

I remember the 1966 September day, in New York, that I first met you. It was noon when I was ushered into your 26 Second Avenue apartment for a lunch you had personally prepared. You stood, shirtless, skin glowing, bathed in sunlight from a nearby window. Pots in hand, you were distributing prasadam to your new initiate disciples. With each bite relished by assembled, spiritual sparks were ignited into small flames. In this connection, I pray to have recall of the softness of your skin, its changing hues, the sandal fragrance of your clothes, your knowing eyes and the assuredness of your person.

I remember the next day, for you asked me to grocery shop for my sister's wedding feast in the morning, and then assist you in cooking for the remainder of the day. First I bungled the shopping, then made numerous blunders trying to make aloof kachori for the next 7 hours. By this time I thought I might not be capable of anything you might ask me to do. But you were so patient, and in the course of that day, imparted many basic Vaishnava cooking and kitchen precepts. Further, while you single-handedly prepared a multi-course wedding feast, I watched you chop, peel, mince, stir, mix, fry, bray and so on—often times using your hands rather than tools as equipment, noted your kitchen ease, focus, and expertise. I was fascinated by everything about you. In this connection, I pray to share these things that you have taught me, especially with the younger generation, now poised on the launching pad, in hopes that they may take these instructions to heart.

I remember that the wedding ceremony that evening--a fire blazed in the dead center of your small living room that we had in only 24 hours previously; smoke so thick I was coughing; chanting Sanskrit prayers and hymns. Again I watched you, this time in a 'Swamiji' role of officiating priest, as you lovingly gave away my only sister in marriage to an old friend--both only initiated devotees for two weeks. In this connection, I pray that all vows and prayers spoken to you at a sacred fire yagna be followed purely.

I remember my third visit to your New York quarters yet the following day. At this time, you showed me a newly printed business card with your particulars of Founder-Acharya of ISKCON New York on one side and the Maha Mantra and scheduled temple functions on the reverse side. You designed the card, and seemed quite pleased with it, asked me to take several, and distribute them to my friends. As I lived on the west coast, I did so reluctantly.

In this connection, I pray to unreservedly distribute all that you have spoken or written, irregardless of friend or otherwise.

I remember attending your classes during my 10 day visit to New York-- your accent so thick it was hard to understand more than half of what you said. But I was instantly captivated by your melodious chanting of the Hare Krsna Maha Mantra. You played a set of bongo drums, or sometimes hand cymbals, and with your eyes mostly closed, seemed to go into a meditative trance while chanting. Most present seemed to imitate you, and get lost in the sound you created. In this connection, I pray to go ever deeper into Vaishnava prayer, Japa, Hari Kirtan, and shastra, meditating pointedly as I do so, in the shade of your presence.