

Gold, Guns, and God

Swami Bhaktipada and the West Virginia Hare Krishnas

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“The devil and the devotee reside in the same body.”—Kirtanananda Swami ¹

Chapter 35: The secret homosexual society: the inner sanctum.

Was it possible that Cheryl Wheeler was correct in her suspicion that her son with Hayagriva had been sexually molested by Kirtanananda? Certainly her husband's behavior was not up to Vaisnava standards; he became known throughout ISKCON as a major sense enjoyer; one who consistently breaks the regulative principles, especially regarding illicit sex and intoxication. Satsvarupa put it mildly when he wrote, "Over the years, Hayagriva has experienced his own difficulties."²

From the very earliest days of New Vrindaban, one wonders whether Hayagriva and Kirtanananda ever strictly followed the regulative principles of Krishna consciousness. Although before meeting Prabhupada in July, 1966, they had been practicing homosexuals (with a marked preference for teenage partners), it is reasonable to assume that both followed the regulative principles while living at Swamiji's 26 Second Avenue ashram.

Prabhupada made it known that homosexuality was demoniac.

. . . the homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane male in the ordinary course of life. (SB 3.20.26, purport)

The world is degrading to the lowest status, even less than animal. The animal also do not support homosex. They have never sex life between male to male. They are less than animal. People are becoming less than animal. This is all due to godlessness. (Conversation with the GBC, May 25, 1972, Los Angeles)

I am very sorry that you have taken to homosex. It will not help you advance in your attempt for spiritual life. In fact, it will only hamper your advancement. I do not know why you have taken to such abominable activities. What can I say? Anyway, try to render whatever service you can to Krishna. Even though you are in a very degraded condition Krishna, being pleased with your service attitude, can pick you up from your fallen state. You should stop this homosex immediately. It is illicit sex, otherwise, your chances of advancing in spiritual life are nil. Show Krishna you are serious, if you are. (Letter to: Lalitananda, Hawaii 26 May, 1975)

Novice devotees often follow very strictly for a few months or a few years, but all devotees' vows are eventually tested in time. Hayagriva and Kirtanananda's vows were tested after about one year of following the regulative principles and they failed the test. Kirtanananda resumed smoking marijuana after he left ISKCON in September 1967 and it is probable that he also resumed his homosexual relationship with Hayagriva and other partners. When Kirtanananda and Hayagriva returned to ISKCON in July 1968 it is unlikely that they renewed their vows and following strictly. How could they—living alone without association in the wilderness of West Virginia?

This suspicion is corroborated by several devotees. One early New Vrindaban resident described the very curious relationship between Kirtanananda and Hayagriva:

I visited New Vrindaban during the winter of 1968 and lived there briefly in the spring of 1969 and 1970. At that time Kirtanananda and Hayagriva appeared to still be lovers. They acted very curiously when around each other: like a husband and wife. Hayagriva was the dominant partner.

During my first visit to New Vrindaban, Hayagriva was standing at the bottom of the stairs at the old farmhouse on the top of the hill and screaming: “Ham! Ham!” Kirtanananda responded with a girlish giggle, and then in a high-pitched flirtatious voice, he replied, “Yes, Mr. Wheeler?” The word “Ham” is, of course, a double entendre. . . .

I believe that Kirtanananda and Hayagriva continued their homosexual relationship even as late as 1968 and 1969 and perhaps 1970. I do not know what occurred after that.^{3 4}

One of New Vrindaban’s neighbors who was friends with Hayagriva since 1968 remembered, “Howard. . . he has never hidden the fact that he was a blatant homosexual, and that his preference was younger men in sexual partners.”⁵

During 1969 in England, Umapati dasa verbally chastised Hayagriva for his homosexual activities. Hanuman Swami recalled, “When I was in England in 1969 (living at John Lennon estate) I witnessed a very big verbal fight, where Umapati was trying to lecture Howard ‘that he should stop his homosexual lifestyle.’ Howard got real pissed. I was 19 and just could not understand then, but it does make sense now.”⁶

During May 1972, Hayagriva had so many difficulties that he resigned from his position as president of New Vrindaban. Kirtanananda said, “Hayagriva, unfortunately, being an only child, was also a spoiled child and never very disciplined. He had great difficulty controlling his senses, and that included staying in New Vrindaban, staying in one place. He used to travel a great deal. He used to, as a matter of habit, spend the summer months in New Vrindaban when it was nice weather-wise, and then he would take off for Mexico or India or other places for the rest of the year.”⁷

While Hayagriva vacationed in Mexico and India he found dark-skinned young men with whom he enjoyed sporting pleasures. One devotee who spent time with Bhaktipada and Hayagriva in India claimed, “It was known that Hayagriva preferred dark-skinned young men.”⁸

Hayagriva was known at New Vrindaban for his parties with young dark-skinned Mexican men. He even boasted to his friends about his young homosexual adventures. Randall Gorby said that Hayagriva called his Mexican boys “his treasure of the Sierra Madre.”

Q. Did Mr. Wheeler state to you that he engaged in sex with any one or more of these Mexicans?

A. Yes, he did. In fact, he was rather proud of it. He referred to a couple of them as his “treasure of the Sierra Madre” when he brought them.⁹

Sometimes Hayagriva brought his young Mexican lovers to Gorby’s home in Bethany, West Virginia, where they would spend the night sporting together in Gorby’s guest house. Randall remembered:

Q: Would you engage in lengthy discussions with Mr. Wheeler at your house?

A: At all times.

Q: And would he tell you at your house, and at other times, about say his Mexican trips?

A: Yes, in fact, he would, whoever the one that was selected that he brought back personally, he would come by the house, and I had a structure in the back of the house, a

sleeping structure, because I have a large family and they have a lot of friends, and we had a sleeping structure in the back, and they would stay overnight, and go on down to the community the next day. He was proud of his “accomplishments,” and he would come by to show me.¹⁰

Janmastami recalled one time in 1979 when Acyutananda Swami visited New Vrindaban and chastised Hayagriva for partying with Mexican men. Hayagriva responded by blowing cigar smoke into Acyutananda’s face. Janmastami recalled:

I was drilling a water well in the front yard over at “Lake Visvadika,” the name Vahna had given the property that his father had purchased for him over at Talaban. . . . Anyway, he needed water and I was to drill the well so that he could move in.

In the interim, Hayagriva, who had just returned from a trip to Mexico with two carloads of Mexicans, was staying in that house. He brought two carloads of potential laborers to help with the construction at the Palace. Some of them it turned out were only there because of their attraction for Hayagriva himself and they moved in with him over at Talaban. The rest stayed in various locations and did a large portion of the cement work at the Palace as Atmabhu’s construction force. They mostly stayed at the two story red house, half way up the hill at Bahulaban, the old brahmacarini ashram. Those who stayed with Hayagriva over at Talaban were all party animals, homosexually inclined, and they consumed vast amounts of intoxicants, heavy to beer and hard liquor.

While I was drilling, the music always blasting from inside, Acyutananda Swami was coming over on almost a daily basis. He was writing a cookbook and Hayagriva was supposed to proofread it before it went to press. He was very anxious about getting it done but Hayagriva was not quite as excited as he was. Acyutananda came by and one of the times that I saw, the Mexican boys were inside, in their jockey shorts racing around the brim of a large sombrero.

Hayagriva was smoking a big fat cigar when he answered the door and Acyutananda went in to a long sermon about how Srila Prabhupada would not be pleased by Hayagriva’s behavior. Hayagriva listened patiently for about five minutes and then after taking a long drag on his cigar, he blew a long stream of smoke right into Acyutananda’s face and said “Thanks for the lecture, Swami!” and then he closed the door. Acyutananda came over to me and asked “What should I do?” and I just told him, “I guess you just have to wait.”

Acyutananda did wind up waiting about three or four weeks at New Vrindaban and I don’t know if Hayagriva ever really did the proof reading or not.¹¹

The inner sanctum.

In public, Bhaktipada preached about the evils of sex, but in private he indulged his senses. New Vrindaban had an underground secret homosexual society of perhaps a dozen or more practicing homosexuals and pedophiles. Soon after I joined the community in August 1978 I was unwittingly auditioned for membership in this secret society. At the time I did not know what was happening; I thought I happened to overhear a mock debate about homosexuality, but years later, after hearing reliable accounts of some of Bhaktipada’s sexual escapades, I understood I had been tested to see if I was open to gay sex.

In an article for the *Sampradaya Sun*, I wrote:

One experience at New Vrindaban which I never forgot, but did not completely understand until recently, was when Hayagriva, in the company of Kirtanananda and some other male devotees, attempted to ascertain my opinion about gay sex so they might invite me into the New Vrindaban practicing homosexual's club. It was in the summer of 1978, a few days after I had become freshly shaved. At that time I was an attractive 160-lb., nearly-six-foot-tall, physically-fit twenty-two-year old with a great tan, as at New Vrindaban the men often went shirtless in the summer heat.

I was walking from Bahulaban to Prabhupada's Palace-under-construction, when Kirtanananda pulled over in his jeep and asked, "Want a ride?" I replied in the affirmative and hopped in the back of his truck, squeezing in with the spare tire and a few bags of cement. Kirtanananda was driving. Hayagriva sat in the passenger's seat. The back seat had two or three other male devotees.¹² I squatted in the trunk with the spare tire and cement bags, trying to get comfortable.

There was an interesting conversation going on about homosexuality. Hayagriva was acting as a protagonist, proclaiming—in a reserved uncommitted manner—the glories of the gay lifestyle: "Some say that homosexuality is not a sin; it is an inborn genetic disposition which results in sexual attraction between members of the same sex. I hear it can be a stimulating and fulfilling activity between consenting and likeminded parties engendering great pleasure and even ecstasy."

Another devotee in the back seat, who I do not remember, acted as the antagonist. This devotee replied to Hayagriva, "Not necessarily so. The scriptures condemn the practice of homosexuality as immoral and unhealthy and an abomination to God and man. Even the Bible with all its faults soundly condemns those who practice these gross and disgusting activities. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God as punishment to those who perpetuated these unnatural acts contrary to God and Nature."

But Hayagriva did not seem convinced, and he defended his position, "Yet some say these scriptures are based on primitive and antiquated assumptions and superstitions about sex; that sex is meant only for procreation. Yet the desire for homosexual relations is not chosen by the individual, but is God-given. Why should not those who are blessed with this orientation be allowed to enjoy sexual pleasure with their own kind, as heterosexuals are permitted to enjoy intimate relations with the opposite kind?"

Kirtanananda conspicuously remained silent during the entire conversation as Hayagriva and the other devotee argued back and forth. Suddenly the conversation paused, and Hayagriva looked at me and boomed in his stentorian voice: "Bhakta Hank? What do you think about this? What is your opinion?"

I reflected a moment before answering. I had several gay friends in college, even a roommate. Some of my professors were also gay. I knew this because they thought I was hot. Three or four college professors and at least two students had expressed their desires to have a sexual relationship with me. Although I was flattered, I had to respectfully decline their propositions one after another, as I had no innate sexual attraction for men.

I replied to Hayagriva's question with confidence and boldness, offering my frank viewpoint on the matter, and hoping to please Kirtanananda and the assembled Vaisnavas, as I had already heard several classes by Kirtanananda condemning ANY type of sex life: "I think homosexuality is GROSS with a capital G! I once had a college professor who asked me to sleep with him, and I couldn't look him in the eye again! I lost so much respect for him. Maybe for others it's okay, but NOT FOR ME!"

Hayagriva muttered a long “Hmmmnnn,” and that was it; the conversation abruptly ended. There was a strained and uncomfortable silence in the vehicle. I was a bit curious why the conversation had stopped so suddenly, as I thought the discussion was interesting. Several times I had heard devotees engage in mock debates; one taking the personalist and another taking the impersonalist side. I thought this discussion was like that. But there was no conclusion to the debate. Everyone remained silent for the remainder of the ride.

After a minute or two Kirtanananda abruptly pulled over in front of the Palace and I hopped out to do my service of gold-leafing the column capitals in the kirtan hall. I thought nothing about the conversation again for many years; until recently. At the time, I did not know what was happening, but now I understand that I was being tested. Gay men thought I was hot. If I had responded favorably to Hayagriva’s question, I believe I would have been invited to experience an entire realm of underground New Vrindaban life which may have existed from the very beginning of the community ten years earlier in 1968.¹³

Some others claimed that children in the community were abused both physically and sexually. Naranarayana dasa, who first visited New Vrindaban in 1968 and lived there during 1969 and 1970, believed that the first two boys (young teenagers) who came to New Vrindaban had been molested by Hayagriva, who, he claimed: “was frequently a pedophile. He actually destroyed the lives of two devotee boys: [G] and [B]. Later when he was living in Ensenada, in Baja California, Mexico, he had a thing going with some of the boys there.”¹⁴

Labangalatika devi dasi, who lived at New Vrindaban from 1969 to 1972, claimed, “Hayagriva to me is a very dangerous . . . child molester. . . . He did a lot of service by Srila Prabhupada’s mercy, which is for his eternal benefit, but . . . it should be known what he had become and what things he did. He molested [B], Silavati’s son . . . for sex.”¹⁵

Another early resident, Puskara dasa, who lived in New Vrindaban in 1971, also claimed that Hayagriva molested [B] and [G].¹⁶

Old habits die hard.

While most residents of New Vrindaban were aware of Hayagriva’s tendency for sense enjoyment (when I was a new brahmachari, the Old Vrindaban Temple President, Atmabhu Swami, forbade me to associate with Hayagriva or others like him), few suspected the unthinkable: that Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada—considered by the Brijabasis to be the dearest disciple of Srila Prabhupada, the most renounced ISKCON sannyasi, a pure devotee and self-realized soul—had a long history of sexual deviations even while he was an alleged sannyasi.

Kirtanananda bathes naked boys.

In 1970, while traveling with Prabhupada in India, Kirtanananda started a daily program of bathing naked boys at the Calcutta temple. This caused anxiety and dissension amongst his godbrothers and they tried to convince him to stop. Prabhupada himself had to personally mediate in the affair and end Kirtanananda’s “bathing program.” Hanuman Swami remembered:

I met Kirtanananda for the first time in Calcutta. There were just six of us devotees living in a house with Prabhupada, and one day Tamal-Krishna got very upset because Kirtanananda was bringing hordes of boys inside the house, bathing them, feeding them, and then sending them away. This was Kirtanananda's daily program.

Tamal-Krishna thought that the neighbors would wonder, "What are those Westerners doing with our boys in that house? Are they pedophiles; are our children being molested?" Tamal-Krishna tried to express his concerns to Kirtanananda and the two got into a big shouting argument. Later that very day, Tamal went to see Prabhupada about it; Prabhupada was in complete agreement with Tamal and in a subsequent meeting told Kirtanananda to end his program.

Kirtanananda—who was sitting directly in front of Prabhupada with only Tamal and me in the room—became insolent and questioned Prabhupada, "Why do you give preference to Tamal-Krishna above anybody else in the movement these days?" Kirtanananda badgered Prabhupada, asking two, three, four time the same question in a row very quickly, "Why him, why him, why him?"

I was a new devotee at the time, and I was horrified to hear Kirtanananda actually raising his voice and interrogating his spiritual master. I had never heard of such a thing.

Finally Kirtanananda stopped speaking, and waited for Prabhupada's answer. Prabhupada sat there for a very long moment, then slowly but firmly said, "I am like the sun. The sun is the sun; it shines for everyone. It all depends on how close you want to come; how much you want to expose yourself to the sun."

And that was the end of the argument. Kirtanananda was stunned; he became mute, speechless. He was unable to reply.¹⁷

During his travels in India, Kirtanananda Swami also tried to convince a twenty-year-old brahmachari godbrother to have sex with him. Hanuman Swami recalled:

Kirtanananda made sexual advances toward me when I was twenty years old. That happened around the same time that we were in Calcutta together, in 1970. It was the first time I had the occasion to associate closely with Prabhupada, as I had just opened a temple in Paris with Umapati and I had been living basically alone with Umapati for a year.

In Calcutta, Kirtanananda took me apart in the ISKCON house and told me that Tibetan monks in the monasteries were permitted to have sex between monks. (He told me this in a low quiet voice near my face, which I know now was a complete lie.) After a few times, I made it clear to him that I was totally ignorant of the Tibetan monks' way of life and I was not interested in learning about it. I was serving directly Prabhupada now.

Looking back at it now, it was a come-on move on me. In those days I was a new devotee—I had no idea that Keith was gay.¹⁸

Kirtanananda explained some of the difficulties of long-term celibacy. He said:

Prabhupada said that women are like fire and men are like butter. You put the two together and the result is sure. We used to laugh about that. We used to say, "Prabhupada, we can be around women and it doesn't bother us at all. We're so jaded."

But as you become a little purified or refrain from illicit sex for some time, then you say, "I'm not as invulnerable as I thought I was." When one is very jaded, it may appear that way, because your senses are dulled by excessive gratification. But when the senses are

again denied for some time, they will again be very much subject [to temptation]. So our boys have to be very careful, otherwise after being in Krishna Consciousness for some time, they will again be agitated for sex.¹⁹

Boys at New Vrindaban.

When Kirtanananda Swami returned to New Vrindaban from India, his homosexual and pedophilic tendencies continued. He secretly and routinely molested boys and young men in the community and personally picked boys from the gurukula to stay with him overnight in his cabin at Bahulaban. Only a few select boys were invited. This was common knowledge. The *Brijabasi Spirit* explained: “When Maharaja was living in his cabin, it was considered a great privilege to get to stay in the back room. Only a handful of selected boys got the opportunity.”²⁰

New Vrindaban residents assumed that Kirtanananda gave the boys his personal association and taught them about Krishna consciousness. Little did the naïve Brijabasis understand what really happened to the “handful of selected boys” behind closed doors.²¹

One boy claimed: “I got molested by Kirtanananda. I couldn’t speak about it to anyone for years until I got counseling. So when I saw the post [on the *Sampradaya Sun*] glorifying this madman [Kirtanananda], I got nauseated. . . . I still hurt from what Kirtanananda did to me but I’m going on with my life.”²²

In 1978 Kirtanananda left the little cabin at Bahulaban and moved into a suite on the fourth floor of the administration building at Bahulaban where the men’s ashram was located. One eleven-year-old boy explained what happened to him and a friend in Maharaja’s apartment:

I came to New Vrindaban in August 1978 with my mother and was immediately put in the gurukula. I was about eleven years old at the time. The older boys, such as Samba, Kesidhama and I, would go to school at Nandagram in the mornings and do service at Bahulaban during the afternoons. Most of the time we lived at Old Nandagram, but one summer Kirtanananda had us stay in the brahmachari ashram. After finishing our afternoon services, we’d shower up and attend the evening aroti.

I remember several times, Kirtanananda invited me and another boy to take a shower in his personal bathroom in his suite on the fourth floor of the ashram building. He had a brand new bathtub which was recently installed. To my surprise, he told us to shower together, completely naked, and he insisted that we keep the shower curtain open! He stared at us the whole time. I was embarrassed and extremely uncomfortable.²³

Bathing naked was highly irregular behavior for ISKCON devotees. When a new brahmachari joined the New Vrindaban community, one of the first things he was taught was modesty; the genitals should always be covered, even while showering. When men and boys bathed in the bath house, their *kaupins* (a loincloth called “Brahmin underwear”) were never removed and remained hanging from the front, to cover the genitals.

After Bhaktipada moved to the house by Prabhupada’s Palace around 1980 and when his new “dream house” was built on a hill near Old Vrindaban in 1986, he continued inviting youngsters to stay with him. One boy remembered, “As we grew older we surrounded

him [Bhaktipada] at mangal aroti, and a few of us would go to his house and stay there, sometimes for a week on end, when he had his new house at Vrindaban.”²⁴

Bhaktipada’s sexual molestation of boys and young men continued apparently without interruption and may have increased in frequency as the years passed. One mother of a gurukula boy remembered a revealing conversation she had with her seven-year-old son who exclaimed: “He [Bhaktipada] fondled my genitals!”

I joined in Columbus, on May 1, 1979 when Narada-Muni was temple president. I gave them \$6,000 right off the bat. My seven-year-old son, [D] went directly to Nandagram [gurukula] after spending a week with Bhaktipada at Bahulaban probably during June or July. I stayed in the Columbus Temple until December 1979, when I went to visit my son at the New Vrindaban gurukula.

When I saw him, he proudly exclaimed to me: “Did you know that I had a great honor when I first came here!? Kirtanananda selected me out of all the kids to be his personal servant and live with him for a whole week. Do you know what he did? He fondled my genitals!”

I was shocked with disbelief, as I had never used that word “fondle” in my son’s presence. Where did he learn it? However I dismissed his complaint as a weird manifestation of a child’s fantastic imagination and chastised him: “Don’t make up stories like that! Kirtanananda Maharaja is a pure devotee. I don’t ever want to hear you say nonsense things like that again!”²⁵

The boy’s mother’s quick condemnation of her child’s statement was not unusual; parents often deny a boy’s accusation or admission of sexual abuse. A Quebec sociologist specializing in gender and sexuality explained:

The reaction of the young person’s family to his disclosure of the abuse preoccupies him as much, if not more, than the threats that are designed to keep him quiet: will they believe me or will they believe the denials of the other? Will they really do something to help me or will they punish me for having talked about it?

Unfortunately, this last fear is often borne out. A large number of the young men I questioned were not believed, while several were indeed punished for having offered up such “insanities” concerning a brother, father, uncle, grandfather, or other close family member. Even among the youngest, there are those whose families have made them feel so guilty, if not rejected, after their disclosure of abuse that their family ties have been all but severed. One adolescent was accused of dirtying the memory of his grandfather, who had recently died. This boy is now suicidal. . . .

The anticipated disbelief, denial, and rejection that have pushed these boys into silence for so long often become too real once the abuse is disclosed. It is not surprising that, after such experiences, these young boys sometimes lock themselves up in their silence and pretend that nothing has happened to them. . . .

In order to get over the pain and repetition of the abuse, the child, adolescent, or young adult will more or less consciously try to forget the events. Here we find: total or partial, permanent or temporary amnesia concerning the abuse, or some of its elements, or even the stage of childhood in which it happened. Keeping the traumatism in the memory would seem to be too painful.²⁶

The Association for the Protection of Vaisnava Children (APVC) confirmed that children who reported abuse were often scolded, threatened or beaten by school or temple authorities. One scholar who has documented child abuse in ISKCON wrote: “The APVC has received dozens of reports from former ISKCON children, describing how they disclosed the abuse or tried to tell about it, but instead of meeting with concerned responsible action, were beaten and threatened by school and temple authorities, or at best ignored. Often they were scolded and told that it was offensive to speak in such a way about their teacher and a Vaisnava Brahmin. Obviously such responses discouraged and intimidated them and others from revealing the abuse, and this caused re-victimization of the children by the organization itself.”²⁷

Young boys massage Bhaktipada in the temple.

After 1983, when the new temple was built behind Prabhupada’s Palace, young boys often surrounded and massaged Bhaktipada’s feet, legs, hands, arms and shoulders while he sat on his teakwood chair in the temple room. None of the Brijabasis, with the exception of a few such as Hayagriva and Gopinatha, suspected that Bhaktipada was sexually attracted to boys and young men. New Vrindaban residents concluded that Bhaktipada had only fatherly feelings toward the children.

The Brijabasis observed Bhaktipada in the temple daily receiving affection from the gurukula boys, but they didn’t see the perverted pastimes of a pedophile, they saw a pure devotee allowing little children to get special mercy which would help them go back to Godhead. There was no secrecy involved; Bhaktipada received this affection from the boys, in full view of their parents, right in the temple room. Obviously, they thought, he was not trying to hide any illicit activities. They reasoned: Jesus Christ instructed, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”²⁸

New Vrindaban News described one noon aroti at the temple, the gurukula boys who massaged Bhaktipada’s feet and legs, and the loving glances that Bhaktipada showered on the boys:

There is already a large crowd waiting close up at the altar. “Bhaktipada! Bhaktipada! Jaya Srila Bhaktipada!” All the devotees shout. . . . All the devotees are pleased and smiling. . . . Srila Bhaktipada is the beautiful gem, and the devotees the golden setting.

Srila Bhaktipada, . . . gaz[es] smilingly at Their Lordships, . . . [and] sits in his own teakwood chair. . . . All though the aroti, the devotees pack up tightly around Srila Bhaktipada, chanting and dancing ecstatically without cessation. Srila Bhaktipada begins exhibiting different moods. Sometimes he smiles sweetly. Looking at the deities he appears to become stunned. . . .

Then he would look lovingly at the Gurukula boys who were rubbing his feet and calves, and he rubs their heads in reciprocation. Again he glances at all the devotees with his luminous eyes that sometimes appear meditative, stunned, or shy.²⁹

A *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter, during a visit to New Vrindaban, described the morning service in the temple, Bhaktipada’s arrival and the affection shown to him by the boys:

The lives of the people in the New Vrindaban City of God seem peaceful, beginning each day in the Temple of Understanding with praises to their god, Krishna, and to their leader, Swami Bhaktipada.

The scene at 5 a.m. last Monday [November 16, 1987]: About 200 men, women and children divide according to sex on opposite sides of the temple, and with drums and brass cymbals begin their morning worship.

The chanting begins slowly and builds until the group is a mass of jumping, gyrating Krishna devotees. After it has begun, a small, robed man with a shaking pot belly, walking with the help of a staff and the protection of a large German shepherd dog, enters the room from a rear door and sits on a small throne in front of the main altar.

This is the 51-year-old Bhaktipada. When he is seated, small boys with nearly shaved heads wearing half-robos and T-shirts stating “Srila Bhaktipada’s Honor Student,” gather around him. They sit on the floor, holding his feet, or stand behind him, touching his head and arms.

The dancers direct their attention to him. They are his servants, and he is their representative for god on Earth.³⁰

Bhaktipada’s Indian disciples were particularly affectionate towards their spiritual master and sometimes competed with each other to massage him. During a visit to Bombay, Nityodita recalled, “Wherever Srila Bhaktipada is, he gives his darshan freely to whoever wants it, but in Bombay, his darshan potency seems to expand unlimitedly. He totally gives himself and makes himself available to the devotees. Just like when he sits down in his room, one devotee begins massaging his right foot, another massages his left foot, one devotee grabs his right arm, and another the left. The next devotee gives him a head massage—until every extremity seems taken. Then another devotee might come to massage his calves, so sometimes he has six or seven devotees squeezing him all over, simultaneously. . . . I’ve seen Srila Bhaktipada sit there with a smile on his face, preaching. He appears to be simply a receptacle for the devotees’ love for Krishna.”³¹

Nityananda dasa (Nico Kuyt), the former president of the New Orleans temple and the New Talavan farm in southern Mississippi, recalled, “I came to New Vrindaban several times between 1981 and 1986, and Kirtanananda Swami would give me the tour. Once he did so with [S] riding on his lap in the jeep. Weird. He also offered me as many wives as I wanted if I came to New Vrindaban with my incense business. I was shocked.”³²

“Just as I love boys, they love me.”

In November or December 1986, Jane Wallace—the host for the one-hour weekly CBS television show “West 57th Street”—came to New Vrindaban with a camera crew to interview and film Bhaktipada for a segment of the show about New Vrindaban. They filmed an aroti at the temple and focused on Bhaktipada who was surrounded by a dozen young gurukula boys massaging his head, shoulders, arms, legs and feet. Some of the boys who were interviewed later said they “worshipped” Bhaktipada. When Wallace asked Bhaktipada about the boys during her interview, he explained, “That is love. Just as I love boys, they love me.”³³

The *Moundsville Echo* reported on the West 57th Street program, “Bhaktipada was also asked about the statements made by young boys at the commune who said they

worshipped Bhaktipada. One of the boys was shown rubbing the Swami's foot. 'That is love,' Bhaktipada replied in the interview. 'Just as I love boys, they love me.'"³⁴

Jane Wallace was disturbed by what appeared to her to be homosexual pedophilia. When she interviewed residents of New Vrindaban and expressed her concerns, the Brijabasis replied, "Bhaktipada is a pure devotee and he is our guru." She couldn't understand why they were glorifying someone who appeared to be a homosexual pedophile.

Later, during subsequent filming for the New Vrindaban episode for West 57th Street, Wallace interviewed Sulocana's best friend, Puranjana, in Berkeley, California, and spoke to him about her concerns. Puranjana remembered:

I was contacted by a representative of the CBS television news broadcast called "West 57th Street." This show was basically another version of the top rated "Sixty Minutes" show. When I met Jane Wallace she seemed like the very intelligent and resourceful type, and no wonder since she takes after her father, Mike Wallace, a top reporter for CBS news. She said that before she talked to me she wanted to show me filmed footage from New Vrindaban. There was Kirtanananda, covered, or really smothered, by the hands of little boys who were all massaging him simultaneously while he sat in his sacred (?) seat.

Jane asked me rather bluntly, "He's a homosexual, am I right?" I replied, "Yes, Kirtanananda is a homosexual. He keeps a lot of these boys in his cottage, and he has one boy riding on his lap all day long in his Jeep. There has been a story circulating for years that he has one of these boys in his sleeping bag at night. He likes little boys."

Jane then said, "Thank God, I am so glad that I met you. All the other Krishnas that I've met so far kept telling me that Kirtanananda is a pure devotee, and he is their guru. It seems like the whole purpose of your movement is to worship homosexuals? So it is good to hear that this is not what the movement was supposed to be about. And I can say this much, that if some homosexual sat himself in some big chair in the front of my Church, the way this one is sitting in your Church, I would go up there myself and personally pull that man off of that chair. And I would not care what happened to me, I would never tolerate this for two seconds in my Church. Why are your people allowing this?"³⁵

During Bhaktipada's 1987 First Amendment Freedom Tour, he liked to take young boys with him to keep him company during long drives in his car. When he traveled to Cincinnati in late-July 1987, a newspaper reporter specifically asked him about the two young boys in his car. The *Cincinnati Post* reported:

A smiling, pot-bellied man in a saffron robe sits cross-legged in the back of his black Cadillac limousine with a German shepherd attack dog and two young boys. A Bach fugue is playing on the stereo.

"The boys?" the smiling man says. "They're children of members of my community. I take a couple boys with me when I go out. It's an incentive for them. The best boys get to go with me."³⁶

Bhaktipada seemed to described himself in his 1988 book, *Joy of No Sex*, when he wrote about the roller coaster-ride of the chronic sexoholic, although at the time few could possibly imagine such an ironic scenario. Bhaktipada explained, "For most people, sex is a compulsion, cultivated by years of giving in to desire. Like an opiate, sex ceases to satisfy but cannot be given up. The sexoholic is hooked. Sex has become his second

nature, an integral part of his personality. He knows that he has lost control, but he won't admit it. Sometimes he prays to die in his sleep, hoping then that the madman possessing him will go away. But in that sleep of death what sexual dreams may come?"³⁷

In the same book, Bhaktipada described himself further, "If a religious man cannot control his sexual desires, he is called a hypocrite."³⁸

Few suspected.

Although Bhaktipada (and others) enjoyed the company of boys and young men, he also put on a good show of appearing to care for the children. After Sri Galim and [LM] were arrested for sexual child abuse, most devotees thought these two cases were anomalies. Some others who visited the community agreed that child abuse was rare at New Vrindaban.

For instance, a young woman, Sandy McElroy, a 52-year-old Wheeling resident and student at West Liberty State College in West Liberty, came to live at New Vrindaban for three months early in 1988 to gather research for a research paper for a course "Special Problems in Criminal Justice." She also spent much time with the children of New Vrindaban and helped to educate the children to recognize warning signs of sexual and physical abuse.

McElroy became convinced that child abuse and sexual molestation were rare in the community. She also met with Bhaktipada and she was charmed by his "intelligence," his "great personality" and his "nice smile." She could not imagine that Bhaktipada could ever hurt a child; in fact, she felt she understood why he was "loved by so many, especially the children." Sandy McElroy explained:

When I first came to the Hare Krishna Community I really did not know exactly what I wanted to do except to research an alternate lifestyle that I knew nothing about. . . . I only heard about how terrible the community was supposed to be—a harbor for criminals and illegal activities. . . . with all the bad publicity of murder, dead bodies, and child abuse. . . .

With all the accusations toward the community and Bhaktipada involving child sexual abuse, my intentions were to put together a Prevention Manual to help the kids, parents, and teachers. Bhaktipada gave me permission to continue on prevention and was very grateful that someone would take the time to care and help. He is very willing to do anything that will benefit the community and his people and to raise the standards of the community in any way possible. . . .

When I first met Swami Bhaktipada I expected to find a middle-aged "hippie" clad in a robe with japa beads in his hand with a wild look in his eye, as portrayed by the media. I was amazed to find a very educated man who was intelligent, had a great personality, and a nice smile that caught my eye. I never did find the wild look in his eyes, as all I found was Bhaktipada, the man and spiritual master. I can now understand why he is loved by so many, especially the Krishna children who look at Bhaktipada as a father or grandfather image. . . .

Even though the ashram is a controlled environment, I find it to be a very loving place. Kids are not spoiled and they respect adults and each other. . . . Krishna kids are warm, loving, caring, and have something to give the world, and teach us all to live with empathy. . . .

Kids are protected here and any type of abuse or neglect is rare. I believe that sexual abuse might occur in the fringes, as many people come from all walks of life and are not dedicated to God, but the other kids are supervised very well, which makes the chance less. The community and Bhaktipada do not condone child abuse in any form, and will take the steps to get rid of and file charges against any person that violates the rights of children. Children are the future and everyone here protects the children of the future who are the children of the “City of God.”³⁹

Bhaktipada’s personal favorite: adolescents.

Although Bhaktipada enjoyed the company of prepubescent boys, what he (and Hayagriva) really appreciated were young men “at the end of adolescence.” When Bhaktipada was interviewed by Jacob Young for a video documentary broadcast on West Virginia Public Television (1996), he expressed his appreciation for the all-attractive cowherd boy of Braja. Bhaktipada glorified the adolescent qualities of Krishna, “That boy is not an ordinary boy. [He’s] just at the end of adolescence; just where manhood begins; about sixteen to eighteen [years old]. Everything is in full development. No deterioration.”⁴⁰

Bhaktipada’s description of the glory of Krishna’s young manhood was uncanny in its resemblance to the description of Jimmy, the seventeen-year-old hustler who lived with Howard and Keith in New York City thirty years earlier. Howard described the boy, “I delight in having the boy with me again and in seeing that his beauty was only beginning to blossom and would be at its peak for a good while longer. A thing of beauty is a joy for five years, I think. Its loveliness decreases. It eventually passes into nothingness. Keith puts his hand on Jimmy’s knee.”⁴¹

For Bhaktipada, his appreciation of young men had changed little after thirty years of chanting Hare Krishna.

On September 10, 2000, after a sixteen-month investigation, ISKCON’s Child Protection Office determined that Kirtanananda had sexually molested boys. The CPO report declared, “Kirtanananda dasa committed sexual child abuse. Due to these transgressions, it is the determination of this panel that Kirtanananda is not permitted to have any contact with ISKCON or ISKCON-affiliated organizations for five years from the date of this Official Decision.”⁴²

Bhaktipada attended parties with Hayagriva and the Mexican workers.

In addition to prepubescent boys, it seemed Bhaktipada also enjoyed—and by most accounts preferred—the intimate company of post pubescent young men such as teenagers. He attended, in the company of Hayagriva, some of the parties hosted by the Mexican workers recruited by Hayagriva (many of whom were homosexual). At one party Bhaktipada became intoxicated, fell down and injured his knee or ankle, after which he had to use crutches to help him ambulate until he healed. Photographs, taken during the Palace dedication ceremonies, show Kirtanananda on crutches.

One Brijabasi, Tirtha dasa, remembered:

I learned that Hayagriva had revealed to some people that Kirtanananda was getting frisky with some of the young Mexican laborers. The Mexicans would throw some pretty

wild parties at their “house” from time to time. On at least one of those occasions Kirtanananda stopped by and the alleged incident(s) occurred. . .

It was sometime around 1979. I remember the incident because it was during that encounter [at the party with the Mexicans] that Kirtanananda somehow hurt one of his legs, severely twisting his ankle or knee. Following this he was laid up and walked with two canes for a time instead of his customary one cane. I heard of it from one of Hayagriva’s local friends, Randall Gorby. He said Hayagriva told him soon after it happened. He said Hayagriva was present during the incident.⁴³

On another occasion Tirtha remembered, “Kirtanananda’s longtime friend, Hayagriva, would at times succumb to the temptation of intoxication. While intoxicated his tongue loosened. In such a deluded state he revealed to his wife certain intimate details of secret trysts occurring in the community that he alone was privy to. Among them, that Kirtanananda was having homosexual affairs with youthful Mexican immigrant workers. Affairs that had been going on for some time. Even as he sat on the Vyasasana and initiated disciples. When one or more of the episodes began to unravel, Kirtanananda promptly sent the boys packing back to Mexico. Since they were all undocumented workers, no one was the wiser.”⁴⁴

Rumors were ignored.

Certainly the Brijabasis had been deceived by Bhaktipada: he was having illicit sex and taking intoxication in secret. Sometimes devotees heard rumors about Bhaktipada. Once a Brijabasi whispered to me that Bhaktipada attended parties with the Mexicans, but I dismissed it as rumor. I believed Bhaktipada was a pure devotee and I denied anything that I might see or hear which was contrary to my belief. We were taught that the spiritual master was above criticism. Prabhupada said that even if disciples see their spiritual master enter a liquor shop, they should assume he has some legitimate preaching business there. We were not permitted to doubt.

Prabhupada explained, “A devotee should not be disturbed by the activities of his spiritual master and should not try to criticize him. A devotee should be fixed in the conclusion that the spiritual master cannot be subject to criticism and should never be considered equal to a common man. Even if there seems to be some discrepancy according to an imperfect devotee’s estimation, the devotee should be fixed in the conviction that even if his spiritual master goes to a liquor shop, he is not a drunkard; rather, he must have some purpose in going there.”⁴⁵

Neither I, nor the mother of the seven-year-old boy, nor the other Brijabasis, were alone in our blind devotion to Bhaktipada. It seemed everyone believed he was a pure devotee, except for those few members of the secret homosexual inner sanctum like Hayagriva who knew him intimately. And because of our blind faith, we were really blind: blind to reality and living blissfully ignorant in our imaginary world of make-believe in the “Cult of Kirtanananda.”

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- ¹ Kirtanananda Swami, cited by Patita-Pavana dasa, from an informal conversation with brahmacharies at the New York City ISKCON temple at 61 Second Avenue (Summer of 1969).
- ² Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, "Foreword" to Hayagriva's *The Hare Krishna Explosion* (Palace Press: 1985), ix.
- ³ Naranarayan dasa, telephone conversation with the author (December 12, 2005).
- ⁴ A double entendre is a figure of speech similar to the pun, in which a spoken phrase can be understood in either of two ways. Most double entendres carry a sexual connotation.
- ⁵ Randall C. Gorby, *Before the Federal Grand Jury for the Northern District of West Virginia* (Elkins, West Virginia: September 18, 1986), 27.
- ⁶ Hanuman Swami (Henri Jolicoeur), e-mail to the author (September 29, 2011).
- ⁷ Kirtanananda Swami, from trial transcript, cited by Halasz & Halasz, court reporters, "United States of America, Plaintiff, v. CR 90-87 Keith Gordon Ham, Terry Sheldon, Steven Fitzpatrick, New Vrindaban Community, Inc., Govardhan, Inc., Cathedral of Healing, Inc., Defendants, Before: Honorable Robert R. Merhige, Jr., United States District Judge and a Jury, Day VII (March 19, 1991), Martinsburg, West Virginia, 1733.
- ⁸ [P], conversation with the author at a Chinese restaurant in Wheeling, West Virginia (September 14, 2003).
- ⁹ Randall C. Gorby, *Before the Federal Grand Jury for the Northern District of West Virginia* (Elkins, West Virginia: September 18, 1986), 43.
- ¹⁰ Randall C. Gorby, *Before the Federal Grand Jury for the Northern District of West Virginia* (Elkins, West Virginia: September 18, 1986), 65-66.
- ¹¹ Janmastami dasa, e-mail to the author (October 31, 2008).
- ¹² I would like to say that amongst these devotees were Sri Galim and Gopinatha, but I frankly do not remember.
- ¹³ This story is by the author, who first told this tale in an article, "Faith Is Blind And Ignorance Is Bliss," published by *The Sampradaya Sun* (March 20, 2007). See <http://hareKrishna.com/sun/editorials/03-07/editorials1372.htm>, accessed November 20, 2013.
- ¹⁴ Naranarayana dasa, from a telephone conversation with the author on August 31, 2004.
- ¹⁵ Labangalatika devi dasi, e-mail to her son Dwarkadisa dasa (June 19, 2014).
- ¹⁶ Puskar dasa, conversation with the author at New Vrindaban (May 10, 2008).
- ¹⁷ Hanuman Swami (Henri Jolicoeur), e-mail to the author (September 12, 2011).
- ¹⁸ Hanuman Swami (Henri Jolicoeur), e-mail to the author (February 11, 2012).
- ¹⁹ Kirtanananda Swami, cited in "Interview with Kirtanananda Swami (June 1973)," *Sadhana Bhakti* (manuscript in the New Vrindaban Archives), 20.
- ²⁰ Taru dasa, "Ashram Items," *Brijabasi Spirit*, vol. 5, no. 4 (July 1978), 16.
- ²¹ It should be noted that Kirtanananda lived in the Bahulaban cabin from about 1976 until 1978, when he moved his residence to the fourth floor of the newly-built administration/men's ashram building.
- ²² Jambavan dasa, "Reply to Janmastami dasa," *Sampradaya Sun* (August 9, 2008). <http://www.hareKrishna.com/sun/editorials/08-08/editorials3212.htm>, accessed November 20, 2013.
- ²³ Former New Vrindaban gurukula boy [L], from a telephone conversation with the author (July 21, 2003).
- ²⁴ Bhima Karma dasa, telephone conversation with the author (January 28, 2013).
- ²⁵ Deborah Houtchens, from a telephone conversation with the author (March 3, 2003).
- ²⁶ Michel Dorais, *Don't Tell: The Sexual Abuse of Boys*, 89, 95.
- ²⁷ David Wolf, "Child Abuse and the Hare Krishnas: History and Response," *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant and Maria L. Ekstrand (Columbia University Press: 2004), 330-331.
- ²⁸ Matthew 19:14.
- ²⁹ "The Real Thanksgiving," *New Vrindaban News* (c. December 1, 1985), 2.
- ³⁰ Edward Moran, "New Vrindaban: To Krishnas, West Virginia City Is Almost Heaven; Others Have Lower Opinion," *Philadelphia Daily News* (November 23, 1987).
- ³¹ Nityodita dasa, "On Tour With Srila Bhaktipada," *Brijabasi Spirit* (c. May 1983), 26.
- ³² Nityananda dasa, e-mail to the author (December 21, 2015).

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- ³³ Bhaktipada, cited by Ray Formanek, Jr., (Associated Press Writer), "Testimony Ends In Swami Trial," *Moundsville Daily Echo* (March 20, 1991).
- ³⁴ Ray Formanek, Jr., (Associated Press Writer), cited in "Testimony Ends In Swami Trial," *Moundsville Daily Echo* (March 20, 1991).
- ³⁵ Puranjana dasa, "ISKCON HISTORY, detailed account, part 3," <http://www.hareKrishna.org/gbc/black/history3.htm> (accessed May 16, 2014).
- ³⁶ David Wecker, "God is for us. Though he walks in shadow of deaths, Swami fears not," *Cincinnati Post* (undated, c. late July 1987).
- ³⁷ Bhaktipada, *Joy of No Sex* (1988), 1.
- ³⁸ Bhaktipada, *Joy of No Sex* (1988), 14.
- ³⁹ Sandy McElroy, "I Found Warmth and Love," *New Vrindaban Worldwide* (undated, c. 1988-1989).
- ⁴⁰ Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada, quoted from Jacob Young's video, *Holy Cow! Swami* (West Virginia Educational Broadcasting Authority: 1996).
- ⁴¹ Howard Wheeler, Volume II, autobiographical unpublished manuscript. (July 1963, 1-9).
- ⁴² "Official Decision on the Case of Kirtanananda dasa," ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (September 10, 2000).
- ⁴³ Tirtha, letter to the author (October 12, 2004).
- ⁴⁴ T. A. Drescher, *100 Monkeyz: A Monkey Memoir* (Taos Press: East Lyme, Connecticut: 2013), 148-149.
- ⁴⁵ Prabhupada, *Caitanya Charitamrita, Antya-lila*, 3.11, purport