



In 1971 Srila Prabhupada went to Allahabad for the Ardha-kumbha-mela, and Yamuna-devi and I were in the party that accompanied him. Srila Prabhupada spoke on the story of Ajamila and the holy name, from the Sixth Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam. Only the first two cantos had been translated and published, so Prabhupada read from his Sanskrit Bhagavatam with commentaries, sometimes translating from Sridhara Svami's and occasionally from Jiva Gosvami's. While there, I heard that Srila Prabhupada had said that he was speaking for Yamuna. And in April 2007, when Yamuna visited me in Santa Barbara, I asked her about it, and she told me something that etched an indelible impression on my heart.

As she explained, she had always thought that she had as much right as anyone to walk or sit close to Srila Prabhupada. And generally when he spoke, she would sit right in front of the vyasasana. But in Allahabad one of the sannyasis explained to her that in India the women sat apart and that she should too. So the next morning she did not sit in her usual place at Srila Prabhupada's feet.

Later that morning, Srila Prabhupada noticed her passing by his tent, and he called, "Yamuna, come in here." She entered and offered her obeisances, and before she got up he said, "So, you don't want to hear anymore?" Yamuna burst into tears; Prabhupada—hearing from him—was her life. "Where were you this morning?" he asked. Yamuna told him exactly what had happened. Prabhupada was silent.

That, as she told me, was a turning point in her life. She realized that she would not always have Prabhupada's company. Until then, she had not been able to conceive of ever being separated from him. In 1967 Prabhupada had had a stroke, and the devotees had chanted all night, and Prabhupada had recuperated. The devotees were so dependent on him for everything, it was inconceivable to them that he would not be with them. But, she told me, every disciple must come to a personal realization that there will be a time when the spiritual master will not be present. And for her that moment came in Allahabad, after her talks with the sannyasi and then with Srila Prabhupada.

Sitting in Prabhupada's tent, she asked him, "How much time did you actually spend with your guru maharaja?" "Very few occasions—maybe five or six," he said. "But they were very intimate. We used to walk and talk so many things." Then he said, "Those who think that association with the spiritual master is physical, they are no better than a mosquito sitting on the lap of a king. And what is the business of a mosquito? Simply to suck blood. So many of my godbrothers, they were big, big sannyasis, and they thought like that, and they simply sucked blood."

Yamuna took Prabhupada's words as confirmation. From that point on, she understood that she needed to explore her relationship with him and service to him in separation. She began to consider the question of vani (words, instructions) and vapuh (physical presence), and she got more and more insight into it. As she told me, it is something "unlimitedly deep and profound. You can hear the terms on the surface, but it's something else again to actually be in Prabhupada's presence"—to be in his presence as much in separation as when you were in his physical association. "So that was a turning point for me, to realize that Prabhupada was going to leave this planet: 'He is an old man, and he is going to leave, and I have to prepare.'" She understood that from that moment she had to start mentally preparing.

"So that is that story of hearing," she continued. "Prabhupada said, 'I am speaking because you want to hear so much. I am speaking as much because you want to hear so much.' So he knew that hunger. I never expressed that to him, but he knew." As Yamuna often said, Srila Prabhupada was completely aware of every disciple in every way, both their internal consciousness and the external manifestations of their service.

Vani and vapuh became a major theme in Yamuna-devi's life—how to maintain one's connection with Srila Prabhupada through vani to the same degree and with the same intensity

as in his presence—his close physical presence. She was convinced that it was possible, and she arranged her life in such a way as to always receive his guidance and mercy—to always be in his association.

At about 6:30 in the morning on December 20, Yamuna's constant companion and spiritual confidante, Dinatarini dasi, found that she had left. Her hand was in her bead bag, and a slight smile was on her face. She looked completely at peace—even blissful. She had not been afraid of death. She had been confident that she would again be with Prabhupada, or somehow engaged in serving his mission. Such is the destination that awaits anyone who gives his or her life fully to serving Srila Prabhupada.

Yamuna-devi was a beautiful person—a divine servant of Srila Prabhupada, his mission, and his Lords. She exemplified nama-ruci (taste for the holy name), jiva-daya (mercy for the living entities), and vaisnava-seva (service to the devotees). She was a mentor, guide, and friend to many, including me. We will miss her personal presence. Still, we shall try to serve her in separation by upholding the ideals she held dear.