

## **Chapter one**

“Of the splendid I am the splendour. I am victory, I am adventure, and I am the strength of the strong.” This is the declaration of Krsna in Bhagavad-gita. When I think of the Amazon and preaching where no other devotee had been before; and how Krsna took control and gave us all facility and protection, this sloka comes alive for me. I had been a travelling sannyasi in the Krsna consciousness movement for eight years and had just completed a preaching tour of the United States of America. The time had come to make a decision where to go next. A number of options were open to me but I was still undecided.

In a discussion with Hridayananda Maharajah he suggested my going to Brazil. “Although there are thirty-eight temples and hundreds of devotees, sanyasis rarely get there. I think the devotees would be in ecstasy if you went.” “Brazil” I thought. “I never thought of going to Brazil.” The idea began to attract me. “Do they speak English?” I asked. “No. Portuguese, but some people speak English and there are devotees who will be able to translate for you.” It’s appeal was increasing and after more discussion I agreed to the proposal. The necessary arrangements were made and soon I was boarding a plane for Rio de Janeiro. As I fastened my seatbelt, I noticed a pamphlet on Brazil in the pocket of my seat. I saw on the map that the top of Brazil was coloured a lush green. In the middle of this area I read the words, “Amazon.” A thought passed through my mind. I wondered if anyone had ever been there to preach Krsna consciousness?

Upon landing, I was met by Isvara Maharajah who was in charge of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust Publications for Brazil. It was in his association that I began my tour of the temples in Brazil. We started with the southern temples gradually making our way north. As we got closer to the equator, I again reflected on the idea of preaching in the Amazon. This idea intrigued me, as I had never heard of anyone doing it before. Upon our arrival in Recife, Maharajah suggested that next I visit a preaching centre in Manaus. It had been two and a half years since the devotees in Manaus had seen any other devotees. They hadn't been out and nobody had been in. I decided to go.

Flying into Manaus was like flying back in time. Everything there was thirty years behind America, and the tropical heat of the jungle hit us like a wave. As we drove to the temple I asked the devotees if anyone ever preaches out of the city. "Oh no," came the reply. "It is too dangerous. Just out of the city begins the jungle." Due to their limited interaction with anyone outside Manaus, the devotees there were very poor and so was the temple. In fact it was so poor, I realised that there was no way they could finance a preaching trip up the Amazon River. I was disappointed but concluded that it wasn't Krsna's desire.

The Sunday Feast was only kichari and apples but the kirtana compensated for this. The Brazilian people love to dance and the vibrant rhythm of the mrdanga and catchiness of the mantra saw them whirling in a cascade of the holy name. My eye was caught by a big aristocratic looking woman, dancing enthusiastically at the back of the crowd. It seemed obvious she was a person of some importance yet nobody seemed to pay any attention to her. When it came to prasadam she accepted with the eagerness of a devotee. I couldn't quite believe her. I turned to the temple president and asked. "Who is this woman?"

With a shy look he told me "Oh. She's Mrs Mendez, the wife of the Governor of the State of Amazon." "Why didn't you tell me that before?" I exclaimed. "I could have preached to her." "Oh we don't preach to her," he said dryly, "She's the Governess." Eventually an arrangement was

made for me to speak with her. During our conversation we discussed the situation of the devotees in Manaus. "They really need a break," I told her. "This is a missionary movement but these devotees haven't been out of the city for years. What do you think of us going into the Amazon Jungle?"

"I think that's a wonderful idea," she responded. She had a sincere appreciation of the philosophy and the importance of the sankirtana mission. "Is there anything you would be able to do to help us?" I asked. "Anything you need," she answered. I was speechless. And so was the temple president! As our conversation continued I discovered that the Governess was a bhaktin. "I know Swami Bhaktivedanta," she said. "He came to the west and preached vigorously, living in the Bowery in New York. I have read many of his books. Yes, we should go to the Amazon and preach to the Indians." "Maybe we could go by jeep," I suggested. "Jeep? But there are no roads in the jungle. The road ends about two miles out of the city. You can't go there with a jeep." So I said, "OK. How about we fly in, in a plane?" "Oh Americano. You do not know. This is the last frontier. You can go by boat, a good boat. If you don't get a good boat then it's not worth the risk. It's far too dangerous. I will get a good boat for you." The phone rang two days later. What started off as a mild suggestion began to look like a possible reality. On the line was Mrs Mendez, who told us to come to the docks. She had a surprise for us.







































