

The Battle for Krishna Minds

From Newton to Nirvana: Who controls Ed Shapiro?

by Michael Matza

The last time Ed Shapiro appeared in these pages (*Phoenix*, Sept. 3, 1974), he told a tale of horrors that would make a Krishna's *sikah* — his top knot — stand up on end. At his press conference last Monday at the Colonnade Hotel, Ed's tale had moved from the bedroom and basement (of his parents' house in Newton) to courtroom and hospital rooms (in Boston and New York). Now there's confusion mixed with horror in his 22-year-old voice.

Flanked at the conference table by Alan Attias, New England spokesman for the International Society of Krishna Consciousness; Dr. Diana L. Eck, a lecturer in Sanskrit, Indian studies and religion at Harvard University; and Polly Perlmutter, whose son Daniel (Sraavananda Dasa) entered the Hare Krishna movement almost five years ago, Ed sat quietly while introductory remarks were read.

Referring to recent legal battles over the validity of Krishna as a religion and the charge that followers are "brainwashed" or under "mind control," Attias quoted Thomas Szasz, a well-known radical professor of psychiatry: "We do not call all types of personal or psychological influences brainwashing. We reserve this term for influences of which we disapprove."

Adding to this theme of disapproval's leading to religious persecution and offering a quick survey history of the Krishna religious tradition and its movement from India to the United States, Dr. Eck said, "There are those in America, in 1976, who have labeled this tradition a 'cult' and have called into question its authenticity: this is an appalling and saddening witness to our cultural isolation. The recent controversies surrounding the Krishna Consciousness movement stem from our collective lack of awareness. We do not know, and we fear what we do not know."



Ed Shapiro: "brainwashed" or "kidnaped"?

Ed's story

Ed became a devotee of Hare Krishna four years ago when he dropped out of Brandeis University to live at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness temple — then in Allston, now at 72 Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. He studied the Eastern religious sect for three years (in the translations of Hindu texts and through conversations with other devotees) before his decision to join, and he felt firm in his calling.

His new-shaved head, saffron-colored robes, beat-up sneakers and his new name of Vasu Gopal didn't make it with his parents in the heart of the heart of the suburbs. They went to court to have their wayward son declared mentally unfit to handle his finances. And they called in Ted Patrick, a former community relations specialist for then-California Governor Ronald Reagan, turned free-lance "deprogrammer" — the man with the unorthodox methods to urge the prodigal son back home.

After a harrowing "deprogramming" experience which he says he was tricked into at his parents' home, Ed describes being transported by "Patrick *et al.*, a bunch of thugs" through Canada, where he was housed in Guelph, Ontario, at the home of Professor MacPherson, an economics in-

structor at the University at Guelph. "He considers himself the Canadian version of Ted Patrick," Ed says.

To hear Ed tell it today, he was never "deprogrammed" as Patrick and his parents claim. Rather, he says, he cooperated with the group of former cultists that Patrick had him travel with simply because they were relentless in their desire to eradicate Krishna Consciousness from his mind and he no longer felt strong

enough to put up a resistance. "I never let them convince me to blaspheme against Krishna," he emphasizes, "but it was too much aggravation to fight them any longer. I took the course of least resistance to avoid their psychological torture."

While he was still in Canada, Ed's parents called him from a relative's house in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and requested that he come down for a vacation. He says his plane ride to North Carolina via the Washington, D.C. airport was his first unaccompanied trip since the night of his alleged "deprogramming" by Patrick some three weeks earlier.

Arriving at the Washington airport, Ed remembers seeing "a street person with one of the Krishna books," and he urgently asked where the seller of the book could be found. "I knew I would see other devotees at the airport and I looked forward to seeing them," Ed recalls. When he saw another sect member that he recognized from his pre-Patrick days, Ed asked to be taken to the Washington Krishna temple where he could get back

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Dr. Eck: "We fear what we do not know."

on the religious path from which he had been forced to stray.

After six to eight hours in the Washington temple (since moved to Potomac, Maryland) he cashed in the remaining half of his flight and bought a ticket back to Boston to rejoin the Boston temple.

"When I first saw the devotees in Boston I felt great happiness, and felt joy that they had been trying to find me since my disappearance."

From August of 1974, when he returned to Boston, until the following summer, he preached the word of Krishna on Boston streets and maintained only perfunctory contact with his parents. His father, an MD, supplied Ed with insulin and hypodermics to treat his diabetes, a physical condition that's been part of his life since age 10.

It was about this time, Ed recalls, that he asked his parents for nearly \$20,000 in bank accounts, stocks, and bonds which had been accumulating in his name as a gift meant to give him "a good start in life." The money was to become his at age 21 and in the interim was in a trust controlled by his father.

In earlier legal proceedings Ed's parents had a motion granted for a temporary conservatorship of the estate on the grounds that their son was incompetent to handle his finances.

"They didn't want me to donate the money to my movement and so they put it into conservatorship."

At the advice of counsel, Ed began seeing a series of psychiatrists to establish that he was, in fact, competent and therefore deserving of the funds.

"The hassle was unbearable," he says, and after time spent building a case to rebut the one his parents had against him, Ed decided to drop it all. "I didn't need the money to live," he says, indicating that he could live and eat at Krishna temples for free.

"Finally, I just said, if they want it so badly, let them have it."

He had been administering his own insulin injections since the age of 10, he says, and didn't need to see his father for his condition any longer. At this point he stopped his ritualized visit to his parents' home.

He left Boston to travel with a Krishna bus, lecturing on Krishna Consciousness at universities and preaching the word of his religion on the street. The bus tour operated under the direction of the New York temple. He estimates that his travels took him to nearly 30 states. At the beginning of October, 1976, he was in Indiana when a phone call from devotees in New York brought him up short.

"I got a call that my parents were hassling the temple again, still claiming that I was brainwashed and kidnaped by the devotees, which is nonsense. I was asked to fly back to New York to appear before a District Attorney and testify that I was not being held against my will. That's all I thought they wanted."

Ed arrived in New York a few days before his meeting with Queens County Assistant DA Michael Schwed and stayed at the New York temple in Manhattan.

"The moment I walked into the DA's office he pulled out a tape recorder and asked me to testify against fellow devotees on the grounds that they were un-



Alan Attias: NE spokesman

lawfully imprisoning me through mind control." Ultimately, the Queens Assistant DA would seek indictments against Angus Murphy and Harold Connelly, leaders in the Krishna movement. He wanted Ed to buttress his charge that they had used mind control against Ed to affect hi

Krishna conversion.

"I was outraged. I said it was a ridiculous claim. How dare you ask me to be your witness and testify that I was kidnapped when I wasn't," Ed says.

When Ed refused to cooperate he was arrested as a material witness in Schwed's case against the Krishna followers. Also arrested at that time were Merylee Kreshower, Angus Murphy, and Harold Connelly.

"The woman [Kreshower] and I were put in the same cell. Harold Connelly was locked in a cell across the room and we were told we couldn't talk to him," Ed remembers. "You might be interested to know that the woman sought an indictment against her mother and a private investigator because they tried to throw her into a van to kidnap her to have her deprogrammed."

Arraigned in Judge Agresta's court in Queens, Ed had his bail set at \$50,000. Assistant D.A. Schwed originally requested bail be set at \$250,000.

"Except for what seemed like excessively high bail we were treated nicely and, in fact, I think we were given special attention so that we would agree to testify against our friends." Rather than being confined to a jail cell, Ed and Kreshower were confined to the DA's office by day and sequestered at a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge at Kennedy Airport by night. "They even let us buy \$40 worth of personal goods at a drug store and said it was on the house," he muses, indicating that he felt the kindness was a ploy to get them to defect.

The grand jury returned indictments, alleging extortion and the "unlawful imprisonment" of Shapiro, against Murphy and Connelly. The extortion indictment apparently is linked to Shapiro's estate.

Through the course of a number of legal battles in New York, Ed was remanded to South Oaks Mental Hospital in Amityville, New York, for psychiatric evaluation.

Ed says he was met at the hospital admitting room by a Dr. Ogura. He says the doctor asked him a "strange" series of questions.

"I want to ask you some questions, he told me, and then he said: 'People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.'"

That was his question?

"That's what he said to me," Ed repeats.

Ed refused to answer the doctor's "strange questions" and demanded that his lawyer be present. Ed's legal defense in New

York is being handled by Alan Levine, Paul Chevigny and Chris Hansen, Civil Liberties Union lawyers.

South Oaks hospital would not admit Ed, and, after a phone call to his lawyer, Ed sat in the hospital waiting room, anticipating a car that would arrive to pick him up. In the gathering dusk, the waiting room began to fill up with Assistant D.A. Schwed, Ed's parents, and members of the hospital staff.

"My father began chasing me around the waiting room, yell-

ing things like 'Snap out of it,' and holding up my sister's graduation picture and saying things like 'She still loves you,' things like that. He began crying, saying things like 'I'd like to spank you.' He was acting like he was the master hypnotist and he could snap his fingers and get me to start acting a different way. I asked the lady at the desk if they always let things like this go on in their waiting room. 'He's just trying to help you,' she said. I slipped into a telephone booth outside the building to get away from him and called my lawyer again. I stayed in the phone booth and then found that I was grabbed and handcuffed by the Nassau County Police. At the station I was handcuffed to a pole. They told me I was taken in for my own protection."

On the strength of a temporary guardianship order granted by Judge Perrera in Middlesex County Probate Court in Massachusetts and honored by the Queens County Court in New York, Ed was taken in his parents' custody back to Massachusetts, where his father signed him in to McLean Hospital in Belmont.

Ed says the hospital in Belmont was very considerate of his civil rights.

"They allowed me to see who I wished and let my special vegetarian diet be brought in for me everyday from the temple in Boston."

After he was committed to the hospital involuntarily, Ed's legal interests switched from CLU lawyers in New York to the firm of Richmond, Kassler, Feinberg and Fever. Haskell Kassler had represented Ed at the time of the conservatorship, and the firm had also handled the real estate deal when the Krishnas moved from Allston to Boston.

After a series of motions filed in Middlesex Court on Nov. 3 and 4, the temporary guardianship under which Ed was involuntarily committed was dissolved. After more than two

weeks in a psychiatric hospital, Ed was able to sign himself out. He called a press conference to inform the Boston community of the snowballing events he's experienced in the last month.

His parents' story

On the phone, Barbara Shapiro, Ed's stepmother, is searching for the right words.

"I think you should know that we are not trying to get Ed back into the fold; we are just trying to get him back to sanity," she says.

Do you recognize Krishna Consciousness as a religion?

"Well, I don't know how to answer that. According to the IRS anything is a religion if you worship a common person and have a membership list. I've read Krishna material, and one of their rules is no gambling or speculation of any kind. To them, thinking is mental speculation, because what are you doing when you're thinking besides speculating on different ideas? You're not allowed to think, to doubt, to question. This is why we feel Eddie is being controlled. He's not thinking for himself. We are trying to get him the proper attention he needs."

Mrs. Shapiro feels the issues surrounding the schism between Ed and his parents are being misrepresented by their son because he is controlled by the Krishnas.

"We just want him to live his own life. I think we can walk separate ways and this thing can have a happy ending, but we won't until he's thinking for himself."

Dr. Eli Shapiro has been practicing family medicine for 38 years. "The sociological rela-

tionship of the family is very important," he says. "When I said this to Ed, he said that I was not really his father, and that he was not really Ed Shapiro, just a spirit that inhabits the body. If he doesn't believe the body is Ed Shapiro, he won't take care of it, and he doesn't. He has been in medical emergencies all across the country, and the emergency room bills are always sent to me. When I met him in New York after he returned from India he had terrible infections on his feet. I wanted to take him to a hospital to have him checked out, but he said he couldn't go unless his leader said he could go. His leader said that Ed would do anything he told him to do. I said, 'Ed, is this true?' He looked at me like he was in a trance and said, 'I will do anything he tells

me to do.' He is mastered by these people. My son's personality has changed. I know there's a lot being said about civil liberties in all this but I think that he is in psychological slavery to Krishna. He's being deprived of the civil liberty to be with his family. We do not agree that for a diabetic, the possibility of being a productive contributing citizen in society is found in Krishna."

Do you see a day when Ed will have the money that is now in conservatorship?

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not sure how to answer that. I don't know what the future has in store for Eddie."

What next?

The terms of the dissolution of the temporary guardianship of Ed Shapiro require that he visit a Middlesex County family court probation officer once a week, that he be under the treatment of a physician for his diabetes, that he remain in Massachusetts, and that he be available for further independent psychiatric examination with a doctor of Judge Lawrence Perera's choosing.

Ed and his lawyers anticipate another legal battle with his parents between now and Christmas in Middlesex Probate Court, when the Shapiros file a motion to gain permanent guardianship over their son. The outcome of that court appearance will have ramifications for the estate in conservatorship (it's been three years) as well.

Then too, it is likely that Ed will be called as a witness in the New York kidnaping and extortion trial of his leaders when it comes up some time around the first of the year.

Assistant DA Michael Schwed told the *Phoenix*, "The way I've seen psychiatrists operate, they just ask a lot of questions like, what time is it, what's your name? When I get him on the stand I intend to ask tougher stuff."

How is all this affecting Ed Shapiro and what does he think his future has in store?

"I can't speculate on what my parents will do," he says. "For now I'm not going to expose myself to mishap or possible kidnap by someone like Patrick. For now I'm not preaching on the street. I'll be staying in the temple chanting and praying until this thing is settled."

It's possible that the permanent guardianship hearing won't occur until January. And if he wins in Boston, he will still have to testify in New York, where it appears as if Schwed will seek to prove that Ed is still under "mind control" and thus his testimony relating to the defendants would be suspect. It looks as though Ed will be off the street for quite a while. Some say this is what these proceedings are all about anyway.

Leroi Jones became Imamu Baraka; Cassius Clay came out slugging as Muhammad Ali. But for a once-practicing Jew from Newton, the trip from Ed Shapiro to Vasu Gopal is uphill all the way. ○