

All Glory to Sri Sri Guru & Gauranga

Srila Govinda Maharaj Visits the London Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math

September 3 — September 13 2004

The festival is over, and sitting in the quiet of my room reflecting on the last week's events I feel strangely empty. Yesterday morning we saw our Divine Master, Sri Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Maharaj leave through the "Fast Track" channel of the departure gates at London Heathrow Airport as he began his journey across the oceans towards his Ashram and his devotees eagerly waiting upon his arrival at San Francisco International Airport, USA. The "reality" of my mundane existence floods back.



Just over one week ago we gathered to receive His Divine Grace from India on Friday September 3. Devotees from all over the UK and Europe eager to welcome the Acharyya of the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math and the inspiration of their spiritual lives.

Srila Gurudev arrived at Heathrow Airport that Friday afternoon about 35 minutes ahead of schedule. As usual his faithful driver Sriman Uddharan Prabhu was there to take him across London to his "home away from home", the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math, London Chapter situated in the busy East End of London on the now world famous "Green Street".

Although having just travelled 10 hours from Calcutta, Srila Gurudev was relaxed and strong. On past visits His Divine Grace would almost always snooze while travelling from the airport, but in the comfort of Uddharan Prabhu's luxurious limousine he was animated and playful the whole journey, talking and watching the London sites as they went.

He soon reached his London Math and crowds of devotees were there to welcome him. He graciously received a garland from his temple priest, Sriman Dwarakesh Prabhu, took darshan of their Lordships Sri Sri Guru Gauranga Radha Shyamasundar, spoke with the assembled devotees and then proceeded to his room. Within a few minutes he was again seated in his upstairs sitting room beaming with his radiant smile and telling the devotees of his happiness to again be in London at the Temple of his Srila Guru Maharaj, Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhar Maharaj.

The next morning His Divine Grace was the first to rise, and following the Mangal Arati again he was meeting with the devotees. At 9 am sincere seekers waiting for this chance, received the Holy Name of Krishna, the Maha Mantra from Srila Gurudev as they were initiated into the serving life of the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math.

Tuesday was Sri Krishna Janmastami and while we fasted, we feasted on the Hari Katha of Srila Govinda Maharaj. Assisted by the ever-inspiring discourses through out the week by His Holiness

Sripad Bhakti Sudhir Goswami Maharaj, Srila Gurudev blessed the assembled devotees by joining the congregation shortly before the holy hour of our Lord's appearance.

He sang, "Janama saphala ta'ra, krsna-darshana ya'ra, bhagye hoiyache eka-bara" (your birth will be successful should you have the fortune to have the darshan of Sri Krishna just once) by Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and he recited the Bhagavat slokas describing the appearance of Bhagavan Sri Krsnachandra. Shared this with us in English and sang "Jaya Radha-Madhava Kujabihari" to the delight of all the Vaishnavas and guests present. The curtains drew back and with loud shouts of "Jaya!", "Nitai Gaura Premanandi!" and with joyous kirtan we saw the murti of Sri Sri Guru Gauranga Radha Shyamasundar, effulgent in their new dress and garlanded with flowers and Tulasi manjaris. The devotees danced in happiness, filled with the wonder of their fortune.

The next day was the grand feast of Nanda Maharaj (Sri Nandotsava) and is also, as everyone knows, the most holy appearance day of Srila AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaj Prabhupad, the deliverer of Krishna Consciousness to the entire world.

Following Mangal Arati, Srila Govinda Maharaj graced us by sitting on the seat of Vyas and spoke about that great, empowered avatar of Divinity, Srila Prabhupad. As a young man Srila Govinda Maharaj lived with Srila Prabhupad like his own son. Under the direction of Srila Sridhar Maharaj, he heard Bhagavad-Gita every day from Srila Swami Maharaj (then Abhay Charan Babu) and accompanied him for preaching in and around Calcutta. The first Calcutta Branch of Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math was in rooms above Prabhupad's chemist laboratory and Srila Govinda Maharaj was the first distributor of "Back to Godhead" magazine apart from Prabhupad himself.

We heard so many of Prabhupad's glories from Srila Gurudev this morning; from his unique perspective, and we felt that Srila Prabhupad had himself appeared in our small temple.

The prasadam that day was incredible. The devoted cooks, Srimati Sri Lekha didi, Srimati Divya Sari didi (and her three wonderful daughters, Damayanti, Ashapura & Isvari), Srimati Saraswati didi and Srimati Isvari didi (and all the other cooks and contributors) made a

feast that was literally not of this (mundane) world. Srila Gurudev's table overflowed with extraordinary foods. With a great smile His Divine grace said, "London is my favourite place to take prasadam and especially on the appearance day of Srila Swami Maharaj, then I know that





prasadam must be of a superior kind. Today we are tasting the grace of Srila Prabhupad.”

The rest of the week was so wonderful. His Divine Grace kept steady health the whole time. Many new men and women received initiation, including many of the children of the local devotees. On Saturday morning there was a fire yajna for those who had received gayatri diksha and in the afternoon the children performed a delightful play for the pleasure of Srila Gurudev and the Vaishnavas—“The Birth of Lord Krishna.”

Throughout his visit Srila Govinda Maharaj stressed again and again that his only unhappiness was that there was no room in our small ashram for the devotees to comfortably meet him. And it was true; devotees were literally standing on the street outside. Every inch of space was filled with devotees trying to get the association of this saintly follower of Sri Chaitanyadev. The intensity of Srila Gurudev’s desire for a larger centre was acute and everyone felt it. Surely our Lord will see the desire of His servant and even in spite of our inability and although we may be unqualified and unfit we pray a new building will appear very soon.

All too quickly the 10 days were over and we were sitting in the Airport desperate for every few minutes more of holy company. The Guru and his disciples, sitting around him drawing the inquisitive glances of the busy people as they head toward their planes. A few Indian men and women fold their palms and touch their foreheads as they go by, recognising a sadhu and feeling their day blessed for that, but most see us as an odd spectacle and I wonder what they must be thinking. Then the man from United Airlines is there with a wheelchair to take our Master to passport control and on. “I have been so happy to once again get the opportunity to stay in London, and now I am proceeding to a new place. But in a short time I will again come here by the mercy of Mahaprabhu. Jai Om Vishnupad Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj ki jai, London Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math ki jai, all the London devotees ki jai, all the World devotees ki jai.”

“Jai Om Vishnupad Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Dev-Goswami Maharaj ki jai!” I cheer and the devotees all resound “JAI!” as Srila Gurudev disappears behind the glass walls towards the departure lounge and the fortunate and venerable Vaishnavas awaiting His Divine Grace at San Francisco. Bon voyage Srila Gurudev. May the Lord and His devotees keep you and may we get your company again very soon.

Praying and trying to serve you in our separation. Maintaining our hope and getting our strength from the company of your devotees we continue our lives in good faith.

Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Dev-Goswami Maharaj ki jai!

A humble servant of your servants

Devashis das

September 14 2004