

Yamuna: So back to New York, this is day two. It is nine o'clock in the morning, and I walk into Srila Prabhupada's apartment. I still have on the miniskirt and a tank top. And it's really, really hot, and I've never liked heat, no matter what. Anyway, he overlooks the dress, and he says, "Please come into my office." There are two rooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. And we go into this other room, there is a little grass mat on the floor, and in front of it is a metal trunk, and that's Srila Prabhupada's office. On top of his metal trunk are a few pieces of his personal possessions, and they are all very meticulously placed. I remember it looking very neat, but very spartan, very much like one would think a sage, not very many possessions. But in the corner, the right hand corner of his trunk, was a stack of cards. In those days, the hippies didn't really think of using business cards, it wasn't on the menu. So Srila Prabhupada picked up a card, and he handed it to me with great pride, and it said: The International Society for Krsna Consciousness. And he said, "I would like to give you one of my cards."

I said, "Thank you very much, I really appreciate it."

And he said, "Would you like some more?"

"Okay."

"Do you have some friends you can give them to?"

"Yes, I could do that when I return to Oregon." I was thinking, "Who in Oregon will use these business cards, with The International Society for Krsna Consciousness on them?" But I graciously take the cards.

So then he said, "So we need a few ingredients before we do the cooking, can you do the shopping?"

So I have never been to New York in my life, but I said, "Yes, I can do the shopping."

So he said, "Yes, just on the corner, there is grocery store, and you can pick up a few items there."

So he handed me the four or five items, and I don't even look what's on it, and I go down to the grocery store, and when I look at the list I see, one that says, huld. So I look to the little Korean man, and I said, "Do you have some huld?" He goes, "No, no, no, no huld."

"I think you do, because my swamji said that you have huld."

"No, no, no huld"

I think, "Okay, he doesn't have any huld."

So I go back up and the first thing that Swamji says to me is, "Did you get everything on the list?"

And I lied. The first day. And I said, "Yes."

So he opens the bag, and there are four items instead of five. And he said, "Where is the huld?"

I said, "The man doesn't know what huld is."

He said, "I am sending my man there, and he is buying all the time."

"Is there another name for huld?"

He said, "Tumeric, turmeric."

I said, "Do you want me to go back?"

He said, "No." So the first wedding feast in Iskcon was cooked without any huld or turmeric because I couldn't do it.

So Srila Prabhupada has this little kitchen. Galley kitchen means there's one side a sink, and a little counter on both sides, little refrigerator, other side another counter. So I am sitting in the front room, and Srila Prabhpuada said, "So today, you will make one dish."

"Okay swamaji."

"It is called aloo kachori." So he puts down in front of me, a pitcher of water, a bag of flour and two pounds of butter. And he says, "Please make a medium hard dough."

So I said, "Would you like a pate brisse or a swambu?"

And Prabupada said, "How old are you?"

I said, "I'm twenty-five."

"You are twenty five, and you can't make a medium hard dough?"

So immediately I am feeling a little bad, because the first thing he asks me to do, is we are having a cross, we are not understanding. I am not understanding what a medium hard dough is and he is not understanding what patte brise is. So here is a story of how we are learning from each other.

So he said, "In India, any girl seven years old, she can make a medium hard dough."

So now I am feeling insulted. My false ego is just rising to the surface, like cream on cold milk. So he said, "I can show you." So that is the first time I saw Srila Prabhupada's hands touch the ingredients, cooking for Krsna. And he made a dough like something I had never seen before. Because we know, patte brisse, we handle very little, it is a pie crust dough, so you don't knead it, you barely put it together. But Srila Prabhupada made a dough where he kneaded it vigorously, as you know, for kachoris or samosas. So then he said, "There."

I said, "Thank you very much."

And he brought in some mashed potatoes and he took some spices and he put them in, and he showed me how to make a kachori. Now in pastries, kachori is the most difficult pastry, surely there is, in our Indian tradition, because it is fried very slowly for a long time. And if the dough isn't right, or the temperatures aren't regulated very well, if the pan is too crowded, if the pastries aren't sealed properly, the dish is a disaster. There is really only one way to make kachoris, and that is to make them expertly. And I had no idea what I was doing. So from nine thirty or ten o'clock a.m. until four o'clock, I made kachoris in front of Srila Prabhupada, and I watched him in the kitchen. And I remember seeing how very expert he was in the kitchen. He was silent, he was chanting Hare Krsna quietly. His hands were so dynamic. He whipped with his hands, he raised with his hands, he tossed with his hands, he mixed with his hands, he chopped by hand. In the course of me doing kachoris for six hours, Srila Prabhupada brought out fourteen dishes for one hundred people. At least one hundred people. Although there were maybe only forty at the wedding, he cooked that much prasadam.

Just briefly, it is interesting when you were saying that Srila Prabhupada was very lenient with us, he was surely very lenient, but that very first day in the kitchen, he began instructing me. When about twelve o'clock in the day, I looked at Srila Prabhupada and I said, "Swamiji, may I have a glass of water?"

And he said, "Go wash your hands."

And I thought, "Oh, that's a little odd."

And then he said, "This is a different kind of cooking than any other cooking that you have ever done before. This is cooking for Krsna. So when we are cooking for Krsna, we don't eat or drink in the kitchen."

"Okay." So maybe an hour later, "Swamiji, can I have a cigarette?"

"Go wash your hands." So I went in and washed my hands. He said, "Now you are cooking for Krsna, there are four little things that you won't do anymore."

I said, "What is that Swamiji?"

"You won't smoke any more cigarettes. No more cigarettes. No more intoxicants. No illicit sex life."

"For cooking Swamiji?"

"Not for cooking for Krsna. No gambling."

"Okay, I don't gamble."

"And no meat eating."

"Okay, thank you very much Swamiji." So my very first day, cooking for Srila Prabhupada, he encourages me that I am supposed to do these four things, that I am supposed to think of Krsna, not drink any water, or taste anything that I am cooking. So I am thinking that this is most unusual, but this is what I am doing. So the first batch of kachoris that I sent into Srila Prabhupada, he comes back out and says, "They are all falling apart, because you are not sealing them properly." So he shows me how to do it again, and I think that maybe for my whole life, I will always judge that kachoris are my "Waterloo" in the kitchen, because I know what perfection is from the very, very first of watching Srila Prabhupada's hands making kachoris and shaping them. A kachori is so amazing that although it is fried for a long time over the fire, it becomes flakey and it is not the least bit greasy. There is a beautiful contrast between the layers that are caused by the oil being just the right temperature and the dough being just the right consistency of flakiness, like you might think of fried puff pastry, but a little more dense. So that is the first thing that Srila Prabhupada taught me and I am so indebted for that first day of introduction into assisting to cook for Janaki's wedding, on the auspicious day of first day in the kitchen with Prabhupada.