

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: This is Wednesday, February 7, 1996. I'm in Alachua, Florida and this is an interview with Laxmimoni.

A: I presume you have some specific questions you want --

Q: Yeah, they're pretty general-type questions. Um, my first question is can you spell Laxmimoni for me?

A: [Laughs]. I can, I can spell it. After all these years. L-A-X-M-I-M-O-N-I Das.

Q: It's one word?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, and then there's another part.

A: Dasi. Well, Dasi and Das are the suffixes to all our names. Dasi means "servant" in the feminine, and Das means servant in the masculine.

Q: Is that D-A-S-I?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. Does, does Laxmimoni mean something?

A: Yeah. My whole name means "the servant of the goddess of fortune that never likes to stay in one place, but always finds new ways to serve Krishna."

Q: Wow. [Laughs]. That's a lot in one word.

A: Krishna, um, there's one form of Krishna, Vishnu, Maha [?] Vishnu, you've heard, I'm sure. Anyway, he always has Lakshmi [?] massaging his feet or, situated at his chest. She's always very close to him. So everybody wants to get the goddess of fortune. Because they associate Lakshmi with money, even in India, the words are synonyms, synonymous --Lakshmi and money. So, um, people always want to get Lakshmi, but they don't want to have Naraya [?], they don't want to have Krishna. They just want the goddess of fortune part, but they don't want the responsibility that comes with that. So, um, and we understand that you can't have one without the other for very long. Because Krishna, the goddess of fortune is always situated at Krishna's, worshipping Krishna, so if, if you're just aspiring for the material wealth, it will be very fleeting. Here one minute, gone the next.

Q: OK, that makes sense. Um, so can you tell me something about your background, and how you came to Iscon [?] and --

A: Well, I was a student at the State University of New York at Buffalo, SUNYAB, and I um, was majoring in psych, clinical psych, and I was very young. I graduated college when I was nineteen, so um, I was at UB and I met the devotees there, in 1969 and, um, at that time, there was a week, not so clear in my mind, but I remember there was a week, I don't know what they called it in particular, but many different spiritual, so-called spiritual communes were there. There was the Pig Farm, there was a group called the Pig Farm, and then there was Baba Ram Das and Timothy Leary and his League for Spiritual Discovery, they all came in succession, over the course of a couple of weeks, and at that time, also, my spiritual master, Shil Po Put [?] came to Buffalo. And I, um, I had already had some contact with the

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

devotees, because a very close friend of mine had been involved, but it was a very small group, there was a very small place -- just some devotee, who actually is here, his name is Ripunuga [?] he, um, he had a little house, and you know, some people lived there. And um, wasn't, you know, terribly famous or anything, but because a friend of mine had been involved, I was a little familiar, and then when I saw Prapahd [?] um, I started coming to the temple. And almost immediately became involved. And almost immediately after that was, I went to Toronto to open the center there. Because I had been a draft-resistance counselor, and I was very active in SDS and different things like that, and I had been helping people get across the border legally, um, you know, I, at that time, it worked on a point system, and you had to have a certain amount of points in order to be granted landed immigrancy in Canada. And so I would help people get the things that they needed in order to do that. And because of that experience, and the fact that I had friends in Toronto, um, Chilupadpahd [?] sent us, first he sent us to Detroit to help, and then we went to Toronto almost immediately thereafter, and I spent several years in Toronto after that [or after the?]. But um, I wasn't in Buffalo for very long. I was there for a y-, maybe seven months. I got married, very shortly after I joined the temple, and we lived in an apartment with another couple. And it wasn't, I didn't really live in a communal situation until we moved to Detroit. And then Toronto as well, and then for ever since then. I don't know if you know what I do.

Q: Uh uh.

A: Um, I run a teen-age girls' school, school for teen-age girls, and um, I live with anywhere from twelve to seventeen teen-agers, depending on . . .

Q: Wow.

A: So I'm very much in a communal situation. [Laughs].

Q: Yeah.

A: And I've been doing that for about twenty-one years.

Q: Um, working with the teen-agers. Wow.

A: Yeah. So, anyway, I'd heard about the devotees at UB, and I got involved very quickly and I really appreciate, actually, the thing I most appreciated about the temple when I first went was that, uh, here were a bunch of people who were saying something that made a lot of sense, and they were doing it. I had actually been very involved in exploration, spiritual exploration, before, I was from New York, originally, Brooklyn, New York, specifically, and um, my family was Jewish, although not very serious about their Judaism, more of a cultural thing than a religious thing. So I decided to explore Judaism and I started to read the Scripture and get involved a little bit on a more philosophical um, level, and I wasn't very satisfied. So then I started exploring Christianity, and um, I went to different places and talked to different people, and then, so then when I went to UB, and I started to see the devotees here and there, and Prapahd [?], I started to explore Krishna Consciousness. Krishna Consciousness made more sense to me than either A or B, previously mentioned, and I also saw that the people were actually living what they said, which I found particularly attractive. Um, I was really tired of hypocrisy, my family had shown me, in spiritual matters, I mean, they were good people, I don't, but you know, as far as spiritual things, they said one thing and did everything else. So I, I was kind of disappointed there. And um, in

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Christianity, also, I had a very profound experience, because I went to midnight Mass at St. Patrick's cathedral on Christmas, before. And it was during the time of Vietnam and the whole thing was all about Vietnam, and the whole preaching, and people, women were in the, in the church with their hair in pink plastic rollers and they were TV cameral everywhere, and I was just totally disgusted with the whole thing. It really made me sick. And um, and then when I came to the Hare Krishna temple, it was just a small building, but everybody was very dedicated, very serious, very austere, um, really, uh, determined to develop a spiritual consciousness that was um, unaffected, you know? And I really appreciated that. From the very, very beginning. And, practically speaking, I never left. I mean, I just, I couldn't live there -- the building was very small, I lived in an apartment with some friends, who aren't devotees, but I would get up at 4:30 in the morning, and I would drive to the temple every day, and I would, you know, practically wake everybody up when I came, and then I would stay as long as I could, and actually, I wanted to quit college, I had one year left, and I wanted to quit, but um, Rupanuga [?] wouldn't let me -- I just had one semester left. So I got a fourteen-credit A on an independent study of life in a Krishna-consciousness temple. And I just, you know, I lived in the temple and I wrote a, uh, paper for it, or, I didn't really live in the temple, but I kept coming to the temple, and I wrote a paper, and I graduated that way. Otherwise, I wouldn't have graduated. 'Cause I couldn't, it was just hard, at that time, I don't know if you remember, what it was like then, but, um, they were hanging, you know, school presidents out of bell towers, and picketing and screaming and yelling and, I wasn't very enthusiastic about the whole process, about the educational system anyway, so -- it wouldn't have taken much for me to get out of there. Um, but I really appreciated Krishna consciousness, right from the beginning, because of that, because of the people's dedication, and even, to this day, um, I, I very much appreciate the association of my God-brothers and God-sisters who are serious about their pursuits, and I, I appreciate that in our movement, that we have some, you know, we have a wonderful philosophy, and then the devotees that dedicate themselves to it, I can actually see in them, qualities that I really want to imbibe myself. And that, you know, really inspires me.

Q: Can you describe some about the, um, the philosophy and also the spiritual practice?

A: Well, um, the philosophy of Krishna consciousness is based on the ultimate understanding that you're not this body. That this body is a temporary covering, which houses the soul, and the soul is you. Where you are, you know? So that spiritual entity, the spirit-soul is actually who you are, but, unfortunately, 99.9 percent of most people's time is spent doing things for the body. I mean, we all do eating, sleeping, mating, and defending, because those things are kind of essential, you know, to living. But beyond that, we put many designations on ourselves, depending on what color we are, where we were born, what status we happen to be, and what our profession is, someone says to you "Who are you?" you immediately come out with, well, I go to this university, and I'm an American and I'm a woman, and, you know -- so these things are all determined by the body. These designations. But beyond that, there's a spiritual entity, which we tend to ignore. And because we ignore it, we're never really satisfied. So therefore you get people who are, you know, striving their entire lives to get enough money, to get a new this, or move here, or go there, or, but they're never satisfied with it, no matter how much they get, they're never satisfied, the poor want to be rich, the rich want to be poor, or richer, and it's, it's um, it's a vicious cycle. So, from the Bhagavad-Gita, we understand the living entity is spiritual and that, the happiness that we're looking for, that, that ananda [?] we call, um, is actually

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

something which is only available on a spiritual level. The real happiness that we're looking for, that which is eternal, which doesn't diminish in time and have to constantly be refurbished, it doesn't, it isn't mixed with suffering all the time, um, is only available on the spiritual platform. So, in Krishna consciousness, we try and make as much endeavor as possible, to exclusively pursue spiritual happiness, knowing that material happiness will come automatically. Um, we accept the law of karma, which, you know, basically is for every action, there is a reaction. And also, we understand that there is such a thing as reincarnation. So a transmigration of the soul, that this soul is not bound to this body, that it's a temporary house, so when this body gets old and dies, then the soul will take another body, and that body is determined by our activities in our, um, mindset at the moment of death. So, um, every effort being made throughout the lifetime to fix the mind on Krishna, to fix the mind on spiritual pursuits, so at the time that this body leaves, we can, we won't have any material desires, our desires will simply be spiritual, and therefore we have no need to be in this material world. Our body is, is formed, really, by our desires to be here. You know, man proposes, God disposes. So, God disposes in many ways. I have a desire to be rich, I leave my body with a desire to be rich, Krishna will give me another body with which I can pursue that desire. Very kind. Always taking care of us. So therefore we have to be very careful what we desire.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because otherwise we, we, we, we create a situation for ourselves here. If we want to live in an animalistic way, then why do we need a human body? Therefore we situate ourselves in a, in a subhuman body. Now that may look like a human body, but it may not really be a human body, in the sense that it doesn't function like a human being. In other, we, we understand from our Scripture that the criterion for, quote, humanism, unquote, is the desire to inquire as to why you're here and who you are, and what the goals of your life are. Because, like I was saying earlier, every living entity, dogs, camels, asses, hogs, whatever, they're all eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. Everybody. You are, they are -- so, if that's all our goal is, to simply engage in basically those things, maybe we want to eat in a restaurant, as opposed to in a little plastic dish on the floor, or maybe we want to defend with nuclear weaponry, as opposed to claws and teeth, maybe we want to mate in a, you know, fancy bedroom, with a canopied bed, as opposed to on the street, and maybe we want to sleep in a very, you know, carefully constructed shelter, a very beautifully constructed shelter, as opposed to just a mat on the floor. But still, nevertheless, despite the embellishment, the fact of the matter is, it's just eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. So the, what is it that makes the human being different than all the other living entities, and that's the ability to reason, to discern, to understand that we're more than that. That there's something more about us, something, um, deeper about us that we have to explore, and that we have to come in touch with. And so that's our spiritual nature. And animals are not capable of doing anything about that. So we are capable of doing something about it, and we need to do that. Otherwise, we become no better than the animals. And not to say that in a derogatory sense, for the animals' sake, but for our sake, it's not using that plus that we have. And so, our philosophy, um, goes now further, to understand how it is to connect with the spiritual, and basically by the chanting of Hare Krishna, because Krishna, we see that Krishna is a supreme personality of Godhead, um, he has many names -- he's not limited in any way, but he is a person, not a limited person, in the sense that we are, of flesh and blood, but a person in the sense that he has an existence and he had a personal relationship with every living

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

entity, with every spirit-soul. Each of us has a personal, loving relationship with God, and God in turn looks upon us, and tries to help us and facilitate us in so many different ways. So, insofar as we establish a loving relationship with him, he reciprocates. Actually, in our Bhagavad-Gita, it's explained that, "All of them, as they surrender unto me, I reward them accordingly." So, um, Krishna and his name are non-different [?], it's spiritual sound-vibration, even in all the scriptures, we see "Hallowed by thy Name." The holy name of the Lord is a very special thing, and by meditating, carefully enunciating that sound vibration, one can actually come to know God, through his name. That's why we chant all the time. Either we chant on beads, quietly, or we chant in a group, or just try and keep the name, and the presence of the supreme Lord with us, no matter what we're doing. And we all do different things. Like I run a school, and somebody else is a doctor or a lawyer, a geologist, or whatever they are, but um, but still, to keep the goal of human life, to keep the fact that you are spiritual, and that your ultimate happiness is coming from Krishna, in front of you all the time, not to lose perspective, is really the basic goal of our spiritual pursuit.

Q: Now, do a lot of people, then, um, live communally to try and facilitate this seeking of God, is that part of it?

A: Yeah, we, we live communally, although, we're living less communally now than we did before, partially because we're much bigger now, and it's very difficult for our communities to um, sustain, I mean, like, just for example, here we are in Alachua. We own 127 acres. The farm, I mean, the actual Hare Krishna movement, as a corporate entity, owns 127 acres. But because of the laws of Alachua, and the powers that be, we, um, are only allowed to have one family living on a five-acre plot of land. Right? So that's very practical to somebody, but not to us. [Laughs]. So therefore, we're not legally allowed to do what we would do, we wouldn't live like that -- why does a human being need five acres of land? I mean, we'll happily farm a communal area, and we'll happily graze our cows, also. But nevertheless, on the land remaining, after we do that, we could easily house many more than one family per five acres. The government won't allow us to do that. So therefore, we're forced, by circumstances, to purchase land and live in a peripheral way. Now many of our members are -- when we first joined, way back when, um, most of us were single, few of us had children, because we were just young people ourselves. Now, all my contemporaries are married, and our children are the same age as we were when we joined the movement. My youngest daughter is twenty-one. I have three children. My oldest, my son is going to be twenty-six in July, and my other daughter is twenty-four. So, um, now you know, we have to deal with that. We have to deal with family, we have to deal with location and, now the fact that our children are looking for something to do, you know, and to make a living, or whatever, situate themselves, um, in a way that will, allows them to comfortably interface [?] with, you know, the western world, in our case. So that becomes complicated, just like this living, these laws that at Alachua make our lives a lot more complicated than they need to be. And um, but we have to live within them, 'cause if we don't live within them, then we can't live comfortably here, so we're kind of in a Catch-22 situation, you know? And we have to make the best use of it. So sometimes that causes our, us not to live as communally as we would like to, but in the ideal situation, we try to live as simply as possible, giving our energy, as much as possible, to the functioning of our temple, which is the center of our existence, Krishna, being in the temple, is the center of our existence, and also seeing each other as a, uh, a servant of Krishna, and therefore worthy of our service. That's why we call each other Das Dasi, we also call each other

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Pabu [?]. We, I call myself Dasi, but I call other people Pabu, Pabu means master. And so, we try to see each other in that exchange. That you are serving God, therefore, please let me serve you. And living together, and allowing ourselves to maintain that relationship is very spiritually uplifting. Um, you know, it doesn't always work. There's definitely, um, the influence of our upbringing, and of the world around us, which is very anti-servant, master. The whole concept of being someone's servant is very demeaning in western society. Even the, even the quality of humility, unless it's, it's, uh, what, um, qualified, and you're talking about Jesus Christ, or you're talking about some saintly person, but otherwise, to call somebody humble, or meek and humble is almost derogatory. You know, it means that he can't make it, he can't get ahead, he's not going to make it in corporate America, if he's humble, you know? So, um, the qualities that we aspire for are not necessarily the qualities that are exalted in the eyes of the country, or the world that we live in. And therefore, sometimes it's difficult for us, to, um, you know, to comfortably interact, you know, it keeps, and it makes us want to keep our interactions somewhat limited, that's why we don't encourage our children to go to public schools. And, I mean, you know, the reading and the writing may or may not be up to standard, that's up for debate, but even on another level, there's a certain moral-social fiber which is made out of polyester. [Laughs]. And we would prefer natural fabrics. [Laughs].

Q: [Laughs].

A: You know what I mean?

Q: I know exactly what you mean.

A: So um, therefore we want to keep our children away. Because until they're older they can't, necessarily, discern, and, and the, the training, the weaving starts at a very young age. You know, that you are the master of your ship, you are the captain of your fate, you can do anything you want to, and you don't need anyone's help, and, and, you know, the world came from a big bang and, you know, who's God anyway, just something for fanatics, and even if he is there, you pray to him, get what you want, and go about your business. Um, you know, these kind of things, and then, what to speak of, just the gross reactions of that kind of lifestyle, where anything that you need to do for pleasure, you do it, and don't worry about it. You know, maybe we'll say that if it hurts somebody else, don't do it. But then, that, what does that mean? Because, does that just mean that you don't stab them in the back, I'm not even sure it means that, anymore. But it definitely doesn't mean that you don't infringe upon their ability to do the same thing you're doing or they're happiness in terms of their own social existence and their own emotional existence -- it definitely does not mean that, because that is definitely infringed upon by persons who are pursuing drugs, and by persons who are pursuing illicit sexual connection, and it makes the whole world miserable. Right? So we may say "Well, I'm not hurting anybody," but we are. We're hurting the societal structure, it's a mess, right? And we don't really want our children to be um, subjected to that, you know? So therefore, we have our own schools, as much as possible, we try and keep our children out. So our communal living has a two-fold -- it's an insulation, and it's also a support in terms of, you know, trying to served each other, trying to help each other, trying to um, you know, communicate with people who understand where we're coming from, just the fact that we're vegetarians, although that's now becoming more acceptable, in the beginning years, it wasn't at all acceptable. You know, we, we follow four basic regulations -- we don't eat any meat, fish, or eggs, we

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

don't take any intoxication, not even coffee, tea, cigarettes, we don't gamble, and we don't engage in sexual connection outside of marriage, for, specifically for the procreation of children. So those, just those four regulations immediately make people scratch their heads. [Laughs].

Q: Are, are you also, um celibate if you're not trying to have kids?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. So, you said, you, you first lived communally when you went to Detroit, was that right?

A: Right. I, I, we were only in Buffalo, my husband and I, we got married in '69 in June, I believe, yeah, and then we, um, almost immediately went to Detroit, because a friend of mine, actually, the young man who had brought me, or, in contact with the devotees originally, he was accepted to Wayne State med school, and he had opened a pre- a center in Detroit, and he was no longer thinking, he was thinking that he would no longer be able to keep it going, because he had to start school. And so he asked us, my husband and I, to go there and help him. He quit school almost, I think three days after he started it. So, it wasn't, it was the four of us, and we had a little house, and we ran, we were there for exactly a year, and then we went to Toronto. Um, and we were in Toronto for awhile. I traveled extensively, and I've lived, um, I've lived in many, many centers. I lived in India for several years, and, um, I lived in Chicago and Dallas, and just a lot of places.

Q: Do you get sent to places, or . . . ?

A: Yeah, sometimes, we get sent places. Sometimes there's, you know, there's choices, there's always choices to be made. But the nature of our service, um, definitely propelled us in various directions. And especially when I became involved in schools, specifically, we don't have that many schools, and so, um, that very much directed my, my desire, where I wanted to go, 'cause I wanted to be in places where I could take care of my own children, where I would have an educational facility for them, and then, in doing so, I, I got involved in establishing an educational facility. And then, ultimately, the, the, that part of my life became primary -- the fact that I wanted to establish and maintain an educational institution, uh, became primary, and so, um, when the, the temple or whatever, that the school was in, had trouble or whatever, then I just moved the school. And then finally we, we wound up here. We've been here eight years.

Q: Now is this a Hare Krishna school, or . . . ?

A: Yeah, it's a Hare Krishna school. I mean, anyone who wants to come can come, but their children are going to find it a little hard to live with us if they don't agree, if they're not in line with the philosophy that we follow, because we, we, uh, we live a very simple life, and you know, we follow these four regulative principles, which are really the mainstay of teenage life in America.

Q: That's right. [Laughs]. That's very true.

A: [Laughs]. You know, no McDonald's, no TV, and no boyfriends, and you know, what's life without drugs and boyfriends, you know? So, you know, unless a teenage girl has a desire, and I don't even, I, I take girls from twelve and up, I have girls from twelve to seventeen, and uh, I, it's not even so much that the parents want that for their children as I want to take students who want that for themselves.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: And is this part of the farm? Like, is it on the farm?

A: It's not on the farm, it is part of the farm. Um, we're right around the corner, maybe, one and a half miles as the crow flies, and three and a half miles as the car drives.

Q: And is this where you live?

A: This is where I live.

Q: Everybody lives --

A: That's correct.

Q: It's like, a boarding school?

A: Yeah. They come and -- you know, they go and visit their parents on a regular basis, they kind of stay with us. But it is, basically, it's an ashram. You know. Ashram, literally, means a shelter for people who want to take up spiritual life. That's what the word means. And so we, we try to provide it as that. And we, we go every morning to the temple, and we participate in the whole spiritual program there, and then we come home and we eat breakfast and go to school, and then, in the afternoon, we have all kinds of extracurricular things, different members of the community, um, teach the girls different things. They share, you know, different arts they have, stained-glass, sewing, computer skills, um, horticulture, woodworking, weaving, massage, reflexology, all kinds of, you know, different people in the community will take two or three girls and, that are interested in a specific thing, and just train them that way. And, and, you know, some girls, very few of my girls, but some of my students are interested in going to college. And um, you know, they want to be something that requires a degree in the western world, or you can't do it, whatever that is. So, we're, you know, we're training them in that direction. The educational facility, the academic-educational facility is superior to what's provided, I mean, that's not a very big statement, either. [Laughs].

Q: [Laughs].

A: I mean --

Q: That's sad.

A: 'Cause that's just, you know, it doesn't take much. And so when our girls test out, they test out way above, and when they go to college, they do well because they're not distracted. They just go to college. They don't go to college and party. Or party and go to college. And so they do very well. Our kids do really well. Any of our kids that have had to interface with the western, you know, the regular educational institution have always done straight-A's, pretty much. Always do.

Q: Now, can you describe your economic arrangements? Do you actually pool your incomes?

A: Yes and no. Um, like, for instance, in our school, the people who live there, um, myself and one other woman, we've been living there, oh, twenty years or so. We don't get any salary or anything. And um, the school just provides us with what we need and what we need, we keep at a minimum. We both, we have just one little room, half the size of this, maybe a third the size of this, that we both live in, and the girls live in other rooms, you know, and they, we sleep on a sleeping bag on the floor and, and um, you

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

know, each girl gets a, we each get a dresser and a half a closet or a quarter of a closet, or whatever, and uh, we eat communally, there's one cooking arrangement for everybody and um, and those people that live on the farm, they also all eat together, you know, one person prepares lunch in a central kitchen, and everybody comes. And then also, there are families who choose to, you know, keep their family situation together, and they cook at home. That also happens, you know. There are many families who work, whose, parts of the family work outside, or whatever, and their schedule demands that they eat at different times, or whatever, so, but -- in the, like in the old days, you know, when you're talking, when our movement began for the, at least for the first ten years, which would be from 1965 to 1975, um, we pretty much all lived communally and we pretty much all ate communally. Very few of us lived outside. Very few of us wanted to live outside. It's more so now. Um, I'm not, there are many reasons, I think, but mostly I think it's just 'cause we're older and because our kids are older. And we need to provide for them in a different way, it's hard for the temple to facilitate -- not all of our temples, very few of them, actually, are farm communities. Most of them are city centers, and so you might have one building and you've got, you know, fifteen people living in it, and then, what are you going to do with the children, and what are you going to do with the families, it's very hard, so, therefore, you know, they live outside. But, as much as possible, we encourage our members to keep their lives simple and uh, support the temple, support the, you know the, the community, by either tithing, something like that, giving some, if they make a separate income, or else just donating their time and services in return for maintenance, whatever that, you know, whatever they require. But we don't usually give specifically a remuneration by the hour or whatever it is like that.

Q: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm. Does the farm, do they actually farm at the farm?

A: Yeah, we farm. We take care of a lot of cows, so, and we do farm. We have couple of gardens, and we have a lot of devotees in the peripheral that do, do organic gardening and that give produce to the farm and also live by selling, or trading, whatever, organic produce. And we also grow crops for the cows, you know? Rye and . . .

Q: And are the cows for milk, or . . .?

A: Yes, we do milk the cows. Some of them. Not very many. There's, I think, three, um, which we don't, we're trying to develop some sense of herd management, because we have a limited amount of land, so, in order for the cows to live here, it's a little easier, than in other places, because it's supposed to be warm here. [Laughs].

Q: [Laughs].

A: And you're supposed to be able to graze the cows all year. Um, of course, this has been an exceptionally horrific winter, but, um, up north even worse, and all the time. So, then we had, so then we had, you know, previously, we just like had the cows, and we had calves, and we had lots of milk, and we made cheese and butter and yogurt, and then we never realized that we'd have all these cows, you know, I mean, ultimately, all the calves grow up and then you have, like, all these cows. Not all of them are female, either. Some of them are male. So, now we're a little bit more wise, and we're trying to manage the size of the herd, for, for the acreage that we have, so that, because we never sell the cows for slaughter, we never let, the cows all live their whole lives, so we have to be able to take care of them

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

for however many years they're around, and, and when they get older, they don't milk and they don't pull, you know, we train oxen for plowing and stuff like that, but when they get older, they don't do that either. So then, um, we have to keep the herd a little small, at least under control, so we don't have a lot of milking cows, maybe three at a time.

Q: So you don't use machinery to, to plow with?

A: Um, we do some here, not much, because we're not doing big-time farming. We do, we have a team of trained oxen that do some work on the farm, but there are other places in our, in North America, as well as elsewhere that are trying to just work on using the bull for plowing. We have a manpower problem, you know, in that we don't have a lot of, um, manpower sometimes, that can do, 'cause it takes, everything takes a lot longer, you know, it's a little bit more difficult. And also, I, the government is not very user-friendly. You know, it really isn't. And they, they have their standards of how they want us to live, the living standards are very complicated, you know, we would, if we had it our way, it would be very different. You know, we, we wouldn't have, need to have central heating and air in order to survive, and, and, you know, just these things that are required, otherwise we're not allowed to live legally, put us in a situation where we have to do certain things, otherwise we're in breach of the law. And in order to do them, we need a certain amount of money, we need a certain structure, you need insurance, you need this, you know, it's just like a can of worms. So, um, it puts us in a kind of Catch-22 situation, which often makes it very difficult to live the way we'd like to live.

Q: Sure, yeah. How many people live at the farm? 'Cause you said there was like five to an acre or something?

A: Well, there's about a hundred and seventy-five families that live within ten acres of the farm. I mean, within ten miles of the farm, rather. Maybe even more than that. So many people come here, I mean, people moving here every day, it's hard to keep track. But at least a hundred and seventy-five families. On the farm itself, there's [pause] probably around fifteen families. That's roughly --

Q: Because that, 'cause you have to fit in that legal limit.

A: Right. We have to fit in the legal limit. And so even though I may put my house on a half an acre of land, and allow the other four and a half acres to be grazing land for the cows, I'm not allowed to allow that other four and a half acres to have another residence on it.

Q: Right.

A: And I can't even, I mean, I can invite people into my house, I can have, but I'm only allowed to have one kitchen. You can't, you know, it's just, it, they make your life very --

Q: So does it have to be one residence per five acres, or can you cluster all your residences together?

A: One residence per five acres.

Q: Oh, that's too bad.

A: And that depends on how the land is, is divided up, too. They have their imaginary lines drawn on the land. So you have to go and find out, you can't just put your home wherever you want it to be. You have

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

to put it within those imaginary perimeters. You know, and if one is over here and the other one's over here, well that's, you know, what can you do. It's just very weird, you know, it's very -- Alachua county is kind of infamous for being overly restrictive. Other counties in the area are less restrictive, but not in that sense, in other senses, in terms of building codes and stuff. But it's, it's, they don't make it easy. And it's everywhere, too -- it's everywhere we go, there are, I mean, people might not look, and then you could do whatever you wanted, and you might get away with it forever. But if anyone else decides to look, then what happens is it comes out in the paper, you know?

Q: Exactly. You get bad press, yeah.

A: Now the Hare Krishna's are --

Q: Is there a communal dining room and . . . ?

A: Yeah, there's a communal dining room. Here, mostly, we just eat out on picnic tables outside, 'cause the weather usually is such that we don't ever have any problem with it [unintelligible] --

Q: And then, do people all share in the domestic chores --

A: Uh huh.

Q: The cooking and cleaning and all?

A: I mean, there's one person who's in charge, who supervises, but we're always asking, you know, we'll just go in, like to the Sunday feast, and say we need people to help in the kitchen cleaning, and you know, you'll get ten people just go in there and do it. And some people have their assigned tasks, because certain things require certain expertise, you know, one person is responsible for the gardens, and one person's responsible for the greenhouse, and someone's responsible for the kitchen, and someone's responsible for purchasing, there's several people responsible for the cows, and you know, maintaining them, and seeing that they're cared for, and then, here, in this community, we have several of our publications centered here, --

Q: Oh, right -- Back to Godhead [?]

A: Back to Godhead, [unintelligible] World Review, and, so there, of course, in the hands of certain people that are, that are . . . but then there's, you know, there are certain other tasks that are kind of peripheral but essential, supportive, that everybody helps with and does. Like my girls are always "Could you do a mail out?" and all of us will line up, and we'll just, you know, do the whole thing. Different things like that.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: We have a feast, we'll ask everybody to make a few things and bring them, so that, you know, we'll get a couple hundred things.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: In a lot of communities, work-sharing becomes a, a really divisive issue, or a problem, you know, 'cause some people don't do their fair share, and some people do more and get burned out -- is that ever an issue for you guys?

A: It's, yes and no. It's an issue, yeah, um, more used to be an issue than is an issue, because now the situation is where, if you don't, the facility is very easily available, but if you don't want to work, do your share, then live outside the farm. Just don't live on the farm. Then you can come and go as you please. Um, but still, there are feelings, you know, that some people should do more than they are, or that some people who are doing a lot are looking down on the persons who don't do as much as they think they should do. And, it, it does become an issue, but, um, but see, because our philosophy really involves each person's individual relationship with Krishna, each of us has to look at what we're doing in terms of our own spiritual advancement, and know that the more that we can do, the better it is for us. And, you know, it's not that we have to consider the better it is for the community -- that may be there, but ultimately, the better it is for us. Because when Krishna sees us serving him, then we automatically become happy. And we all know that, all of us. And that's what we hear, and that's what we study, and that's what we live, so, unless you're going to be one hypocrite, it's difficult to rationalize the idea of not doing service -- not necessarily, you know, going in and washing the pots for the entire community, but at least serving the other devotees some way, somehow or other, giving of your time and working together -- because it's such an integral part of our spiritual philosophy, that you can't really separate it out.

Q: Now, um, how does the governing structure work? Is there, is there a leader?

A: You mean in the temple, or in the overall structure of this kind?

Q: Well, I, well I, oh, not the overall structure. I'm speaking more of your farm and school.

A: Yeah, we have a small board that's kind of elected, and I say kind of elected because the last election we had was about two-and-a-half years ago. And I think we're going to have another one now, but, you know, basically none of us are politicians. You know, I mean, we may wind up in politics, just because life goes on, but none of us really want to manage. [Laughs]. So, um, you know, some of us do it out of necessity, but it's not a burning desire, at least not in this community. It's not a burning desire in anyone's heart. So we have one person who's kind of the hands-on manager, in terms of figuring out where the money that we have is going to go, and what bills are going to be paid first, and then there are different department heads, and there's um, a board that kind of coordinates it all. And uh, as our community grows, we're kind of working on a structure, we're trying to figure it out, um, the traditional structure that we had in the city temples was one temple president and what we call a temple commander, which just really means chief cook and bottle-washer. And um, and then, you know, the devotees would all help out in so many different ways, but because this, this paradigm [?] is somewhat different, in the sense that it's spread out, and there's a lot of people involved here, a lot of people, many different ages, many different everything's, you know? Um, that it's more like a, it's almost, it's more like a village. This community here is more like a village than a, a microcosmic center. It's really, this, this community is more and more becoming a kind of village atmosphere, a spiritual village.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: Now, does your temple here, um, does it have a spiritual leader?

A: Um . . . the temple doesn't have it, I mean, yes and no. There are devotees here, specifically two or three devotees who are considered to be spiritually advanced, and who people go to for counsel. But it's a very personal realization, it's not something that's enforced. In any way. And it, it, we had a consensus on it, but it's our own consensus, no one made it for us. And um, generally, in our society, there's a group of persons called sinyasis [?] who are spiritual renunciates, they're like monks, they don't -- they've taken a vow never to get married, to remain celibate for their life, lives, and to pretty much dedicate themselves to studying the scripture and teaching it. So those persons stand out most prominently as, as at least being mandated to be the spiritual leaders. And then there are other persons who just, because they are spiritually advanced, and because they do know the scripture, and because they are willing to make themselves available, they become spiritual leaders also, just because of who they are. So there are several persons like that in this community, and different persons, other than them go to them for counsel, um, but there is no one spiritual leader. And then, beyond that, each of us has a spiritual master, from whom we've taken initiation. Now, I, I'm initiated by Sheela Prapad [?] and many of my God-brothers live here, but Sheela Prapad left the planet in '77. So, now it's '97. So, we're twenty years -- we're '96, so we're nineteen years from that departure and in that period of time, many of the newer people who've come in have taken initiation from disciples of my spiritual master. And there are many of them. Many of them. So each of us, they have their spiritual master, but that person isn't like a hands-on spiritual guide, in other words, if you want to know if you should clean the floor today or get a job as a such-and-such, you don't ask that, necessarily. Those things go on on a different level.

Q: Yeah. Can you describe the purpose behind the way you dress and the marks on your face and stuff?

A: Mmm hmm. I wear white, because I'm a widow. And um, anybody, any woman, who wears white is, is a widow for one reason or another, either because their husband is dead, physically, or because their husband has taken sanyats [?] which is kind of a spiritual death, in the sense that he's no longer obligated or connected to the family, and nor is she. I mean, my children are grown, my husband does his spiritual thing, I do my spiritual thing, we don't communicate with each other very much and um, and we just have a great deal of respect and admiration for each other, but as far as family concerns are, they just don't exist anymore. So, um, that's, I wear white. And the mark all of us wear, it's called tilak, it's made out of clay, and it's a sign that indicates, first of all, it indicates our Visnyava [?] tradition, you know, people in India, you can tell what [unintelligible] of succession they're from by the type of tilak that they wear. But the tilak itself means that your body is a temple of God, and that it's being used in his service. Within it resides the soul. And then the men, they, the men who wear white are married, the ones who wear saffron are celibate. And then, within the saffron category, there are two -- there's ones that are celibate temporarily, and then can make a decision to marry at any time, and then there are others that are, like I said, sanyatsis [?] who've taken a vow of celibacy for their whole lives. And um, they've always, women who are married usually have red, either in the middle of their part or here, the dot you've seen sometimes, Indian ladies will wear a bindi [?] dot here. If it's red, it means that they're married, and um, they wear any color they want. They just wear colored clothing. And girls who are not married, but are eligible for marriage, they'll just wear colored cloth, and they won't have any tilak, a sindu [?] here, you know, they won't have that red, and they won't have the dot. Basically, that's pretty

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

much it. The men have a shaved, the men have a shaved head as a sign of renunciation. And mostly, um, persons who are living in a renounced way, that are, are more along in that mentality are the men who shave their heads. And a lot of men who are, you know, working outside, or who aren't living in a very renounced way at this particular time, they don't shave their heads. It used to be more, that everybody would, but now, more and more, people are having to support families, so many different things, they're just finding it, it gets in the way, so they're just letting their hair grow. But the sikha [?] the, this tuft of hair in the back of the head, means that we believe that God is a person. Now if the person [?] was a Buddhist or whatever, will shave their heads completely, but this tuft of hair on the back of the head indicates that we understand that God is a personal --

Q: -- relations are like with the surrounding community? With, with Alachua?

A: We have really good relationships with Alachua. And we're very liked [?] here. A lot of it is because of the University of Florida, for the last fifteen years, we've been distributing between three and five hundred plates of vegetarian lunch for free on campus every day.

Q: Wow. Every day?

A: Every day. Yeah. Monday through Friday. And uh, we've been doing it for years and years and years, so that, that's gone a long way, and well, you know, just in general, we're kind of clean and mind our own business type people, although we do preach, and sometimes people, you know, don't like that. In this community, we're very well-liked. Um, those people who don't like us usually don't know us. And once they get to know who we are, what we're about, they do like us. It's just that some of them read the newspaper or read something, you know, way back when, or heard about something that happened somewhere, and they have it in their head the Hare Krishnas are a cult, or whatever. And until they get over that, they may not like us. But usually they, they like us. And we have a good relationship with the people here.

Q: That's good. Yeah. Can you describe, some, um, what your daily life is like in terms of, of, um, like rituals or spiritual practice type things that you do?

A: Mine in particular or --

Q: Sure --

A: OK. I rise at, I rise at three in the morning --

Q: Wow. [Laughs]. I don't think I could do that.

A: Yeah, yeah you can. You just got to go to bed earlier.

Q: Yeah, that's right.

A: Um, see the thing is, the morning is the best time for spiritual life, because the material world is asleep. So, you know, while ordinarily you're thinking, "Well, gosh, it's, what time is it? I have an appointment, someone's going to call on the phone," and you know, "Oh, gotta catch the news, gotta go to . . ." you know. But see, in the morning, you can't think of any of those things. Because the material world is asleep. So it's a very good time. Astrologically, also, it's a very good time, for focusing the mind.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

So I rise at three, and I wake my students a little bit after that. But, during that time, chanting on my beads. At 4:30 we go to the temple. Everybody does, or a lot of us do. And we meet there, and we have what's called arita, A-R-I-T-A, spelled, it's spelled many different ways, depending on what your diacritical structure is. But the ariti is a public kirton [?] or a group chanting of the holy name. We chant together as a group and with instruments. We have drums and, you might have seen us on the street kind of doing that. You know, we do it together in the temple at 4:30, and then after that we have two hours of time set aside, where we all chant on our beads, quietly, in the temple room. And then we come together again, at 7:30, 7:20, actually, we greet the deities -- the deities during that time are being dressed on the altar, and the altar is closed. So at 7:20 it opens and we see the deities, you know, dressed for the day. And we come together for group hutud [?] the worship of her spiritual master. And then we have a class, a scripture class. And then by about a quarter to nine, it's over and we all go home, uh, or to whatever we're going to do. Whatever our business is, we go then. You know. Obviously some, who work outside, have to leave a little earlier, and um, we just, you know, do our thing. So, at home, I'm, with the girls, we, we take breakfast, and then at a quarter to ten, we start school. And we end academic classes at 2:15 and then have lunch and then everybody cleans up and then they go out and play for an hour and then we have different activities in the afternoon, it's like a three-ring circus, everybody goes different places and does different things. And then we all go to bed.

Q: How early do you go to bed?

A: I go to bed at 8:30, if I have my way. My girls go to bed at 7:15, 7:30, sometimes I stay up later than that, but I don't usually like it. Especially the next day, I don't like it.

Q: Mmm hmm. Yeah. Um, is that, do you, do you have the worship at 4:30 every day? Seven days a week?

A: Every day. Seven days a week.

Q: Uh huh. Are any days different in terms of the schedule?

A: Not really. The Sunday feast is a little different, because we have a program in the afternoon, so everybody comes together again at 3:15. Some people don't come in the morning. And also, because of the nature of the way people make their money, here, um, some people, you know, work at flea markets selling crafts and stuff like that during the weekends, so they're not around so much on the weekend. But basically, it's the same. The temple schedule is the same. The way we interface with it may be different. You know, because of our own personal needs. Like on Saturday, my girls, we go back to the house, and we have our own program there. One of my girls will give class, and one of my girls will lead the services and everything, 'cause they don't get to do that in the temple. So we just have our own, at home. And then, and then they get to, to take the lead position. So we do that at home on Saturday. And um, but um, other than that, it's pretty much the same, every day. Some days we have big festivals. Sometimes they're like, you know, like this Friday, there's going to be a big festival here, and then on March 6th, there's a really big festival. Second biggest of the year. Scorpranaymin [?] be having games, you know, different kinds of things going on all day. Plays -- all the schools will, all the children will put on different kinds of theater things and they'll be, you know, tons of food offered to -- I mean, it's just a big festival all day, it will go on from early in the morning all the way to late at night.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: Now you have biological children, right?

A: I have three biological children.

Q: Three kids. OK. And, um, was this a good way to raise your kids?

A: I think it's the only way to raise your children. Some of our children have grown up wondering whether it's the best way to raise children. I think it's going to take them awhile to decide that. Because, I think it's kind of a normal syndrome, that, you know, a child initially will reject whatever he's brought up in, and then, you know, go out and explore for himself and then ultimately come back to that, and that, I think that's the way it's been since time immemorial. But um, I think it was, I think it's a very good way to raise our children, but we do have difficulty in the sense that when our children are grown, um, of course, we're running in now, we're coming to the first generation of twenty-one, you know, and up year-olds, you know. Like I said, now many of our children are the same ages as we were when we first joined. So now we're having to position those kids. When we joined, we were ready to give up everything and just live in the temple and not worry about anything. Our kids don't necessarily feel that way, a lot of them want, you know, a family situation, or they want a sep-- a little bit separate, they've been living communally all their lives, they're looking for a little bit of separateness. A little bit of space. Um, and so therefore they need, you know, just like we're finding here, they need some money, they need some income, they need some way to support themselves and their families, and so, our society has fallen a little bit short in, um, being able to provide employment for them. Um, and we're working on that in many different ways. But at least now, in the transitional period, there, there is some shortage. We would prefer, just like we prefer not to go to non-devotional schools, we also prefer not to work within, um, you know, to be someone's employee. We would prefer to be self-employed or, um, you know, some kind of craft or farming situation, where we can support ourselves by our own labor, as opposed to, you know, being a hired hand somewhere else. And, and, and we don't have enough available right now to deal with all the kids that are coming. Um, at, you know, at this time. We're getting it together, but there's going to be a transitional period, and that's what we're coming in right now. So some of our children are feeling a little bit betwixt and between. They've been raised as devotees, um, with certain skills, but now they need other skills, because they have to go outside, and they have to figure out how they're going to position themselves, at least temporarily, within the material world in order to make a living. Some of them are having a little hard time with that.

Q: In the communal situation's you've lived in, as you raised your kids, would you get help with the child-rearing from other adults and --

A: Mmm hmm. Yeah, and I would help. See, 'cause I was the teacher, so I would, I'd take the kids, just like now, even, I have these children, and their parents don't have them. So . . . you know, but yeah, we get help, and there's pre-school and there's all those things.

Q: So do you think a communal situation is helpful in terms of child rearing?

A: They say it takes a community to raise a child. I mean, unfortunately, in this quote culture unquote, um, they barely have a family, what [or not?] to speak of a community. I mean, the family structure in, you know, 1996 America is pathetic. And um, so even the children, don't even have a, you know, a nuclear family anymore. But certainly they don't have the support of a community in most cases. I think

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

the support of a community is invaluable. And I, even, you know, my children, even the children who have had some difficulty with different spiritual aspects and material needs, you know, not being met, I, they nevertheless are very appreciative of their communal, you know, the community, and the people they knew all their lives. Very close bonds. Very very close bonds. Between the children and the children, as well as the children and their parents that they've grown up with, you know, and the community is very close. I think it's invaluable, personally.

Q: Do you think that also helps to further their spirituality?

A: Very much so. Very much so. Because there's lots of role models, and lots of, um, good people to go to if you're in need. You're not just, you're never alone. And you're never, even if you, you know, there are times in your life, especially in the adolescent years when you just, you know, usually the, the relationship with the parent becomes somewhat strained because a parent wants you to be young and you want to be old and, you know, there you are, tug-of-war. But then you have so many other, quote, uncles and aunts, sort of, that you can go to and confide in, and speak to, who are a little bit more detached. Attachment tends to, even, you know, our, a lot of what our philosophy is about is breaking attachments. Attachments to material things that we, we, we, you know, we have become addicted to in one way or another, harmfully or benignly, but still addicted to, and we need to break those attachments, because as long as we're attached to anything in the material world, we're anchored here. We can't go back to Godhead without giving up those attachments. So, in the same way, also, um, attachment makes your vision clouded. When you're attached to somebody or something, you can't always judge it clearly. So, other people who are a little bit more distanced from it can sometimes give better advice and see things more clearly than a parent can. For instance, you know, a child's having trouble in school, a kid, parent, you know, very often things are "Well, not my kid -- he'd never do something like that. He's perfect." You know, but it may not be reality. But our attachment clouds our ability to see. This way we have many family members, and the affection is there, but that attachment is, you know, somewhat removed, as you go out into the community. So you can get a more, uh, more clear perspective.

Q: Can you describe a bit, um, how one would become a member? Like, for example, if I showed up at that farm and knocked on the door and said "I want to join," what would happen?

A: We probably would tell you to come for awhile. Um, or, at least, you'd be asked "How much do you know about Krishna consciousness, and what do you, you know, what do you want, what do you want out of Krishna consciousness. Um, assuming that, you know, you'd been studying for awhile, coming for awhile, knowing the devotees, um, if you did want to stay, you'd probably be allowed to stay. But if you didn't know, if you were in total ignorance, then you'd be encouraged to come for awhile and read and dialogue and help out here and there and just do a little of this and that. And then --

Q: So are your services, like, open, like people show up --

A: Oh, services are always open. And people always show up.

Q: Uh huh. And that's how they learn about . . .?

A: Yeah, that's how they learn here. Or by associating with other devotees in different places. Some

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

people will be, like, some, now we have some kids and adults at Santa Fe community college. So many people meet these people and talk, and you know, for a long, long time, and then finally they come to the temple, they actually know quite a bit. Um, also, we distribute a lot of literature. And so people read, and then they call and they have questions, and they come, and you know [inaudible].

Q: Yeah. And then, are there, are there stages of membership? Like, are you a provisional member at first?

A: Well, membership, membership doesn't depend on us, it depends on you. Um, I mean, we have certain standards for living in, on the farm, you know, because you have to follow those four regulative principles, otherwise you're, you just don't even come. I mean, you can be a member in the sense that you can come to the temple and worship if you want, but don't come to the temple thinking you're going to smoke dope or drink coffee or, you know, forget it. So, um, you can't live on the farm, you did it in your home, is, I guess, your business. But it's not something that you can do, living on the farm. Um, or at my ashram, or any place where it's, you know, where the people involved are strictly following. Uh, but initiation comes after a year, at least, of following carefully and studying the scripture and, you know, expressing a serious desire to pursue spiritual life. And if you don't want to take initiation, you don't have to. And you can come forever, you know, there are people who come to the temple for thirty years and never get initiated, never make that commitment. Um, and they're free to come. And they're free to do whatever they want to do, and then they're free to leave if they want to leave, um, the only thing they're not free to do is whatever they want to do on the farm. Within the actual structure of the temple, and the temple community, they have to follow the four regulative principles, minimum. And if they won't, then they're not gonna, they're going to be asked to leave. I mean, if they come to the Sunday feast smoking a cigarette, they're going to be asked to leave.

Q: [Laughs].

A: You know, or if they bring their hamburger with them and they say they want to sit, then they're going to be asked to leave. But barring that [laughs] um, they'll be allowed to stay for the, you know, for the function, but no one can live there and actually become part of the community unless they're willing to accept that as a way of life. Some people come, like in our centers in the city or, you know, we have what's called bhakta [?] program, or bhakteen [?] program, where a man or a woman who has an interest will live in a tentative kind of situation, where they're kind of learning, but it's a residence situation, and then if after two, or three, or five weeks or six months, or whatever, they decide they want to leave, then they leave. And if they decide they want to go further, then they go further. It's up to them. But the only formal commitment is initiation, and there's two of them. There's a first initiation, and then there's a second, which comes a year after the first, and that allows you to work on the altar and do some other things that wouldn't be permissible otherwise.

Q: Um, what would you say is the best part, for you, of living communally?

A: Mmm . . . just the association of my God-brothers and God-sisters. Just getting strength from the people that I live with [?]. Support.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: And what's the hardest, or the most challenging?

A: Well, in my living situation? Noise.

Q: [Laughs].

A: [Laughs]. Constant and never-ending noise. Um, I think the most challenging is probably, in terms of the community, is, you know, sometimes you have an opinion or a feeling, a strong feeling about how something should be done, and then, other people don't necessarily agree, and it winds up getting done a different way, that you don't necessarily agree with, but you have to do it that way. But I think that happens in any, more than a group of two. [Laughs]. So . . . you know, it's not necessarily just the pitfall of communal living in the sense that we're doing it.

Q: Mmm hmm. Yeah. Um, let's see --

A: Have you ever spent any time in a Hare Krishna community?

Q: No, I never have.

A: You probably should, at least a little bit, while you're, you know, if you're going to be working on this paper. Just so you can, at least come in the morning and kind of see what's going on, so you can relate to a little bit of what we're going to be telling you. Because otherwise it's very foreign.

Q: That makes a lot of sense. Yeah. I think the professor I work for has. Um, [unintelligible] but yeah, I would like to, too. Very much so. Um, I'm trying to think --

A: Just going to have to get up a little early one morning.

Q: That's right. A little earlier than I usu- have to go to bed earlier, too. Um, um, --

A: Shoot the television, it'll be easier.

Q: [Laughs]. I never watch TV anyway. Um, if, if a group of people were going to live together communally, what, what sort of advice would you give them?

A: See, that's a hard one for me to answer, because, one, I'm -- my life is not about communal living. My life is about spiritual commitment. So, the communal aspect of things is secondary. And, if people were going to tell me they wanted to do anything, I would tell them to put God in the center. You know, because anything else, as far as I, in my, from where I look at it, is a waste of time. Now to live communally for the sake of living communally, just doesn't have any point. And, even if you don't live communally, but you center your life around God, then that has a lot of point. So, you know, I'm looking at it from a different angle. And communal living is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Q: Mmm hmm. That's what Mickey Singer [?] was telling me about the other day, when I was at the Temple of the Universe, that was his main message, I think, to me. Yeah, that it was a means.

A: Mmm hmm. Mickey Singer's a unique person.

Q: Yeah, he's interesting. Do you guys have much interaction with the Temple of the Universe?

A: Um, not so much with the Temple of the Universe, but with persons in the Temple of the Universe.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Mickey Singer, in particular has made very, very, very significant, um, contributions to the construction of our temple. Um, he feels very strongly that he wants to keep the spiritual atmosphere charged up in this area. And he sees us as a significant instrument in accomplishing that goal, and so he wants to help us as much as possible. Um, and many of the people from the Temple of the Universe come very frequently to our temple here. Um, but our practices are much more, um, specific. And much more rigid, I hate to use that word, because it has so many connotations, but, what we're about is much more clearly defined. You know, and how we do things, and what we, what our spiritual master has told us to do is very clearly defined. See, Mickey Singer's situation is, um, there is not one spiritual, um, for the overall group, there is not one spiritual leader. And we do have one spiritual leader, very definitely. And we have books and we follow them. You know. So, um, in that sense, we're different. But we, we do appreciate each other, and we work together in many ways. And some of our devotees work for him. He owns a thing called Computer Personalized Programming, and some of our devotees work for him. And it's a nice atmosphere for them, because their, their spirituality is not denied, nor does it need to be. So they can be vegetarian, they can be Hare Krishna, they can come in their robes, they can, you know, be in the association of people who appreciate them for what they are, whereas sometimes, if you work outside, it's a whole trip. You have to be incognito, you have to, you know what I mean, it's like, who wants to be with people who are eating a hamburger and, you know, they don't understand where you're coming from, and they're in a whole different world, you know? It's very difficult to relate to, sometimes.

Q: Sure. Yeah. What does your, um, family think of what, how you're spending your life?

A: Well, my family consists pretty much of my mother. My father died years ago. My sister, I don't really communicate with that much, all that much, she lives in New York, my mother lives in California. Um, my mother is much more appreciative of what I'm doing now that she was for the first ten years that I did it. Um, and I'm not so sure, I mean, now she sees me, I hate to use the word normal, but she, 'cause, to me, that doesn't, anyway, in my mother's eyes, normalcy is probably something I'm trying to avoid. But --

Q: [Laughs].

A: [Laughs]. But, um, you know, she sees that I, you know, I have a school, and that's a perfectly acceptable thing to do with yourself, you know? What does your daughter do? She runs a school. So she's happy, and she loves my kids, she thinks my children are great. Um, but you know, I'm sure she would have rather I had become a clinical psychologist and . . . you know, established myself in more conventional ways. We, you know, we talk regularly and she's quite nice. But philosophically, she's never even asked me what I'm doing, or what, you know, really, what it's about, or, you know? She's more interested in the, in the uh, externals of my business than the internals of my business.

Q: Since we're the most interested in the period of the sixties and seventies, I guess, um, did, did Hare Krishna's, did a lot of people who you might describe of as hippies or counterculture come to Hare Krishna's during that time?

A: Mmm hmm. A lot. Yeah.

Interview with Laxmimoni Dasi

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 7, 1996

Q: And have stayed?

A: Yeah, a lot of them have stayed. A lot of us have stayed.

Q: Would you have described yourself as a hippie?

A: Um, not a hippie -- I mean, I was a college student, so I guess that disqualifies me automatically. But, um, I had a bohemian bent, you know, and I mean, and, to some extent was involved in the political counterculture at that time. Um, the social counterculture, a little bit. I mean, I joined when I was nineteen years old. So I didn't have a whole lot of time to get into a whole lot of things. Um, but yeah, there was a lot, just like I was involved in draft resistance, and that was part of the counterculture at that time. Just the whole idea of rebellion against what was considered to be upper-middle class America. And um, even now, you know, I'm not really very fond of it. Uh, but a lot, a lot of hippies joined, you know. And now, I, I see what's happening is a lot of hippies that were, you know, whatever, anyway, whatever it connotes, that they're, a lot of hippies now have imbibed certain aspects of Krishna consciousness into their lives, but they don't take a formal stand, or take a commitment. If you ask them what their religion is, they might very well say Hare Krishna. But what that means to them may be some kind of conglomerate, you know, a little bit of this spirituality, a little bit of that spirituality, and yes they believe in karma, and they believe in reincarnation, and they chant Hare Krishna, but they also, you know, I mean, so it's become less clearly defined, um, in that, in that time period, people were actually giving up their commitment to the outside world and getting definitely focused on Krishna conscious practice. A lot of the reason it was so e-, you know, much easier to do it at that time was because Shuva Pradpah [?] was here, with us, and was directly involved in guiding and directing, and he had a certain, uh, personality, and gave a certain sense of security in his being, because he was so knowledgeable that, um, although many of my God-brothers are very, very wonderful, and very advanced, they just can't, you know, they don't provide that same shelter.

Q: Mmm hmm. Well, I think that's about all the questions I have . . .

A: OK, great.