for a few days before and after what I thought was Ekadasi. As soon as any feeling of weakness appeared I would chant Hare Krishna and it would disappear.

KM: Sometimes I ate bread, but later we asked the prison administration for raw grains that were going to be used for making the porridge. They gave us these grains and at night we would put them in water. Then in the morning they would be ready.

A: I think that I will never forget the wonderful taste of the KGB prison *prasadam*. It was simply grains soaked in water with some sunflower seed oil, but it tasted very nice.

KM: It was a small prison with only fourteen cells and very peaceful. You would have the feeling that you were the only one in this prison. Because we would rarely see any other prisoners.

A: They always kept a very bright light in the cells in order to prevent anyone from committing suicide.

KM: All day long the only sound you could hear was the constant pacing of the guards up and down the corridor. Every three minutes they would look through the peep hole in the door to check the prisoners. When they would look in, they would see Sannyasa chanting Hare Krishna, then in another they would find Atmananda chanting, in another I was chanting and in another Armen Sarkisyan was chanting. It looked as though

everywhere they went the prisoners were chanting. After four months the guards would even chant on their own.

A: When they would come to my door I would sometimes start to give them a lecture.

KM: The guards became so tired of us because we always preached to them very strongly. It was very difficult for them. At that time we were very serious and obstinate.

Then the trial started. The Judge used the standard Soviet method of slandering the Hare Krishna movement quite extensively. He was hoping for success, but he was disappointed. Everything he said was completely senseless. We also had a chance to speak and we defeated all their arguments. After this it was difficult for them to continue the trial because everyone attending saw all the illegal methods used against us. It was obvious to everyone that we were simply being prosecuted because of our religious beliefs. The people in the courtroom protested, "For what reason are you prosecuting them?"

We then started our hunger strike because of the illegal way in which they were prosecuting us, simply for our religious beliefs. They sent us to the psychiatric hospital for a psychiatric examination. During the entire trial we were chanting and therefore they thought we were crazy because we told them that if they continued to speak all nonsense in the courtroom we had no alternative than to chant Hare Krishna.

A: The first Procurator who sanctioned our prosecution had a heart attack. The Armenian people believe in omens, therefore the next Procurator was very polite and careful in dealing with us.

KM: After the trial they sent us to the psychiatric hospital where the situation was quite horrible, especially when they gave us the drugs. For instance, Armen Sarkisyan often lost consciousness. The orderlies had to



Russian Bhagavad-gitas and Armenian Coming Back's confiscated by K.G.B.



Sannyasa dasa, right, and Atmananda dasa, center, with foreign human rights activists in Moscow February 1988.

carry him to the toilet. He could not even move. I was trying to tolerate it, but it was terrible. Haloperidol is a very powerful drug and it causes intense suffering. I cannot think of anything worse. This was their way of trying to make us lose our Krishna consciousness and stop our chanting of the Holy Name. Even in this horrible condition, by the mercy of our spiritual master, we woke up at four o'clock in the morning and sat on our beds and forced ourselves to chant our prescribed amount. It was incredibly difficult. Other inmates in the psychiatric hospital had also been in prison before and were often beaten, but they said that one injection of haloperidol was worth 1000 beatings. We would agree to be beaten every day rather than have one injection.

A: When we first came they gave us very large doses.

KM: We were so lethargic from the drugs, Sannyasa could not even stand on his legs and he was thin like a match. When I first saw him I was reminded of the picture of the Six Goswamis (austere saints). We were so weak that we could not even go up a flight of stairs. They continued to inject us with haloperidol even in this condition.

S: There were 20 days when they intensely injected us, I could not remember anything, it was just black. I could barely wake up and chant my prescribed prayers and after I finished them I cannot remember anything. I cannot remember what happened before my chanting or after, only sometimes the fear of sleeping all day and night would appear and I would not be able to chant my prescribed amount. Two days this happened and I did not chant and I was very worried about it.

They brought three other devotees to this hospital, Saci Suta (Sarkis Ogadzhanyan), Sarvabhavana (Gagik Buniatyan) and Advaita Acarya (Agvan Arutyunyan). Sarvabhavana told us about the investigation of their case. Every day he was beaten and tortured. They would turn on an electric hot plate and bring it close to his face. As he would move away from it, his head would go against the wall and they would bring it even closer until it began to burn him. They did it in order to find out

where the books were printed, but he did not tell them anything. They beat him like anything. I remember he told me that they pushed him on the ground and were kicking him with their winter boots. He said he was trying to chant Hare Krishna at that time in his mind, but he was thinking that if he kept silent during the beatings then they would think that he was not feeling any pain. They would beat him harder and harder until he started yelling. Then they would stop. Sarvabhavana used to cover his head while they were beating him because they were too fast for him to try to protect any other part of his body. He would go back to his cell and chant Hare Krishna. Then the guards would come and beat him for chanting. He was very determined.

KM: Sarvabhavana was always getting beaten, even before his arrest he was beaten. Once he was distributing leaflets and suddenly several stereotype KGB men surrounded him without saying anything. There were about twelve of them. They pushed him in a mud puddle and started to beat him, each one of them. He asked them why they were beating him and none of them said anything, they only continued to beat him. This would happen while he was distributing books quite often, but he was so determined, even after such beatings his devotional service became even more intense.

To stop our hunger strike during our medical examination we were forcibly fed with a tube inserted down our throats. Simultaneously, they injected us with drugs. They wanted us to know that we were breaking our religious principles of vegetarianism (the force feeding was with eggs) and abstaining from intoxication.

A representative of the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow was invited to come and make the final diagnosis of whether we were crazy or not. Despite the representative being from such a cruel and infamous place, she was quite sympathetic with us. She could appreciate Vedic wisdom. When she met with us she decided to send us to Moscow. In order to make us more afraid, they decided to send us by train. To go by train meant that first we would have to wait several months for the train to come. The train was completely packed with prisoners. In one compartment meant for 4 people, there was 20. All prisoners are very fearful of travelling by train in the USSR. Because the train leaves from prison, before they sent us to Moscow we, were transferred to prison. In prison it was interesting. When I came to my assigned cell I did not know what to expect. When I opened the door . . . I heard someone chanting Hare Krishna.

A: The same thing happened to me.

KM: This happened because in the first prison we told everyone about Krishna consciousness. From there, prisoners were sent to this prison and they told others about it. Inmates from the psychiatric hospital also arrived in that prison before us and were telling the others about Krishna consciousness. When we came to this prison everyone already knew about Krishna, therefore it was a little easy for us. In this prison we could always hear chanting.

A: When I came to Moscow the other prisoners said, "Krishna, Krishna, give us Krishna!"



Transcendental literature confiscated by Soviet authorities.

KM: Several people that Sannyasa preached to began chanting 16 rounds (prescribed amount for full-time devotees) daily. We were preaching that Krishna punishes someone who goes away from Him. Thus, there is no reason to punish someone who comes to Krishna consciousness. If you follow the 4 regulative principles and chant 16 rounds you can expect something unimaginable to happen to you. One can even be released in a very unexpected manner. We were often convinced of this when we saw prisoners taking to Krishna consciousness and suddenly they would be released. Even today we could meet these people from prison in Moscow and they would say that Krishna released them from imprisonment.

During this period in prison we felt deep inspiration and devotional sentiments. From this prison they sent us by train to Moscow. We stopped at each prison along the way. First we stopped in Baku, where we also tried to preach Krishna consciousness. The prisoners there greeted us and liked what we had to say. Almost all the inmates believed in God, even the most heavy criminals would come to visit us and show their respect to us and give us vegetarian food. They also took Krishna consciousness as much as they could.

A: For instance, in the city of Baku it is very difficult to buy butter, but we were supplied with it.

KM: I am sure that everything that happened to us was because we strictly followed the instructions of our spiritual master and by his mercy unbelievable things happened. After Baku, the next stop was Ryazan' where we also spread Krishna consciousness as much as we could. At that time Armine Hrtyan sent us the letter from Sri Vishnupada to the Soviet devotees that said, "Wherever you go, whomever you meet, simply tell them about Krishna." That is exactly the situation we were in.

We were feeling at every step that our *guru* was controlling everything. After his letter we told everyone about Krishna. We had kirtan on the train wherever we went and never felt that we were being persecuted.

Finally we came to Moscow. We were in Butyrskaya Prison for half a day when one psychiatrist lady, the same who examined us in Armenia, came to visit us. She wanted to know our reaction to the prison train trip from Yerevan to Moscow. She wanted to know if we were afraid and had a negative experience, if we had been, she thought that there might be a chance that we would reject Krishna consciousness in the future. The last thing she expected was to see our smiling faces and hear our appreciative thanks for having us sent by train to Moscow. She was completely astonished. She thought there was really something wrong with us and we were abnormal.

She decided to give us a thorough examination. At first she was planning to give us a five minute exam, but because of our happy attitude on arriving in Moscow she kept us for 45 days of observation in the Serbsky Institute. We are thankful to her for keeping us longer because in the Serbsky Institute we met so many people who would otherwise have been impossible to meet. They were people who were imprisoned permanently, religious and political prisoners. Therefore, we considered it Krishna's great mercy. They put us all in different wards of the Serbsky Institute.

A: There were about 60 people chanting throughout the Institute.

KM: All the time we hoped that our *guru* would decide to deliver us. We had a feeling that we could do devotional service even in this Serbsky Institute, but we felt the lack of association with other devotees. It was really difficult at that time. Before we were together, but

when we were separated it was difficult individually. Then they gave their diagnosis and decided that Atmananda be given treatment in an ordinary psychiatric hospital and Sannyasa and I be put in a special psychiatric hospital.

When they saw us continuing our religious practices enthusiastically they decided to send us back to Yerevan, separately. Even though they decided that we should be separate, sometimes we would meet each other. For the return trip, we went a completely different way back to Yerevan.

A: We were convinced that it was Krishna's plan that we preach in the other prisons also. In Voronizh, Rostov and in each prison we left the instructions of Lord Krishna and His holy name. We were even chanting out the windows for everyone to hear. They liked it.

KM: When we came to Tbilisi prison in Georgia the prisoners already knew about Krishna and His holy name. This was because Rafael Janashvili and Yamaraj dasa had told them before and they had accepted it very willingly. When we came there we distributed our hand-written leaflets about Krishna consciousness to everyone. We had a lot of free time and this is what we did. To speak about Krishna is one thing, but to give them something to read about Krishna was special. Then they could read it again and again after we had gone and then give it to someone else.

A: In Tbilisi prison the inmates made very nice pictures of Krishna.

KM: New devotees appeared there and they are still practicing Krishna consciousness. For example, one boy named Slavic, he is still imprisoned waiting for a death sentence. They will probably shoot him because he killed someone. He took Krishna consciousness. He sent us a letter recently and asked us for a *Bhagavad gita*. He said it was very urgent that he receive it. He chants 16 rounds and follows the 4 regulative principles. In spite of the very horrible condition of this prison, especially the food, he is a vegetarian.

After this they sent us to different psychiatric hospitals and it was more difficult. The ecstatic prison life of preaching we had experienced was interrupted.

We were with Sannyasa in a cell for a year and a half. This cell was a bedroom, toilet and dining room all in one. It was a universal room. The size was 4 meters by 6 meters, with between 8 to 12 prisoners. It was always changing. All of them were obviously mentally deranged. For example, someone would wake up at night singing, another would laugh all day, another would yell all day, another would constantly beat someone else. This type would use anything for beating, shoes, plates, anything. One can only become humble in such a circumstance.

We did not have so much problem with the necessities of life and we always felt that Krishna and *guru* were taking care of us. We always understood that anything that happened to us was only the mercy of Krishna. We did not complain because we knew what was happening to us was an insignificant reaction to our countless sins. It was obvious, because even in this lifetime we committed so many sins. If we were simply paying for this lifetime we should have gone to hell for a very long time. Therefore, we can complain only about ourselves.



Kamala Mala dasa in Psychiatric Hospital.

From the material point of view the situation could be tolerated, but from the spiritual point of view it was very difficult to bear. When we were all together it was easier because we encouraged each other. It was very helpful when I was together with Sannyasa, but Krishna decided to separate us later for more intense preaching.

We were cooking *prasadam* and distributing it, even if it was only bread. We also distributed leaflets about Krishna consciousness. After we did this they decided to punish us even more. It is one thing when they inject you and beat you, but it is really heavy when they put you alone in a cell with completely crazy people. You cannot imagine how crazy people can be. For instance there were some who would constantly speak profane language and beat people. One person was there who would not allow anyone to lay down on their bed. He was completely out of control and he would say, "how can you lay down when I am walking?"

The others were insane criminals and there would always be someone who controlled them and never let them have any peace. This one particular person believed in God and he was a little careful with us. Our peacefulness drove him crazier. "WHY ARE YOU SO PEACEFUL???" he would scream. The hospital authorities purposely put him with us because normally no one could stay with him. The doctors and guards could not control him at all, he was so heavy and crazy. They choose us to stay with him. Of course we continued to chant 16 rounds every morning very loudly. This demon was really offended, "How can you disturb my rest? I am your master and you are just newcomers here. This is my house. I have lived here for 11 years. How can you do this in front of me and disturb my rest? Do not chant so loud!"

We started to mumble softly and we were really unsatisfied chanting that way, thus we chanted more, from 5 AM to 9 AM. Our cellmate still did not like it at all. We were trying to behave as humbly as we could. This crazy fellow was always engaged in different activities, even at night he only slept two or three hours. He was always yelling and planning to make trouble.

One time he could not tolerate us any longer and he tried to hit us. As soon as he would wake up he would see us chanting Hare Krishna. He would start yelling, "You have made a monastery of my house!" He went completely crazy. Then he attacked Sannyasa and when I tried to stop him he attacked me. Then he stopped and

put his hands on his heart. Suddenly he started to feel terrible and called for the doctor. Then he pointed to us and said we were to blame. He said, "your incantations have caused this and now I am dying." It looked like his heart was coming out of his mouth. We just sat peacefully and chanted and felt that Krishna controlled every second of this critical situation.

Actually, this crazy person preferred us for cellmates because he liked us. We were closer to normal than the other prisoners in the psychiatric hospital, but he could not associate with us in the manner that we wanted. At the end he personally asked the authorities to move us to another cell. They expected us to ask to move away from him. When this crazy man asked them to move us then they had to. We were then moved to another cell, but it was even worse.

In the next cell there were 10 people and all of them were very crazy. They could not control their minds at all. Whatever idea crossed their minds they immediately would act on it. Anyway, they would chant Hare Krishna with pleasure. About 10 days we chanted with them. We started to cook *prasadam* there. We found some grains and cooked them on a little stove that we made ourselves. We fed all our cellmates very much *prasadam*.

Nearby our cell there was another prisoner who was even more horrible than the previous one. Nobody could associate with this person. They put him in a special cell and gave him whatever he wanted. He even had a radio, which was ordinarily forbidden. He would walk all over the psychiatric hospital at any time he wanted. Everyone considered him to be acutely insane, without hope. We noticed that these kind of people easily became attached to devotees. This man demanded that we come live with him. From our earlier experience we knew what might happen if we did.

Later he convinced Sannyasa to come and live with him. He kept him in his cell for 12 days, it was an incredibly long time because no one could bear it for more than six days. This person could easily kill. He was a pathological murderer. Everyone was afraid that he would kill. Sannyasa stayed with him. This person became very happy and liked Sannyasa very much. He started to tell the other patients about Krishna consciousness, how to chant, etc. However, on the twelfth day I sent him a letter explaining that he was very ambitious and power-loving. He took it personally and became offended and kicked-out Sannyasa. Despite this, he liked us very much.

All the people in our cell chanted Hare Krishna and we regularly prepared *prasadam* for them. The authorities started to realize that even in this condition our devotional activities did not stop. Therefore they decided to separate us. They put me with one crazy man who was laughing night and day and speaking profanities constantly. That was the only language he knew.

When they separated us our service became even more intense and we wanted to spread Krishna consciousness all over the psychiatric hospital. We gave *prasadam* to as many people as we could. Our hand-written leaflets were in almost every cell. On the appearance day of Lord Caitanya Sannyasa dasa fed the

entire psychiatric hospital with *prasadam*. Krishna arranged for this. By the mercy of the spiritual master, whatever circumstances one may be in, if one has a sincere desire to serve Krishna, He will give him full opportunity. Everything depends on desire. If one does not want, that is another question. Therefore there is no reason to complain except about our own lack of desire to serve Krishna.

One and a half years passed in this condition, engaging in uninterrupted devotional service. We relished this taste of devotional service and we realized that it is the most sweet. There is nothing more tasty than this. We felt that we needed this service. During all this time the doctors came daily and said, "You still continue with these activities? Then you will stay here until the end of your life." That was their method of putting pressure on people in the psychiatric hospital. We were not so disappointed. We knew that everything is temporary, even if we stayed there, so what.

We found out that our staying in this prison (psychiatric hospital) was causing a loud noise abroad and that it was helping the preaching around the world. This gave us strength and the feeling that we were not completely useless.

A: Sometimes doctors told us that they would hear about us on the *Voice of America*. There were special programs about the persecuted devotees in the Soviet Union.

KM: If they did not put us in prison then there would have been no reason to trouble the VOA or BBC. If it were not for the protection from following our *guru's* instructions then being in prison in such bad association would have caused us to immediately fall down. They released us because of the pressure organized by our godbrothers in foreign countries and in Moscow. All of us are indebted eternally because if we would have stayed in prison any longer our Krishna consciousness might have been lost. Towards the end I was feeling heavy pressure that I might be losing my Krishna consciousness. The greatest loss is when the soul is killed. The death of the body does not compare with loss of the soul. It was difficult for me to chant Krishna's name. We are eternally indebted to everyone who helped us, especially to our spiritual master.

When they put us in the psychiatric hospital we saw that the more our desire increased to serve Krishna the more people would want to hear about Krishna consciousness. Even the doctors wanted to hear about Krishna consciousness.

We understand that many people helped to bring about our release, not only devotees, but many other individuals and organizations. They never met us before, yet they used so much energy for our release. It is quite amazing in this modern world where even close relatives, without thinking twice, put each other in prison. Therefore, we want to join this movement to help release everyone from the big prison of this material world. And those who are in prison in this big prison. This means spreading Krishna consciousness. We constantly pray to our spiritual master that he never lets us leave his lotus feet. We also pray to have his association and to fulfill his mission until the end of our lives.☐

From the Psychiatric Hospital



Asutosh dasa shortly after his release from Soviet psychiatric hospital.

Alexsei Musatov

Asutosh das
February 1988
Moscow

My name is Alexsei Arturovich Musatov. I was born December 5, 1959 in Moscow. My Hare Krishna name is Asutosh dasa. I belong to an old Russian noble family, which has always had strong religious traditions. Many members of our family from one generation to another were clergymen. One of them, Borozdin, was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church. He was the founder of a famous monastery near Novgorod. The spiritual traditions of my family are very strong, and since the early 1980s, when I came in contact with the Hare Krishna teachings it became the basis of my life.

In April of 1983, I was arrested for spreading the Vedic philosophy and for translating the books of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, including *Bhagavad gita As It Is*. We had been translating books for a number of years and the authorities were constantly following our activities. Their agents kept coming to my apartment disguised as plumbers or repairmen of various kinds, they inspected the rooms trying to find out what was going on there.

The legal norms were openly violated from the very start because the two "impartial observers", who are required by law to witness an arrest and search, were in fact two KGB academy cadets who also took part in the search. I had to sign a statement pledging that I would not leave the city.

A few days later I was summoned to the public Prosecutor's office in the Octyabersky District in Moscow for questioning. Their attitude towards me was very aggressive

and totally negative from the very start. They attempted to put pressure on me in different ways and created very uncomfortable psychological and moral conditions during all contacts and conversations.

Different investigators came one after another, but their pressure did not relent. One of them would try to speak soft and demonstrate to me how erroneous my thinking was to me, another attempted to scare me, a third one would try to persuade me to repent and sign a voluntary acknowledgement of my guilt. But what guilt?

Our trial was entirely prearranged from the very beginning to the end. They failed to collect evidence against us. Now we will try to obtain a legal exoneration for all of the devotees who went to prison for their spiritual convictions. We will demand exoneration and retrial for all of our cases because the situation now is more favourable owing to *perestroika* (restructuring).

First of all I wish to express my gratitude to the world public because I spent about five years of my life imprisoned and constantly, virtually every second, I was feeling the support of my spiritual brothers and devotees around the world. I was constantly feeling this support, and it is impossible to describe these feelings.

The conditions were very hard at times; in the common prison cells, in solitary confinement, and the psychiatric hospital. The conditions were very hard, but the Hare Krishna *mantra* gave me energy for life, both spiritual and material. No hardships can overpower Krishna consciousness and nothing can wipe out faith and devotional service from our hearts.

I was summoned to the prosecutor's office in 1983. They questioned me all day long, I received nothing to eat. They did not let me out of the room from early in the morning until late at night. Finally they drew up a protocol of arrest (detention). I refused to testify from the very beginning, flatly refused to sign anything at all. They tried to make me sign just any paper, but I flatly refused to sign anything.

First they took me to a preliminary detention cell where I stayed about three days. Next I was transferred to Butyrskaya prison. I spent 15 months there all together. I was kept in all kinds of cells. From the very beginning they were trying to force me to testify against other devotees. I was surrounded by their agents from among the common criminals, because convicts can often receive special privileges, for example, reduced prison terms for certain services. They willingly accept this. Many times such people were placed in my cell because the prison administration wanted to get information about Krishna consciousness.

The Butyrskaya prison has various kinds of cells—there are cells for a few people, big cells for 40 people, where up to 60 people may be crammed in. People slept on the floor, the conditions were very bad, many were smoking, and the cell was filled with smoke. I had great

problems with food because the meals contained meat and I had to live literally on bread and water, as there was nothing else to eat.

All the time I was subjected to psychological pressure. They threatened me with huge prison terms and demanded that I should renounce Krishna consciousness and give up my activities with the Hare Krishna movement. They especially insisted that I should stop my religious activities.

After a few months in the Butyrskaya prison I was sent for a medical examination. Because I always refused to give any evidence and refused to talk at all with the authorities, the prosecutor, or the KGB officials, I was sent for a psychiatric medical examination. This was arranged in order to declare me mentally sick, on whatever grounds. The examination lasted 15 minutes, not more. After a brief conversation, this proved to be enough to declare me mentally incapable.

During the examination the KGB official who brought me there was addressing the psychiatrists in a most informal way. This happened in the Kashchenko Mental Hospital in the summer of 1984. The KGB official and the psychiatrists were calling each other by their first names. It was obvious that they had discussed and settled everything long before, and that everything had gone according to the plan.

When I finally learned that I was declared mentally incapable I was not very much surprised because I had expected it. However, if I was mentally deranged, they should have treated me

differently in the prison and put me with the sick inmates where I could have received a special diet including milk, butter and other food products. Instead, I was immediately sent back to the same cell where they kept me the rest of the time, illegal as it was.

On the way to the medical examination the investigator kept telling me that they would immediately release me if only I sign a denunciation of Krishna consciousness. He told me that otherwise I would receive a maximum term of 5 years. He called me Jesus Christ when I refused to talk to him at all. I tried to behave diplomatically in order not to provoke their aggression, but at the same time I categorically declined any form of cooperation or collaboration which they were trying to impose on me. What kind of cooperation could I have with them? They wanted me to give evidence against people involved in the same case. They demanded evidence on our contacts, relationships, they wanted to have all possible information about each of the devotees involved in my case, as well as about those not implicated in it, promising me all kinds of privileges in return.

When I categorically refused to talk to them at all, they placed me into a very large cell with a lot of people where the living conditions were quite appalling. Throughout my stay in the Butyrskaya prison I had no chance to meet a lawyer, I knew absolutely nothing

about my case and I did not speak to the lawyer except the one time when they drove me to the medical examination. It was purely by chance that one of my cellmates was taken to court and there he met some of my friends, the devotees who had the same case as me. It was only from him that I received any reliable information about my own affairs and about what was going on outside the prison. I had been in detention for about a year and had no information. All this was a flagrant violation of all legal norms.

Only through this contact did I find out that the trial had already taken place. I realized that I had been declared mentally sick and that now I would be handed over to the specialized psychiatric system. I was horrified because I realized that it would be a special psychiatric hospital. People said the most awful things about special psychiatric hospitals, even among the criminals where I was then. People would do anything in order not to get to the SPH with its physical and psychological methods of manipulating human consciousness, its brutality and its experiments with various medicines.

I wrote a letter to the prison superintendent requesting to be transferred to less severe conditions, that is, to a hospital where I ought to be kept as a mental patient. There are special cells in the Butyrskaya prison for the mentally sick with less cruel conditions; relatively good food and smaller cells for 2 or 3 inmates, a marked difference from the situation in the investigations

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prison. It was only after many requests and long negotiations with the administration that I was finally transferred to a better condition. They wanted me to prove that I had been declared mentally sick and that the trial was underway, while they themselves concealed this from me because I refused to collaborate with them.

I waited several months and finally in June 1984 I was sent to the SPH in Smolensk. There are 2 SPHs for Moscow dwellers, the Sushovskaya Hospital and the one in Smolensk. For a few months there I lived under very bad conditions in what the common criminals call “the slime pond.” This is a special ward in the hospital with the most severe conditions—there is no fresh air at all, dirty cement floors, and 3 level plank beds. The small cells are expected to house 8 persons each, but 2 or 3 more would be sleeping right on the floor. Because there was absolutely no ventilation, no air, many people would have heart attacks, suffocate, or faint before they were allowed to go out and breathe in some fresh air. It is impossible to imagine such conditions. When I read about the life of prisoners before the revolution I think it was almost idyllic conditions compared with what we had to suffer there.

In autumn 1984 I was transferred to the 4th ward of the Smolensk SPH. Immediately on arrival there I was given a course of sulfazine, a concentrated course of in-

jections which result in a very high temperature. The injections themselves are very painful, but some members of the medical staff make them even more painful by choosing sensitive areas on purpose. They obviously enjoy causing pain to people and say cynically that one should remember it for the rest of one's life.

As everywhere, there were many people who got there by accident, who were considered sick although they were sufficiently sane. The first course of treatment lasted about a month and the high temperature held all that time. As a result I lost almost 15 kilograms in weight. I felt so weak that I could hardly walk, all my energies went into resisting this medicine. They kept telling me: "We are cleaning you, we are making your consciousness healthier and more adequate." As one of the psychiatrists told me, "we are not treating your religious convictions, but your religious convictions are fixed ideas and we are treating you for your fixed ideas."

I tried to find a common language with the doctors and administration to tell them something about Krishna consciousness and convince them that it is not an anti-social philosophy but a synthesis of the highest human wisdom, that all its ideas are profoundly humane and intended to realize the best qualities of man. Very much depended on the individuals themselves, many of those who worked there were embittered by their lives and by the conditions which made them cruel. They are also people who have good human qualities to understand the highest manifestations of the human nature. I must say that such people understood me and moreover some of the staff members, some doctors, sympathized with me.

They realized that I was 'framed' from the start and how ridiculous my alleged crime was; that I was translating *Bhagavad gita* from English into Russian and preaching Krishna consciousness in Moscow. They also realized how untenable all these charges were, but they had strict instructions concerning me so they had to observe at least the outward appearance of following certain rules of conduct. I felt their sympathetic attitudes even in the most trifle things, because the trifles play a huge role in a life which is controlled and checked down to the minute.

We were held in cells, different cells designed to contain different numbers of people. It is not a hospital in the usual sense of the word and the cells with plank beds can hold from 10 to 40 or 50 people. The cells have no bathrooms or lavatories. One is allowed to go to the latrine only a few times a day. We were constantly watched there. Our behaviour, all actions, and contacts were recorded in the medical case histories. We were watched by the orderlies, who were themselves inmates, but placed in a more privileged position. The administration sometimes intentionally aroused them against us.

This is a deliberate policy to prevent any agreement, any alliance between the orderlies and the patients. Patients were incited against the orderlies, and the orderlies were incited against the patients, one can talk long about this, one can write dozens of books about what we saw and experienced there.

There are already a lot of books about the psychiatric system and the prison camps, so I do not want to discuss it. All the devotees who were imprisoned will one day make an archive of Krishna consciousness and describe all that they have seen because we have acquired a really invaluable experience of survival within this system of labour camps and psychiatric hospitals. We should write a book and call it "A Manual for Courage."

In the Smolensk Hospital there were mostly people convicted for serious crimes. Some of them had been convicted many times, recidivists, chronically ill people, murderers, and terrorists. There were also people who got there by accident, or for their political convictions.

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The administration was always trying to sow intrigue among the patients, to incite them against each other. They created tensions in order to sow discord. There is a special method in psychiatry to influence the state of mind of a patient. A provocation, for example, when an orderly is instructed to set a patient off balance. Such actions create a heavy atmosphere and the patient may

explode as a result of something quite trivial. Sometimes they intentionally provoke aggression in patients, a person may be trying to protect his rights and then naturally explodes. Then they immediately begin to treat them. They deliberately provoke patients and disturb their minds in order to increase the pressure on them. They usually do not prescribe a treatment without a reason, but they find a reason. They provoke a patient to some conflict, sometimes merely harsh words, and immediately make use of this to prescribe a treatment.

All therapies are very hard there, they apply insulin shocks which affect both the conscious and the subconscious mind of a person. After the insulin shocks people used to lose their ability to think logically, they would lose their self-control and the ability to adequately comprehend reality. They would lose their memory and become completely different people.

One of the commissions said that I should be subjected to insulin shocks. I realized that it was not the initiative of my hospital doctors, but rather of the KGB. It was their instructions concerning my treatment. From the very beginning they wanted me to relinquish my spiritual views. They would say that if I remained faithful to Krishna consciousness they would never let me out of their system, that I would stay there forever. They wanted to have a written abdication of my spiritual views and religious convictions.

I said quite definitely what my position was. I cannot betray my own life, my own principles and views. I told them that it was my mission and I would follow it throughout my life. After that their aggressive pressure relaxed somewhat, they switched to something else. From the beginning they were annoyed by the fact that I was vegetarian and that in spite of the hard conditions in the hospital I was following the principles of Krishna consciousness.

All the meals there are restricted in time, one has only five to seven minutes for a meal. In spite of that I found time to offer food to Krishna and to make *prasadam*. This annoyed them most of all. They said, "you can believe if you wish, we cannot change your heart, but do it inside yourself, do not show it outwardly." They began to say that they must be able to show that they did something with me, that I changed in some way. They said that they could release me earlier even if I did not openly give up my convictions.

In that hospital there were many people from the criminal underworld, people with many drawbacks, simply people who had no morality at all. I felt their sympathy toward me and they called me a saint, behind my back of course. I followed the principles and did not compromise even in trivial things concerning Krishna consciousness. Whatever the conditions of my stay there, wherever I was, I always tried to talk about Krishna, about my spiritual experience and my spiritual master. I attempted to share this wealth with others, even with those whom I met occasionally, even with the orderlies, the people who were guarding us, and they showed great interest in our activities and the philosophy of Krishna consciousness.

My preaching and philosophical talks raised peoples' morale and improved their moods. They began to communicate with others, they wanted to live. My lifestyle, my ideas, and my activities in the psychiatric hospital were a living example for them. They began to feel sympathetic interest in the philosophy of Krishna consciousness. When the other prisoners saw all the measures taken by the administration against me, they respected me even more and felt greater sympathy towards me and often offered me their services. They would say, "don't worry, even if something happens to you, if they treat you with insulin shocks, we will take care of everything. We will bring you sugar and see to it that you are all right." People came up to me, even those I did not know so well, and offered me their help.

There was a matron on our ward, Antonova Lidiya Grigoryevna, who hated me from the very beginning. Because of her injustice and hatred, everybody detested her, and on the contrary, people felt attracted to me. They came to me with their pains and problems and sought my advice concerning their private lives. She

wanted that they should come to her and she hated me because she thought that I was leading them away from her. People gathered around me, began talking to one another, making some kind of contacts. While she would say, "look, he gathered a crowd again and preaches Krishna consciousness!"

She started hating me because she could not do what I was doing, therefore she found every way she could to hurt me. She made my life very miserable. I worked in the kitchen and she insisted on giving me the hardest and most unpleasant tasks, she kept me busy from 6 AM to almost 8 PM. It was really quite unfair because I had to cook food for the other patients, wash up, set the tables and do many other jobs. She made me do the hardest and dirtiest work in order to humiliate me, to influence my mentality, but she failed.

Everyday the matron took home bags filled with food-stuffs. She exchanged the products we received from home for drugs and tea. She made such deals with the criminals and even with me when I received parcels of vegetarian products. My parents sent me nuts, raisins,

and other products to supplement my diet. She stole them from me and carried them away in her bag. I have heard that her wrongdoings were exposed and that she lost her job there.

Of course, there were some brighter moments that I can remember, even with members of the staff. I felt tense most of the

time so I was trying to find some place to be alone for a few moments to have a *kirtan*. When there were kinder orderlies on duty I asked them to lock me up alone in the canteen. They would do it because they realized that I needed it. Those were the happiest moments in my life there, I was looking forward to them all day.

It was impossible to read because everyone is constantly under surveillance. Every action is watched. I had to chant the *mahamantra* while walking with others along a narrow corridor. There were so many people there, we had to walk to the end of the corridor, turn around and walk back all the time. It was awfully noisy. Sometimes I would lie on my bed and cover my head with the blanket. The best time for me was at night when the lights went off and the bars were locked. It was so quiet and everybody fell asleep. Only then could I chant the Hare Krishna *mantra* and hear it nicely.

Day after day the Hare Krishna *mantra* gave me new energy for spiritual activity, new force for preaching, for helping people. I felt the responsibility upon me to help other people. I saw many people in desperate situations, people who were broken down, smashed, people who were in poor psychological shape. It was very hard for me also. I always tried to help others, to give some advice, some moral support. When I saw how a person was changing, how his face was changing and he began open-

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ing up, I felt very happy that I could help someone to get away from the hardships.

Just by living the way I did attracted others and they began chanting the Hare Krishna *mantra*. I did not even mention it at first, but people were chanting it. While walking along the corridor I heard people say the word Krishna and I saw that they were not addressing me, they were simply talking about Krishna, about Krishna devotees, exchanging their opinions.

I underwent psychiatric examinations several times, including some by a commission from the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry. The commission concluded that I could be discharged, but the court declined, even after 2 years of confinement in a special psychiatric hospital. The court overruled the medical opinion and detained me in the hospital for another 7 months. Even the doctors who were treating me and who suggested my discharge were indignant about the court's decision.

I received a few post parcels in the psychiatric hospital from abroad and I was told that there were three more, but they were never given to me. They just informed me about the parcels and made me sign the receipt. They said they sent them back because the rules restricted the number of parcels a prisoner can receive. I suspect that the hospital personnel kept them.

Despite the hard conditions I was doing my best to lead the life of a devotee. I got up early in the morning, about 5 o'clock, before all the others to have a little quiet time to chant the Hare Krishna *mantra*. The night hours and the early mornings were peaceful. They gave me the energy to live the day through.

In December 1986 I was transferred to the Moscow Regional psychiatric hospital where I spent about a year. The conditions there were slightly better, I could meet my relatives and friends. The food was also better. I continued speaking about Krishna, trying to carry on my spiritual master's mission, which is the essence of my life.

In this ordinary psychiatric hospital we could not have contacts with people from outside because there were bars, locks, etc. However, we could write letters to whoever we wanted. Through letters I explained the teachings of Krishna consciousness. I had no spiritual literature, so I was quoting Srila Prabhupada's books from my memory. From the responses I received I saw how the mentality of people was changing, their understanding was growing from one letter to another. I saw the teachings of Krishna consciousness sinking deeper into their souls. People were becoming devotees, and what is most important, they started to do something. They were seeking their own place in Krishna consciousness.

After leaving those places people continue writing letters to me. Many of those who I met there want to meet me again to seek my advice in the face of spiritual or everyday problems. They turned to me as a Krishna devotee and I am trying to live up to their expectations. I wish once again to thank all those who took part in the efforts to help, especially all the devotees whose support I constantly felt. Hare Krishna.❧