

Krishna Consciousness Comes to Detroit

Irving Shushnick

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

This 16 word Hindu chant was first heard in Detroit when poet Allen Ginsberg led the hippie community in a Lovefare last February. Jerry Younkins and Anarchy next brought the Hare Krishna to the Grande Ballroom for a SUN benefit and the recent Love-In at Belle Isle witnessed hundreds of young people chanting Hare Rama for hours.

Below is the story of the Hare Krishna as it originally appeared in our sister underground paper, the *East Village Other*.

Recently, 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, pot-heads 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 non-bustable by fuzz.

How is this all possible? "Through Krishna," the Swami says.

For the cynical New Yorker, living, visible, tangible proof of this can be found on Second Avenue between 1st and 2nd Streets when the sounds of cymbals, drums, bells, voices, harmonium and the innards of an old piano waft across the slums of the East Village like incense.

One glance through the storefront window reveals the Swami seated on his dais leading "Kirtan" surrounded by some 30 young, barefoot disciples who sing, dance, chant and listen to his lectures on the Gita, the principal scripture of Hinduism handed down some 5,000 years ago by Sri Krishna, an incarnation of God. Sitting cross-legged in his golden robes, the swarthy complexioned Swami tells his followers in a soft voice that "Krishna is everything."

"We see now His maya," he says, "His illusory energy which is the entire material universe. Krishna is behind this. He supports everything. But this material universe is full of suffering. Let us return to Krishna's true abode, His spiritual universe. It is His spiritual kingdom that is eternal."

Many of the Swami's new disciples, who include Allen Ginsberg, feel that the Swami's greatest contribution is the "Kirtan," a form of meditation which leads to consciousness expansion. The uniqueness of the "Kirtan" lies in the fact that it is a rhythmic, hypnotic 16-word chant sung for hours on end to the accompaniment of hand clapping, cymbals and bells.

"The Kirtan," says the Swami, "is as natural as the cry of a child for its mother. It is a meditation of body and spirit through the senses. It is feeling the presence of God and crying out to Him for help."

One of the Swami's disciples confessed, "I started chanting to myself, like the Swami said, when I was walking down the street: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare over and over, and suddenly everything started looking so beautiful, the kids, the old men and women...even the creeps looked beautiful...to say nothing of the trees and flowers. It was like I'd taken a dozen doses of LSD.

But I knew there was a difference'. There's no coming down from this. I can always do this, anytime, anywhere. It's always with you.

The cosmic or expanded consciousness, called "Krishna Consciousness" by the Swami, is an awareness of a soul present within the body. "It is also," he preaches, "the same awareness of life as when taking LSD."

"It is partly the constant awareness of the Lord living in all things—in the insects, the animals, in the earth, in buildings and sidewalks, cars and machinery, and in men, and in the sun and boundless universe. It is the state of bliss and of love in all life."

After Turning Off and Singing Out his disciples in this way, the Swami makes everyone Fall In to a special diet which forbids the ingestion of coffee, tea, meat, eggs and cigarettes, to say nothing of marijuana, LSD, alcohol and illicit sex. The energetic old man maintains that the human body requires only natural, healthy food products, such as grains, fruits, vegetables and milk. His students seem to agree.

The Swami met his first guru (teacher) in India in 1922 and was instructed to spread the way of Krishna in the Western world. Last year he came to America and, after a stay in the Philadelphia area, he traveled to New York and succeeded in establishing his society called The International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

The Swami, whose title means one who is master of the senses, is quick to point out that his Society is not a religion seeking converts. "There is one God," stated the Swami and I bring my students here not to convert them to Him, but simply to convince them. I do not seek to change any man's religious practice."

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