

# STAY HIGH FOREVER

## Śrīla Prabhupāda's Revolutionary Alternative to the Misuse of Intoxicants

*But while this was going on, an old man, one year past his allotted three score and ten, wandered into New York's East Village and set about to prove to the world that he knew where God could be found. In only three months, the man, Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta, succeeded in convincing the world's toughest audience — Bohemians, acidheads, potheads, and hippies — that he knew the way to God: Turn Off, Sing Out, and Fall In. This new brand of holy man, with all due deference to Dr. Leary, has come forth with a brand of "Consciousness Expansion" that's sweeter than acid, cheaper than pot, and nonbustible by fuzz. How is all this possible? "Through Kṛṣṇa," the Swami says.*

*— from The East Village Other  
October 1966*



Prabhupāda lived amid the drug culture, in a neighborhood where the young people were almost desperately attempting to alter their consciousness, whether by drugs or by some other means—whatever was available. Prabhupāda assured them that they could easily achieve the higher consciousness they desired by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. It was inevitable that in explaining Kṛṣṇa consciousness he would make allusions to the drug experience, even if only to show that the two were contrary paths...The local head shops carried a full line of paraphernalia. Marijuana, LSD, peyote, cocaine, and hard drugs like heroin and barbituates were easily purchased on the streets and in the parks. Underground newspapers reported important news on the drug scene, featured a cartoon character named Captain High, and ran crossword puzzles that only a seasoned "head" could answer.

Prabhupāda had to teach that Kṛṣṇa consciousness was beyond the revered LSD trip. "Do you think taking LSD can produce ecstasy and higher consciousness?" he once asked his storefront audience. "Then just imagine a roomful of LSD. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is like that." People would regularly come in and ask Swamiji's disciples, "Do you get high from this?" And the devotees would answer, "Oh, yes. You can get high just by chanting. Why don't you try it?"



Probably the most famous experiments with LSD in those days were by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, Harvard psychology instructors who studied the effects of the drug, published their findings in professional journals, and advocated the use of LSD for self-realization and fulfillment. After being fired from Harvard, Timothy Leary went on to become a national priest of LSD and for some time ran an LSD commune in Millbrook, New York.

When the members of the Millbrook commune heard about the swami on the Lower East Side who led his followers in a chant that got you high, they began visiting the storefront. One night, a group of about ten hippies from Millbrook came to Swamiji's *kīrtana*. They all chanted (not so much in worship of Kṛṣṇa as to see what kind of high the chanting could produce), and after the lecture a Millbrook leader asked about drugs. Prabhupāda replied that drugs were not necessary for spiritual life, that they could not produce spiritual consciousness, and that all drug-induced religious visions were simply hallucinations. To realize God was not so easy or cheap that one could do it just by taking a pill or smoking. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, he explained,

was a purifying process to uncover one's pure consciousness. Taking drugs would increase the covering and bar one from self-realization.

“But have you ever taken LSD?” The question now became a challenge.

“No,” Prabhupāda replied. “I have never taken any of these things, not even cigarettes or tea.”

“If you haven't taken it, then how can you say what it is?” The Millbrookers looked around, smiling. Two or three even burst out with laughter, and they snapped their fingers, thinking the Swami had been checkmated.

“I have not taken,” Prabhupāda replied regally from his dais. “But my disciples have taken all these things—marijuana, LSD—many times, and they have given them all up. You can hear from them. Hayagrīva, you can speak.” And Hayagrīva sat up a little and spoke out in his stentorian best.

“Well, no matter how high you go on LSD, you eventually reach a peak, and then you have to come back down. Just like traveling into outer space in a rocket ship. [He gave one of Swamiji's familiar examples.] Your spacecraft can travel very far away from the earth for thousands of miles, day after day, but it cannot simply go on traveling and traveling. Eventually it must land. On LSD, we experience going up, but we always have to come down again. That's not spiritual consciousness. When you actually attain spiritual or Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you stay high. Because you go to Kṛṣṇa, you don't have to come down. You can stay high forever.”



If it were risky for a seventy-one-year-old man to thump a drum and shout so loud, then he would take that risk for Kṛṣṇa. It was too good to stop. He had come far from Vṛndāvana, survived the non-Kṛṣṇa yoga society, waited all winter in obscurity. America had waited hundreds of years with no Kṛṣṇa-chanting. No “Hare Kṛṣṇa” had come from Thoreau's or Emerson's appreciations, though they had pored over English translations of the *Gītā* and *Purānas*. And no *kīrtana* had come from Vivekananda's famous speech on behalf of Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. So now that he finally had *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* going, flowing like the Ganges to the sea, it could not stop. In his heart he felt the infinite will of Lord Caitanya to deliver the fallen souls.

He knew this was the desire of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and his own spiritual master, even though caste-conscious *brāhmaṇas* in India would disapprove of his associating with such untouchables as these drug-mad American meat-eaters and their girlfriends. But Swamiji explained that he was in full accord with the scriptures. The *Bhāgavatam* had clearly stated that Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be delivered to all races. Everyone was a spiritual soul, and regardless of birth they could be brought to the highest spiritual platform by chanting the holy name. Never mind whatever sinful things they were doing, these people were perfect candidates for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Tompkins Square Park was Kṛṣṇa's plan; it was also part of the earth, and these people were members of the human race. And the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa was the dharma of the age.

**\*All from Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta — Planting the Seed, Ch 9, “Stay High Forever”.**