

**Passing Places,
Eternal Truths**

**Travel Writings
1988–1996**

PASSING PLACES, ETERNAL TRUTHS

Travel Writings 1988–1996

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

GN Press, Inc.

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book are invited to correspond with our secretary, c/o GN Press, Inc., R.D. 1, Box 832, Port Royal, PA 17082

© 1998 GN Press, Inc.
All rights reserved
Printed in India

GN Press gratefully acknowledges the BBT for the use of verses and purports from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. All such verses and purports are © BBT International.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gosvāmī, Satsvarūpa Dāsa

Passing places, eternal truths: travel writings 1988–1996/
Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-911233-31-8

1. International Society for Krishna Consciousness. I. Title.

BL 1285.84.G6613 1996

294.5'512-dc21

97-51400

CIP

This body has rattled out of joint; the used Renault is in better shape than I am. I'm glad to sleep in a room tonight, but I want to go back to that cold, steel cave, the back of the van where Prabhupāda's books are within arm's reach, where the bed is stiff, and sleep is interrupted by truck lights, but where you are free. I don't want to enjoy special *prasādam* or soft beds wherever I go, but I treasure the honor of being asked, "Will you give the *Bhāgavatam* class?" Prabhupāda, please protect my honor, and let me keep on traveling for you.

CONTENTS

Introduction: On Travel / 1

About This Book / 8

The Summer Marathon / 9

Passing Places, Eternal Truths / 163

My Purpose While Traveling / 227

A Trip to Spain / 343

Glossary / 429

Acknowledgments / 442

INTRODUCTION

On Travel

According to the *Vedas*, travel is not worth the trouble it causes unless you are traveling to a pilgrimage site. In ancient times, there were no tourists. Warriors would travel to maintain order within their kingdoms and *sannyāsīs* would travel to preach, but other than pilgrimage, there was little travel.

Spiritual pilgrimage means to travel from holy place to holy place. The quality of a holy place is determined by two factors: it must be a place in which Lord Kṛṣṇa or one of His many expansions performed pastimes, or a place associated with His great devotees. The *Bhāgavatam* states that if we bathe in a holy river but fail to inquire from the *sādhus* we find there, then we are no better than cows or asses. Pilgrimage is not meant for materialistic or ritualistic gains but for seeking our lost relationship with God. Therefore, if there are *sādhus* present where we live, we do not need to travel. Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sings, “To visit holy places of pilgrimage is another bewilderment of the mind, because devotional service to the Lord at any place is the last word in spiritual perfection.” The real point of life, whether we are stationary or wandering, is to become self-realized, to understand our eternal relationship with God, and to engage in loving service to Him. If travel furthers the

development of love of God, it should be undertaken. Lord Caitanya has assured us that in this age, we will develop pure love of God by chanting the holy name. We do not need to travel to perform that sacrifice, but sometimes it may help.

A Vedic aphorism states that no one should travel unless he will find at his destination a Deity, a holy river, and a friend. Other travel should be performed as service to guru and Kṛṣṇa. Preachers also travel, and they find themselves cleansed by the inevitable austerities they are forced to undergo. Spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so important that Kṛṣṇa Himself appears in this world to preach. Therefore, those who accept the austerities of travel in order to teach others about Kṛṣṇa become dear to the Lord.

And great devotees have used travel for these varied purposes. The *Mahābhārata* describes how Vidura was thrown out of the Kauravas' palace because he was siding with the Pāṇḍavas. He took advantage of this situation to travel as a pilgrim and to free himself from the contamination of his association with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons. Lord Caitanya's followers walked hundreds of miles from Bengal to Orissa each year just to receive the Lord's direct association. Pilgrimage can still function for us in the same way; it can free us from our worldly entanglements, encourage us to live simply as mendicants, give us the association of holy persons who are not traveling but living in the holy places, and give us a vision of the pastime places.

Perhaps the most famous of all spiritual travelers is Nārada Muni. When he was a young boy living with his maidservant mother, a company of wandering Vaiṣṇava mendicants stayed at his home. Nārada was fortunate enough to be able to hear the philosophy of devotional service from them. After they left, Nārada's mother was bitten by a snake and she died, leaving him, at five years old, an

orphan. Nārada took the opportunity to become a mendicant like those Vaiṣṇava sages. In a purport to that section of the *Bhāgavatam*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “It is the duty of a mendicant (*parivrājakācārya*) to experience all varieties of God’s creation by traveling alone through all forests, hills, towns, villages, etc., to gain faith in God and strength of mind as well as to enlighten the inhabitants with the message of God. A *sannyāsī* is duty-bound to take all these risks without fear.” (*Bhāg.* 1.6.13, purport)

When at the time of death Nārada achieved his spiritual form, he widened his preaching circle to include the entire universe. Wherever he goes, he plays the *vīṇā* and sings the Lord’s glories. Many great Vaiṣṇavas have become his disciples, such as Vālmīki, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vyāsadeva, the compiler of the *Vedas*, Dhruva Mahārāja, and Prahlāda Mahārāja. Nārada is appreciated wherever he goes by both devotees and demons.

In one instance, however, he was cursed. On one of his travels, Nārada met Dakṣa’s sons and encouraged them to become renunciates. Dakṣa became angry and cursed Nārada, “You may travel all over the universe, but I curse you to have no residence anywhere.” (*Bhāg.* 6.5.43) Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, “Because Prajāpati Dakṣa was a *grhamedhī* who wanted to remain in household life, he thought that if Nārada Muni could not remain in one place, but had to travel all over the world, that would be a great punishment for him. Actually, however, such a punishment is a boon for a preacher. A preacher is known as *parivrājakācārya*—an *ācārya*, or teacher, who always travels for the benefit of human society.” Nārada set the standard of not staying in one place for more than three days, and present-day *sannyāsīs* continue to follow this standard.

A news reporter in India once called Śrīla Prabhupāda a “jet-age *parivrājakācārya*.” Like Nārada, Śrīla Prabhupāda

traveled around the world many times and effectively spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness wherever he went. He was, in fact, the first Vaiṣṇava to take the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra outside India and to spread it to cultures with no background in Kṛṣṇa worship. According to the scriptures, this is proof of Śrīla Prabhupāda's extraordinary empowerment by Kṛṣṇa.

To continue his mission, Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged his followers, especially the *sannyāsīs*, to travel, not as tourists, but as effective and surrendered preachers. When one new devotee, not yet initiated by Prabhupāda, wrote to Prabhupāda saying that he wanted to travel to "see things," Prabhupāda wrote back about the uselessness of travel in general:

I can understand you are planning to go on world tour, but I think there is no need for wasting your time on such world tour. Better you chant Hare Krishna sitting in one place, that is far better. What for you want to go on world tour—people everywhere are doing the same thing, eating, sleeping, mating, and defending—each in some slightly different way, but same substance is there. There are the same streets, same people, same cars, same trees, etc. everywhere, somewhere a hill, somewhere sandy, somewhere some water—but what is the profit of seeing so much scenery? It is better if you want to travel . . . You can travel with our Sankirtana party if you like. They are presently here in Los Angeles, and they are making program to go to London, then over Europe, then eventually on to India, etc. So if you want to travel I recommend you travel with them, and chant Hare Krishna with them wherever you go. And you will profit by this sort of travel, whereas the other is a waste of time practically.

—Letter to Kris, November 13, 1968

Prabhupāda wanted his *sannyāsīs* to open centers, to expand the preaching fields, to distribute his books, and to travel to already existing temples to encourage the devotees to hear and chant. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement therefore requires two types of devotees: those who are willing to stay in a *prabhu-datta-deśa* and to develop it, and traveling preachers.

Prabhupāda never stopped traveling, although he indicated a number of times that he wanted to. In his commentary on Dakṣa's curse, Prabhupāda writes about himself:

In the *paramparā* system from Nārada Muni, I have also been cursed. Although I have many centers that would be suitable places of residence, I cannot stay anywhere, for I have been cursed by the parents of my young disciples. Since the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement was started, I have traveled all over the world two or three times a year, and although I am provided comfortable places to stay wherever I go, I cannot stay anywhere for more than three days or a week. I do not mind this curse by the parents of my disciples, but now it is necessary that I stay in one place to finish another task—this translation of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. If my young disciples, especially those who have taken *sannyāsa*, take charge of traveling all over the world, it may be possible for me to transfer the curse of the parents to these young preachers. Then I may sit down conveniently in one place for the work of translation.

—*Bhāg.* 6.5.43, purport

Prabhupāda was never able to stop traveling—or he chose not to. Fortunately, he was able to combine travel with his translation work and he gave us a treasury of literature as well as his wonderful example as *parivrājakācārya*.

By presenting *Passing Places, Eternal Truths*, I am declaring myself to be a traveler for Kṛṣṇa conscious purposes.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda awarded me *sannyāsa* in 1972, as he handed me my *daṇḍa*, he ordered, “Preach, preach, preach.” So it was he who gave me the order and the urge to travel. Prior to that event, I rarely traveled. I was raised in New York City, where I imbibed the attitude that there wasn’t much to see outside of Manhattan and the other boroughs that comprised New York City. I took my first plane trip when I was twenty-two. I had just been inducted into the Navy and I flew to join my ship. I traveled for two years on the *USS Saratoga* and visited many Mediterranean ports, but as soon as I was able, I returned to New York City, this time to the Lower East Side, where fortunately, I met Śrīla Prabhupāda, who had traveled there from Vṛndāvana.

In those early days of the movement, I thought I would always stay in New York with Prabhupāda, but in 1968, I moved to Boston to start a center there. I remained in Boston for four years, then accepted the *sannyāsa* order from Prabhupāda and began to drive around America in a van, visiting colleges and ISKCON temples and presenting the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Although from time to time I have been given a base of operations, it has never amounted to anything permanent.

I am happy to travel, but over the last ten years my health has broken down and I find it more difficult. Unfortunately, neither can I practice *nirjana-bhajana*, *bhajana* performed without moving from place to place. Still, I may be forced to slow down my travels. Fortunately, Prabhupāda has also indicated that we can prosecute Kṛṣṇa consciousness in any place by chanting and hearing. “In this age, devotional service of hearing and repeating the holy glories of the Lord is strongly recommended, and one who takes the vow of renunciation of family life need not imitate the *parivrājakācārya* like Nārada or Lord Caitanya,

but may sit down at some holy place and devote his whole time and energy to hear and repeatedly chant the holy scriptures left by the great *ācāryas* like the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.” (*Bhāg.* 1.6.13, purport) Prabhupāda protects us in either case.

I also like to travel by the *br̥had-mṛdaṅga*, the sound of the printing press, as I write and distribute Kṛṣṇa conscious books in my spiritual master’s footsteps. Still, I don’t think it will be possible for me to completely stop traveling, and as long as I can, I will look for a van, a plane, or one vehicle or another, to travel from holy place to holy place within ISKCON, especially parts of America, the Caribbean, Western Europe, and the holy *dhāmas* of India: Māyāpur, Vṛndāvana, Mumbai, and Jagannātha Purī.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book contains selections of travel writing covering about ten years. The book is structured by placing a “timed book” at the beginning and second to the end as two anchors. The middle of the book contains a selection of small excerpts or nuggets from larger works. The final piece in the book is an attempt to write fiction while traveling.

I hope that you will find this book interesting, and regardless of whether you are a traveler or not, I hope you will become one at least while reading this book, as we ride together in the van, sit in the plane, travel sometimes on foot, and always try to remember and prosecute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions.

THE SUMMER MARATHON

Author's Note

The Summer Marathon is a timed book, and therefore I should tell you what a timed book is. When I free-write, I write what comes to mind. Sometimes I discipline that practice by giving myself time limits—an hour, half an hour—within which to write without stopping. I write without care for structure or artistry, and concentrate on digging up spontaneous “first thoughts.” Sometimes, however, I find this writing method a little too free from structure, and I decide to channel it more. One way I provide structure is to extend the writing session from an hour to a longer period of time—a week or two, or a month. During that time I consider my main engagement to be writing, even if I am traveling or visiting a temple. When the time period is up, I usually have a book.

I don't take on much structure other than that. Therefore, sometimes the writing falls into the category of diary, sometimes it takes the form of travel writing, sometimes chapters form, but almost always, there is a theme that runs through it all.

I chose the time frame for *The Summer Marathon* by following the dates of a European summer book distribution marathon in 1995, when I was traveling in the van with my assistant, Madhumaṅgala dāsa, to Slovenia, Switzerland, and other such places.

You may feel that *The Summer Marathon* begins slowly. Instead of the immediacy of travel concerns, you get some background about my writing life and hear about a fictional character named Svevo. I also discuss my desire to write for truth, and name some of the writers who have set this theme for me—Emerson, Heschel, and Field. I hope you will be patient with these opening pages, because they actually set the foundation for all the travel writing in the book. Once we grasp these initial premises, we can sail down the road more profitably. As I state in *The Summer Marathon* itself, “It’s a new kind of literature, as Emerson said. The truth. People may get to like it even though it isn’t tight and great lapses are allowed when we sink into a mundane valley. At least it’s all true.”

I know that *The Summer Marathon* is not the usual kind of travel book. It doesn’t contain portraits of culture and places and people. Rather, it’s a writer’s book with thoughts about the nature of writing and my seeking to understand better whether or not I am pleasing Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda. In other words, the travel is as much inner as it is outer. In his introduction to Freya Stark’s travel book, *The Journey’s Echo*, Lawrence Durrell writes, “A great traveller (in distinction to a merely good one) is a kind of introspective; as she covers the ground outwardly, so she advances toward fresh interpretations of herself inwardly.”

As Thoreau wrote, “The question is not where did the traveler go? What places did he see—it would be difficult to choose between places—but who was the traveler?”

INTRODUCTION

The Adventures of Svevo, Revisited

As I sat down to begin this book, I was suddenly reminded of a novel I read before I met Prabhupāda: *Confessions of Zeno*, by Italo Svevo. Let me tell you about Svevo and his book.

I first read Italo Svevo in 1964 after I had been discharged from the U.S. Navy and had gone during a snowstorm to live on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I rented my first apartment there and thought that I had attained a mystical heaven. I arranged my room simply—white-washed walls, red curtains, and just a few pieces of furniture. The most prominent thing in the room was the big writing ledger I had brought back from one of our cruises to Italy. My apartment was to me something akin to a monk's cell. Unlike a true religionist, however, I made sure I had an ample supply of marijuana to carry me through my days. I had no bed (just a cot), and no girlfriend, and I wanted to write. I simply needed a subject. I found my topic when I began to visit some acquaintances named Eliot and Anna. Eliot was a painter of abstracts, and I would often smoke marijuana with him and Anna and then assist Eliot in a "happening" by throwing paint (or eggs, etc.) at the boards on which he was working.

The story of my involvement with Eliot and Anna is too long and painful to tell here, but suffice to say that I began to write of my visits with them—a series of poetic, autobiographical vignettes. I was not attempting to write a novel with a developed plot but of things as they happened, and I included plain descriptions of events and places as well as descriptions of my own dedication to the life of the hip artist.

Italo Svevo was an important discovery for me at the time. I no longer remember much about his book, but I do remember how much I admired his truthfulness. I remember one scene in which the hero went to his office and moved different objects blandly around on his desk. Svevo captured his stream of consciousness. The book was also anti-romantic: his hero was pursuing a love affair, but he never got far with it and his thoughts revealed that he was sometimes in love and sometimes not at all in love. It was Svevo's dedication in the writing to capture life as it happened that intrigued me.

The most tangible influence I picked up from Italo Svevo, however, was his last name. I decided to use it for the main character in my writing because the word "Svevo" was so similar to my own name: Steve, Stevie, or Steve-o. It was a way for me to thinly veil my persona. Naming my character gave me the impetus and the distance I needed to delve into the writing. I'll give you an example of a vignette that I remember writing. One night over at Eliot's, we painted a big board together. Eliot put a lot of black on it and in the end, we threw raw eggs at it. The vignette was a description of the three of us walking through the streets late at night carrying that large board. I saw my Svevo and his friends as something like the figures that Picasso drew during his "blue" period—graceful acrobats; sad, artistic figures.

Smoking marijuana was part of the writing experience. It meant that my reality was constantly changing. After I had been writing for some time, Eliot and Anna began to read bits of the manuscript and Anna thought it had genius.

I lived as much for my story as for my relationship with Eliot and Anna. One day when Eliot and I were alone, Eliot warned that if I continued to keep his company, he would corrupt me. By that he meant that he would destroy my idealism. I didn't think that he had that power, but perhaps I should have been more afraid.

At that time, another friend warned me that I should be careful not to miss out on living life because I was always trying to turn it into Art. He said that he wanted to get as much life experience as possible before he began writing. Life came first. For me, writing came first. I said that life was the stuff that I would use in my writing. My friend was alarmed by my attitude. He said that even if I became a great writer, it would be Pyrrhic victory; a war won at too great a cost. If I didn't live life but attained art, my friend reasoned, the artistic excellence I would have achieved would have cost me too much. In a sense he was right, and I could see even then that martyrdom to art was not making me happy. It was a difficult quandary, however, because neither was I interested in leading the kind of life for which he aspired, with that same lust for sense gratification that he admired in Henry Miller.

While *Svevo* was in progress, I sent a portion of it to an editor in Chicago. He wrote back that he thought it was "superb" and that he wanted to publish it, starting by publishing installments in his magazine.

It was a time when my life grew more desperate. I eventually broke off my relationship with Eliot and Anna. Within two years of leaving the Navy, I was disillusioned with the Lower East Side. It was also at that time that I took

LSD and jumped out the window, breaking both heels in the fall.

Now let me move ahead in this story to say that by July of that year I had met Śrīla Prabhupāda. Soon after I became his disciple. One morning during Prabhupāda's lecture, Eliot came to the front door. I knew he was a trouble-maker, so I didn't let him in. Anna came by one day too with a crude invitation. I repulsed her.

A chapter of my *Svevo* manuscript did get published in that Chicago magazine, but I never got around to reading it. I was already too absorbed in my newfound Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then one day the publisher showed up at the door of my First Street apartment. By then, my apartment was an *āśrama* that I shared with the others. I spoke with the publisher in one corner of the room and told him that if he liked, I could write a sequel to *Svevo* and tell about how I came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and I gave him a summary of the chanting. Although he said he was interested, I never heard from him again.

I took the idea of writing a sequel seriously, however, and I went to talk to Śrīla Prabhupāda about it. I still remember going into his room when no one else was there and telling him I had something practical to discuss. He smiled and asked me what it was. I told him that I had written a book that somebody wanted to publish, but that it was not Kṛṣṇa conscious. However, I could write a sequel telling how my hero, who was in so much illusion, finally found the true path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda was encouraging, but he added that I should make money from it. It's not that they should pay me less because I was religious. I was pleased that Prabhupāda approved the idea, but I never did write it, probably because around this time I had decided that true renunciation meant I should give up writing. Not long after this incident, I carried all my

writings—half a dozen short novels, many stories, poems, and diaries—and threw them into the incinerator in the hallway at 26 Second Avenue. The only manuscript I saved was *Svevo*, because Prabhupāda said I could do the sequel. Eventually, though, that too was lost.

What does all this have to do with *this* book? I'm not sure. I feel captivated by Svevo's approach right now, so perhaps it will spark something off in this writing. Aside from that, this writing is meant to record my travels to temples starting July 29. Each day I hope to seek the truth. This book is meant to be what I call a "timed book," meaning that it will last a predetermined amount of time. I am calling it *Summer Marathon* because I will write it during the ISKCON summer book distribution marathon, which starts on July 29 and ends on Janmāṣṭamī. This will be my *sankīrtana* effort. We'll have to see if Svevo comes to life in these pages.

Pre-Marathon

July 20, 1995

I know that the dates of my summer marathon don't coincide exactly with the dates of ISKCON's summer book distribution marathon, but for both me and the book distributors, this is the home stretch of summer, our last chance to pour on Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the ideal, relaxing warmth that summer brings. Besides this writing, my marathon will consist of traveling to ISKCON temples and giving lectures on my way to Belfast, where I am scheduled to attend the Janmāṣṭamī celebrations.

Confessions of Zeno begins with a fictional preface written by a psychiatrist. The doctor has instructed his patient to write his autobiography as a form of therapy. I like this kind of thing, a fictional editor or publisher who takes the whole story down to an even further fictional realm. Should I do that with my story? We'll see how it develops. Aside from Svevo, the literary reference I have adopted as a main theme for this book is a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies—captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences and how to record truth truly.

I'll let you know what I mean by that in terms of my own odyssey and writing during the course of this marathon, but just as a pre-marathon remark I will say that I intend to try to find my truth on a daily basis. That means the absolute truth of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and my own honest perception of what is true to me each day. Taking the opportunity of my travels and the urgency of awareness that this could be my last summer in this body, I will try to choose from among my experiences those which are most interesting and meaningful, and I will try to record that truth truly.

July 24

I imagine a critic surveying my writings and pointing out that I write mostly about writing. That's true. Or the critic might discuss the Pyrrhic victory I mentioned in the Introduction. Although I should probably avoid playing critic to my own works, I am unable to leave the critical concerns behind. These are important issues for me. Since I write to



purify myself, these concerns are bound to come up repeatedly. Let me discuss them for a minute here:

I don't have to be ashamed of the fact that I often write about writing. Writing is an exciting and fascinating subject. I often ask myself, "What is the wellspring of creativity? How can I write to please Kṛṣṇa? How can I use writing to worship Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda?" I also praise the joys of writing and again seek to link it to God, who gives all good things. I seek to fashion art out of writing, to make a poem or book that will attract people and bring them to Kṛṣṇa. I write to help myself. I want to leave a record, as so many mortals do, and because I am connected with the pure devotee and Kṛṣṇa, I want my record to have transcendental value. The degree of value will depend on how deep I can go; it will depend on my achieving some measure of success in my struggle.

As to whether or not my writing is done at the expense of living life as it comes, I prefer to take a more positive approach and say that writing is an important aspect of Vaiṣṇava life, especially for one who has chosen it as a vocation. I shouldn't create an unnecessary dichotomy between my writing and my life. Writing is devotional service, so how can I separate the performance of devotional service from "real life"?

As for this present book, I can only guess at what it will become, but my guess is that the writing itself will drive *The Summer Marathon* forward. The writing itself will be the main adventure of these homestretch summer weeks. The writing constitutes the marathon. A marathon means working exceptionally hard despite obstacles. I will continue this writing under all circumstances—through travel, headaches, temple duties, and lack of subject or inspiration. Therein lies the challenge.

In Joanna Field's book explaining diary techniques, *A Life of Ones Own*, Field tries to seek the truth through her diary. Specifically, she records each day what made her happy. She began this practice because she felt an uneasiness stirring in her that her life was not being lived according to her own desires. She writes, "I was so dependent on other people's opinion of me that I lived in a constant dread of offending." Therefore, she tried to get inside her life by seeing what fueled her happiness. She kept a diary, "melting in it every day when I had been particularly happy and anything that I wanted. At the same time I would note anything else that seemed important so that if it should turn out that happiness did not matter I should have a chance of finding out what was more important." Joanna Field's emphasis is on trying to get beyond other people's images of us or of life lived out of obligation to others. To actually find out who we are takes self-observation. Here is her report from the first two days of the experiment:

The only special happiness that I could remember (after the first day) was hearing someone playing the piano in the distance and watching the splashing water in my bath. The next day, back at my work, I apparently had only one moment which seemed important. It was a moment of absent-mindedness when I looked up from my desk and found myself gazing at gray roofs and chimneys, a view typical from a million of London's top-floor windows. I do not remember exactly what I saw but only the shock of delight in just looking.

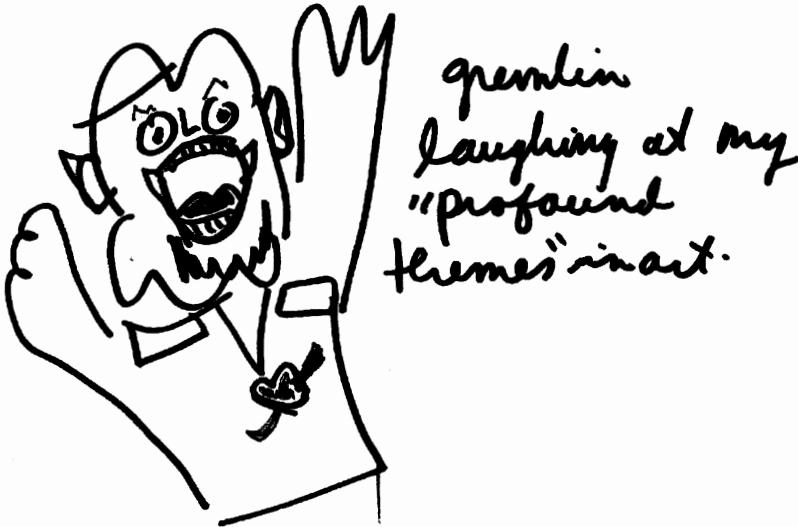
I may employ her method and see where it takes me.

Another book that comes to mind is a book by Abraham Heschel called *A Passion for Truth*. I read this book before I wrote *Truthfulness*, *The Last Leg of Religion*, and his

passionate discipline for undeceiving oneself inspired me.
Heschel writes:

This was not a philosophical inquiry into the nature of Truth but a scrutiny of men's lives in relation to Truth. Religion, the Kotzker maintained, was not simply an act of adopting a system of beliefs and certain modes of conduct; test and trial were needed, and one had to ascertain through introspection whether one's beliefs were genuine or not, and whether one acted out Truth or lived the life of pretense. . . .

I would like to capture that mood in my own truth-seeking.



July 29

1 A.M.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says He is the transcendental chant, the father of the universe, the mother . . . The pure devotees seek Him out directly, *satataṁ kīrtayanto mām*. They are fully absorbed in glorifying Him. Why should we do less? We don't want to be considered among the "others," such as the impersonalists. Follow the path of praising Kṛṣṇa with a firm vow to follow the rules and regulations, to bow down, to offer worship to the Supreme.

Do I do it? Is this an ideal I cannot yet reach? Is my writing fated to be something less? Let it climb, the devotional creeper. Let me sing with voice and pen. Free-writing, free expression—in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Yes, yes.

Calm, fairly calm. We're at a house in Italy. It's early Saturday morning. Cars pass regularly as people go home from their late-night Friday. I seek peace but should know I can't have it in this material world. I can't have it, but I can have an abiding spiritual peace. Those who know Kṛṣṇa as the object of sacrifice, the Lord of all planets, as everyone's best friend can attain "peace from the pangs of material miseries." (Bg. 5.29) Confidential knowledge of Kṛṣṇa grants relief from miseries. Therefore, it's not wrong to seek peace and solace and relief—and even quiet—but

it is not possible to attain them by material means. You can't get them just by living in the countryside.

Madhu and I will drive all day today in order to arrive in Slovenia by nightfall. We are going to the ISKCON temple there, which is in a city whose name I don't know how to pronounce. Thugs sometimes attack the ISKCON temples in such countries. Such temples—all our temples—are filled with strife as devotees struggle to work with one another with their not-always-perfect motives.

And so, my friend, will you write out of your head and hand and headache? Will you tell us of your journey? It's certainly summer—sweaty, hot, mosquitoes biting all night.

Yes, I will tell you of this journey, and even when I can't think of something edifying to say, I'll continue to speak because I continue to live. My heart beats.

My material father is dead; he died eight years ago of a heart attack. The news reached me only a few days ago. It happens. Was he thinking of God? Was he even my father? Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate father. The spiritual master is my real father. My master, father, teacher is Śrīla Prabhupāda, and I can continue my relationship with him even after his departure from this world.

Taste of mosquito repellent on my tongue. When I get bewildered by outer events, I'll try to gain hold of inner Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Last night I had a nightmare. Cruel persons were torturing me in various ways. That's the material world. Whatever suffering I experience in dreams or otherwise is only token karma for my past sinful life. I want to use it as an impetus to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Headaches are like that, and highway delays, inconveniences, mishaps—all challenges placed before this soul in his attempt to reach Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.

Should we not be perfect before God? God knows our hearts. I am speaking—writing—it might be said, just to keep myself busy. It's something I do to pass the time. I dig up things, show off, say I seek to go beyond pretense and to find myself, the pure self, as eternal servant of the Lord. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes (and I want to repeat), the devotee aspires to gain his eternal association with Kṛṣṇa in one of the five transcendental *rasas*. That's it. We are seeking Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this summer marathon record.

Toot-toot. Train whistle. Get into the white van. Chant or lie down as your body bumps over the miles. Think of friends and projects. How is it possible that I'll have to leave it all?

At the end of today's road is supposed to be a thriving temple which in the last year has recruited fifty devotees. They will see me, old Svevo, cranking into their courtyard in this white van. "We have been on the road all day. We just want to rest. See you in the morning." Usually we travel for only five hours a day. Today we will drive eight. I'll try to catch a few writing times during the day. Not so external? It's all one, external-internal. I will tell you something.

This cannot be a book written in one place with no other occupation during the day. This fact may be an advantage. I'll try not to complain, "I'm distracted and can't write." If we are traveling, then give us the benefit of special road perceptions. Anything. My desire is for protection in the Lord's energy, not outside it.

Road stops, mental jerks, ups and downs—all this and more ahead. Bumps with others. Ruffles within. Concerns of the body and its organs. Admitting the truth. Seeking the Absolute. Avoiding faultfinding.

I read in Heschel that the Kotzker wasn't content to weed out doubts and faults; he wanted to face them. I'm not sure I agree with that procedure. If we know things are not good for us, why *not* weed them out, even as routine? Although it's true that nothing should be done without thinking, some doubts have no value, no profit. What do we gain by looking too closely at them? At least we should argue with them.

We would agree with Heschel that weeding does not remove all weeds. The seeds have to be destroyed. Otherwise, mown fields rise again. *Kecit kevalayā bhaktyā*: devotional service does the job. Ultimately, it's not by my introspection or heroic strength that I can undeceive myself. It's by *śṛṇvatām sva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*, hearing about Kṛṣṇa, the Lord in my heart; He cleanses the desire for material things and delivers me pure taste in spiritual life. I plan to keep weeding. Weeding causes pain; I'll have to cry sometimes. If at a particular moment when it's time to write I'm filled with complaints, I may have to say, "Ouch!" although I would prefer to say, "Gaurāṅga!"

Svevo ties his bow. He puts on the straw cap his friend bought him, tries it on for size in the mirror. Look okay? It's just in case he has to pretend he is a nondevotee. I don't think there will be an occasion for that in the next twenty-one days because devotees are not hated or illegal where I am going. But just in case.

O Lord of the universe,

O soul of the universe,

kindly deliver us from the pangs of death, disease, old age, travel, and fear of those who are cruel. Deliver us by allowing us to think of You. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

8:30 A.M.

Stopped at a gas station for breakfast and rest



Last night I dreamt of the Guarinos. One group of us arrived at a place and had a car ride scheduled for the next morning. Then Uncle Mickey, who was physically big, and another uncle arrived. They needed a ride to the same place where we were going, but Mickey was considerate. He said maybe they couldn't all fit in our car since I also had my luggage (including my — *Book*). I said in the morning when our car actually arrives, we can try to fit in. We'll see. Then I wanted to tell them my childhood memories of the Guarinos, especially something my father used to say—that if the five brothers had gotten together to form a business—something like a furniture moving business—it could have been a great success, but they could not cooperate. Do I dream of them because only two days ago I learned that my father died?

Svevo mourns on principle. If he knew who he was, then he'd know his story, what he has done. He waits for words to be his own, not those of John Berryman's "Henry's Fate."

Is he the one right now ascertaining whether he has indigestion? Is it he who is hearing the highway sounds?

Is he afraid? All we can conclude with any certainty is that Svevo joined the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

In another dream, I came back to my room and a black man and his family had moved in. We were to share the room. I played with his son, but he became disrespectful and pulled my ears as if I were a boy like him. I told him our natural relationship was that I was the spiritual master and he the disciple.

Speeders on the highway. It sounds different than a surf, but similar. We hear distant death. Everyone in ISKCON knows our Armenian temple was attacked. We dream of it and see the photos of wounded devotees. I dreamt I saw a confidential file of photos showing the men's wounds.

I would like this to be a bright and light narrative, like the way I felt when we first stopped for breakfast.

No use recalling childhood.

It's not that we now and
even at the time . . .

were not God conscious,
doesn't help me except

I was a self and so were they.

Illusion of happiness is
also a kind of happiness?

Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "What if a man builds
a very nice house and you ask
him why he built it
and he says, 'Just to set fire to it'—
you'd think he's a crazy fool."

Tortoise draws in limbs. "Swami" means master of the senses. I'll be listening to Prabhupāda's lectures.

I have to write even when I don't feel like it. The dictionary defines "marathon" as "a foot race of 26 miles, 385 yards run on an open field." It refers especially to an event in the Olympic games. It's derived from the story of the Greek runner who ran from Marathon to Athens to tell of the Greek's victory over the Persians. A marathon is also "any long-distance or endurance contest."

Lie on your back and dream. On your side. The day turns mild. We will reach our day's end destination, Ljubljana, it's called. Zagreb is to the southeast.

I was happy to put a wet towel on my head, and bare chest, and arms. Madhu was sitting in the sweltering front seat. We're in a traffic jam. I asked him if he'd like a wet rag. "Yes," he said. Later he thanked me and said it gave him some relief.

Those sentimental feelings others have. Mine are not like that?

"I stayed one night at Tripurāri Mahārāja's temple," he said. Now words come to me from the letters I have answered.

Did it ever occur to you that you are not making progress? Drive on, only two hours from the temple. I'm a faded, living legend, who wrote the biography, was there in the beginning, has no teeth, doesn't care much what others may think. I anticipate danger, anticipate being thrown in the clinker, think of Amnesty International.

If we examine what makes us happy, we may discover a means to find our unique self. Plenty of people would like a wet rag to cool down a hot body or to eat the whole-wheat spaghetti (no tomato sauce) we ate with vegetables at lunch. I look over at the desk in this van (my desk), at my new desk lamp, and the index card I taped there reminding me to write. Does that make me happy?

True happiness is far away. The unique self is known by revelation. The Supreme makes us happy. When we serve Him, we can taste a drop of His *sac-cid-ānanda* nature. No other process can do it, and no introspection or speculation. Scratching the surface leaves you cold or hot, but not spiritually where you want to be.

Get ready. We're almost at the border. Put on pouch with passport. We assume they will not be unwelcoming. The temple is full of youngsters, all initiated by my God-brothers. They will receive me and give me a place to park the van. It's a sign of improvement that I don't ask myself so much, "Why am I coming here? What can I add to their lives?" I just go.

I said to Baladeva early this morning, "I will be going to two ISKCON countries where I have never been, but even more important for me is this book, *The Summer Marathon*." But when it gets hot after lunch, I melt into awareness of my body and I want more rest. I did look at a 1974 edition of *Kṛṣṇa* book, hardbound; George Harrison funded it, and Satsvarūpa dāsa Adhikārī helped with the typing and preliminary editing. Eternally lucky I got to do that. Read it again.

It's a marathon in the sense that it runs until Janmā-ṣṭamī, like the book distributors' summer marathon, and in that I keep going. Twenty-six miles, twenty-one days. The BBT created their marathon to create competition and to spur on the distributors who like the energy they get from it, like sports. Summer and winter contests.

I will find here the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in microcosm. Worrywart outgrown. Turn to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Pray for the right thing. And try to learn from others, not thinking you already know it all with your own brand of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Learn, be simple, give a lecture, and in the same way write it down.

It was important that I reinstated early morning reading of *Bhagavad-gītā* back into my schedule today. Fight to keep it there. It's like a compass fix, a firm foundation to all else. I feel reassured in the reality of Kṛṣṇa, which seems to dissipate so easily for me. I am also assured that I actually have a taste for Him.

I tend to say in my public lectures that we don't need anything or anyone but Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. The Lord says that and so does His pure devotee. One can only say it, however, if he has experience. The early morning reading does say that even more than a quick lecture outline. I don't want to state a duality between reading *Bhagavad-gītā* and my own writing, but suffice to say, I need to read. I will lose taste for all things of this world in the proportion that I gain serious attraction to the Lord.

Learn to read "the same thing," *Kṛṣṇa* book Preface, slowly and with appreciation. The six opulences of Lord Kṛṣṇa which prove Him to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead are not mythological, trivial, dogmatic. Parāśara Muni gave something great in that definition of God as the all-attractive Supreme Person. Our spiritual master uses it. We depend on him, but he's not independent. He's linked in the chain of disciplic succession. From him, we receive it. "Only he could lead them." I read it a little at a time. Go for those time-honored teachings. Satisfy yourself there. On a hot day you want cold water, that's always true.

We stop at Duino, an Agip station for refueling. Is this the same place where Rilke wrote *Duino Elegies*? No sign of it. Big motorboat on a trailer ahead of us on the diesel queue. Pretty girl runs by. I'm no big poet, can't sacrifice on that altar following Rilke. Want Kṛṣṇa consciousness this day and every day.

Hello, hello, I imagine ahead to arrival at the temple. They look at me and me at them shyly. We ask for an electric hookup. Go in and see the Deities? Not at this hour? Too tired to lecture, you tell them. Head still spinning from the road. First the border crossing. Bye, *ciao*, Duino.



6:30 P.M.

Ljubljana

Me, me, Svevo, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, son of my spiritual master from a long time ago before most of these boys and girls were even born. Weary from traffic jams and the long drive, the strain of finally finding ourselves on a street near warehouses and a railroad track, our van with IRL license plates and trying to find the right place. The *sāṅkīrtana* men are just pulling in as they return from the day's distribution. They are all dressed in Western clothes. They start a *kīrtana* to welcome us, maybe twelve of them and a few *mātājīs*. Then they escort us to a large guest room. We say no, we would prefer to go to the temple room first, so

we change directions and go to see Prabhupāda's full-sized *mūrti*. I'm not so conscious or feeling right now—too tired—but I know what to do. I bow down. On the altar a simple painting of the Pañca-tattva, and pictures of Rādhā-Madana-mohana and Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva of the German farm. Then a separate altar with their gurus on it. I bow before the pictures and I recognize Harikeśa Mahārāja, Śacīnandana Swami, Rohiṇī-sūta Prabhu, Smita Kṛṣṇa Swami, others, others—the devotees watch as I prostrate before their gurus, my Godbrothers, ISKCON. Then our whole group moves back toward the guest room, but I remember, “Oh, we will stay in the van.” So we communicate that and ask for an electric hookup. One of them, a young man named Viśva-mūrti, says that most of the devotees have gone to some “camp” and maybe I will go there too. Madhu says I'll stay here. Here we are. Those are the details of our arrival. I'm bushed and want to rest.

Then a fax comes asking us to go to another place two hours further down the road to join the camp festival there where four ISKCON guru *sannyāsīs* will be lecturing and holding *bhajan*as with a gathering of 250 congregational members from Slovenia, Croatia, and Austria. They even expect me to get there tonight! Forget it. I'm taking rest and I'm going to stay in this place even if not so many are here. Enough is enough.

July 30

I awoke at 1 A.M. and read *Bhagavad-gītā*. It's important, and while I want to keep my reading time inviolable, I can't help but write here too, to capture some of it. Kṛṣṇa is the goal, the sustainer, the Lord, the witness. We reach Him and perfection by taking the elevator. In other words, if we consider Kṛṣṇa in His energies and approach Him in that way, it takes a long time. "One should directly approach Kṛṣṇa, for that will save time and energy." Does one climb a skyscraper step by step? Prabhupāda encourages us to take the elevator. He doesn't say that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme inconceivable and that we cannot expect to attain a relationship with Him. Rather, he says that although most people don't know it, Kṛṣṇa is the supreme goal. We (the devotees) are supposed to know this and get on the elevator. This is also known (as described in today's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verse) as the path of Garuḍa. How can we follow it? By praying, chanting, serving, and associating with devotees.

Śacinandana Swami is among the devotees at that camp two hours away. He phoned to ask me to go, but is sympathetic to my decision not to. He is going today to Serbia and then Croatia, despite the war in those countries. He and I exchange letters although we almost never meet. In

his last letter he wrote, “The art of preaching is, in my humble understanding, an art of giving. Unfortunately in this condition of material existence, a conditioned soul like me is only expert in the art of taking—taking attention, taking respect, even taking nectar. When I became more aware of this ‘wavelength’ [of giving], I was overwhelmed with gratefulness and admiration for Śrīla Prabhupāda and his merciful mission.” He then told me of some of the practical strategies in this zone to “make” devotees.

Am I giving or taking? I want to be among the giving too. Remember that movie where St. Clare goes to join St. Francis and she says something like, “I don’t want to keep taking love for myself. I want to give love.” All right, but I guess I’ll have to give it right here. It shouldn’t matter so much whether we go to the summer camp where 250 people and five swamis are congregated, or if we stay here and speak to twenty or fifty people. It shouldn’t matter so much if we are shy of Zagreb and stay in Ljubljana. Every place needs Kṛṣṇa consciousness and every devotee can be a giver, a preacher.

To go like bees after the nectar will also make us givers. Go directly to Kṛṣṇa in His words in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and come out “sticky” with pollen.

When I turned on the light this morning I saw the small container my earplugs come in. The box has a little “Classic Trivia” label on the back: “Elephants have a trunk so flexible that some of them can even untie a knot with it.” That’s a kind of giving too, to tell you the trivia.

Last night I heard kids shouting. I think this temple rents spaces in a large building that houses other people. I didn’t know whether these shouts were devotees or non-devotees. I also heard them singing *sundara-ārati*, *kiba jaya jaya gorācānder*, resounding voices of young men

and women. They asked Madhu to give the *Bhagavad-gītā* class, and I lay down in the van and drifted off to sleep.

Somewhere in a dream, I (or Svevo or someone) was drawing large-scale, Disney-like characters. The illustrations were well done and were offered to Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa and the other devotees. In the course of the dream, however, the artist came to realize that this was not the best offering. He somehow figured out that although Śrīla Prabhupāda had been tolerant to accept it, and even liked it, it was not a first-class offering; it was more his own indulgence, a whim. So he told others that he was giving it up. His discovery was also enlightening to them. Wow! Talk about pertinent dreams. Here I am. But I can't yet give up my cartoons.

My aversion of going to the summer camp or the war-torn city, of giving and not taking—what is it? My summer marathon. And what is yours, dear reader?

Machado wrote something like, “I don't owe you anything; you owe me for my poems.”

My offering, if I can concentrate and remember it, is to record what's happening and share it as nectar, as instruction. Everyone is running through life (me too), but some of us want to record the human and spiritual essence of the experience. A poet senses the secret and tries to preserve it. Perhaps this is a vain attempt, just another way of taking, but I tend to see it as a form of giving when it is done in the right way.

In my case, I not only want to do it, but I want to be *understood* for doing it. It helps me to feel confident even when I feel unworthy. “Oh, he's merely a writer. He doesn't go to a summer camp or Zagreb, and he doesn't hanker to be with his Godbrothers on a stage in a big tent staying up late singing *bhajan*s into amplifiers. He doesn't give in

that way.” Doesn’t give by taking responsibility for face-to-face encounters with new people. Doesn’t get involved in the zonal effort to convert people. Where is his zeal to wrest souls from *māyā*’s grip? One Godbrother wrote me of a program they hold in this zone and at which he gives of himself: “We also offer the guests to take walks where each devotee in the seminar preaches to three or four guests and in the end we have a question and answer session . . . ” He tells of street *harināma* with Kṛṣṇa conscious pantomime after which hundreds of people are inclined to hear the swami’s five-minute lecture. He also recommends Bhūrijana Prabhu’s *The Art of Teaching*. He finds there “many nice instructions which I find very valuable in my preaching and also teaching of disciples.”

This Godbrother is a generous and loving person. I want to be like that in my own way by being generous in writing. It seems strange. I produce so many books and in a way, they are private, but it’s my preaching. There is pantomime, there are zonal seminars, and there is my proliferation of books that sooner or later will reach people’s hands with a special, private message. Those who say that ISKCON is only concerned with vigorous proselytizing and institutional life may see my “Anne Frank” approach as ineffectual. But a private person preaches.

In one zone, I heard, they pray to Gaura-Nitāi every day after *darśana* that the Lord send them more *saṅkīrtana* devotees.

Am I a *saṅkīrtana* devotee for whom they are praying? Or are they praying only for the book distributors, those who go out to the streets every day carrying book bags and stopping people cold? Yes, they are praying for *those* soldiers. An old writer may help too, but by the zonal ISKCON jargon, he is not “going on *saṅkīrtana*” and not a *saṅkīrtana* devotee.

I leave that issue aside, but I'm aware of it. I would prefer to pray for any devotee anywhere.

It's important to actually realize Kṛṣṇa. I don't mean this in an advanced sense; I mean that it's important to overcome agnosticism. When I read or hear how Kṛṣṇa is God, I don't want to think, "This may be a myth. It's hard to accept because there are so many religions in the world claiming that their God is God and who don't recognize Kṛṣṇa as God." They see Him more as an Indian cultural manifestation of the divinity. I can run here and there preaching, but it's more important that I be convinced. One could say the only way I will gain conviction is when Kṛṣṇa becomes pleased with me, and the quickest way to catch His attention is to preach.

I agree. But there are many ways to preach. We all have to find our way—Choṭa's way.

Heschel is intellectual, involved. He considers opinions even by great Western philosophers, and finally offers the Jewish viewpoint. In his book, *A Passion for Truth*, he advocates what the Kotzker and Kierkegaard have said. I don't have the time or capacity or desire to analyze it or to labor over it, but it is filled with themes relevant to ISKCON life. Maybe we needn't bother with the moral questions involved, the intensity of self-scrutiny; maybe it's a deviation or distraction, like looking at the "classic trivia," but I think there are sparks here. I propose to occasionally write down a fragment from Heschel and give a quick Kṛṣṇa conscious fix on it, although I know what I am doing isn't professional philosophizing or even adequate.

He says it's quite possible to act in religious life for self-love and out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, but to attain holy life, one's incentive should be pure love of God. I think in ISKCON, since our theology is so pure—

all selfish religion is kicked out—we may tend to think that we have already attained the purity. We need to be humble about that and part of the ability may be a scrutiny of self that exposes our falling short.

Heschel and his teachers admit that self-esteem is an important human motivation and a need. “Such esteem becomes questionable, however, when it serves as an inducement for moral and religious action.”

Leave that for now, an incomplete thought. I also noticed while pursuing this that I fear that too much rigorous thought will bring me a headache. So much of what I do is shaped by that. Things have to go easy for me; I need to go with a flow and not create opposition. Find truth naturally in *Bhagavad-gītā*. This morning I felt sweetness in coming close to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*.

In Heschel, I sensed more opposition and difficulty. I know his teachers specialize in difficulty. Spiritual life isn’t easy, but it *is* also easy. It’s the path of Garuḍa, on his wings. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that big speculators fail to attain perfection in devotional service. (“Too intelligent for his own good,” was Bhakta Fergus’s comment when he peeked into Nietzsche.)

Śrīla Prabhupāda:

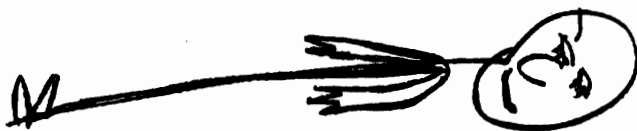
The path of devotional service is undoubtedly very difficult to follow, but it becomes very easy if the candidate actually wants to follow the path of the *mahājāna*. In this age there is the path of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who appeared to deliver all fallen souls. This path is so simple and easy that everyone can take to it by chanting the holy name of the Lord. *Harer nāma harer nāma . . .* We are very satisfied that this path is being opened by this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because so many European and American boys and girls are taking this philosophy seriously and gradually attaining perfection.

—*Bhāg.* 5.14.42, purport

I can't recall whether I dreamt this or it happened while awake: I was speaking to a group, and between speaking there were pauses. In the pauses came a total and very rich silence. Maybe during the silence I saw a patterned wallpapered wall or a cloth texture. The silence was so terrific I savored it, startled. It was almost loud, it was so silent. It was a relief. Now it's gone and I don't know where it came from. I offer it as a confession—I mean, I know it's not directly Kṛṣṇa conscious, but I have to write here what honestly happened and what strikes me.

As far as relating it to Kṛṣṇa consciousness—"Of secret things I am silence." (Bg. 10.38) Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Among the confidential activities of hearing, thinking and meditating, silence is most important because by silence one can make progress very quickly." (Bg. 10.38, purport)

She asked "Why does Kṛṣṇa take so much to help us sometimes?"
I said HE is never 'slow' or neglectful.



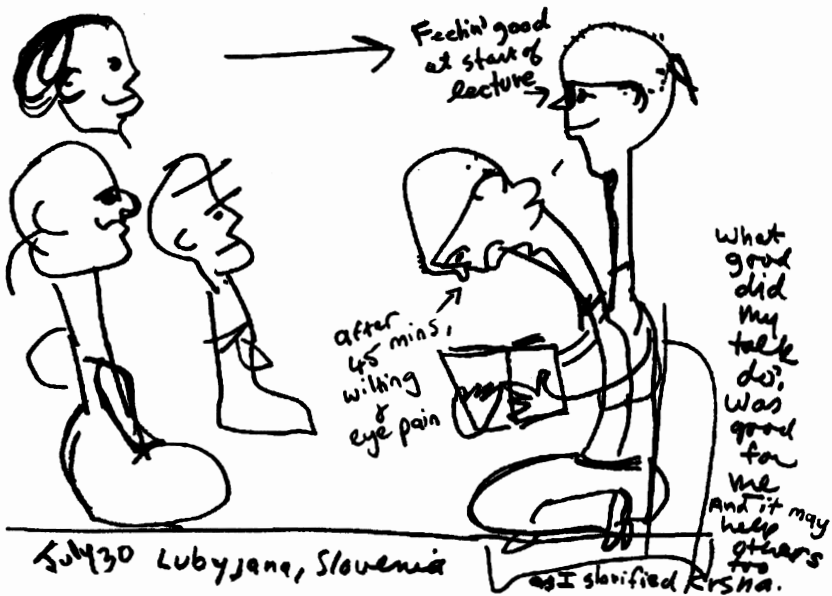
See that as His mercy while you lie down now.

When I get a chance, an opening,
I'll re-write the next bit of Summer Marathon.

They told them there were only five devotees left behind at the temple and that I should go to the summer camp, but it's not true. There are at least twenty-five devotees here for class. One woman in Western dress asked,

"Why does Kṛṣṇa give us relief for our difficulties only after a long time?" I told her He is not slow or neglectful. It is we who are slow to see Him acting in our favor, which He may do in many ways. Have faith that whatever He does is for our good.

Profound concepts of the pure devotee's awareness of Kṛṣṇa in his life at all times. I can't claim to know this by realization, but I spoke the ideal teachings, the ideal examples, and what I believe (by hearing) is the care and protection the Lord affords to all His devotees. As I spoke—it was the next to last question after an hour of lecturing—my head pain began. I lingered on the answer to her question and then took one more. A smiling, very young man asked, "What is the meaning of second initiation?" I said I couldn't answer such a topic at the tag end of a lecture. See you later.



It may seem odd that I stay cooped up in such a small space in the rear of the van all day. After the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class, I walked out of the temple and into the back of the van. I didn't care if anyone thought it odd. I laid down on my saffron bunk and heard Madhu explaining to someone why I can't meet with devotees during the day or sing *bhajan*s in the evening. I heard him say, "He gets up at midnight."

From *A Passion for Truth*: "While self-love or self-interest may be regarded as a legitimate component in the love of one's fellow man, it is incompatible with the love of God. If purity of heart is to will one thing, and that is to be the love of God, then desires must be excluded, particularly erotic desire, the Kotzker and Kierkegaard agreed."

We say the same thing. From *The Nectar of Devotion*: "The word *love* can be actually applied only in relationship with the Personality of Godhead. . . . What goes on under the name of love in the material world is nothing but lust. . . . Great authorities like Bhīṣma have explained that love of Godhead means completely giving up all so-called love for any other person. According to Bhīṣma, love means reposing one's affection completely upon one person, withdrawing all affinities for any other person. This pure love can be transferred to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. . . ." (NOD, p. 143)

What to do about our inability to attain that stage? We say, "It's a gradual process." I like to write books, and I hope Kṛṣṇa will like them and accept them as an offering. I don't know what He wants of me in that regard. Perhaps He wants me to give up the satisfaction I feel in writing or the solace I feel in privacy. The real question is, if I did know what Kṛṣṇa wanted of me, would I be able to surrender and do His will? It's very hard to know. We accept

what Śrīla Prabhupāda said, but now, who can you trust in that way, especially in very particular and personal affairs?

The Kotzker discussion reminds me that we sometimes say things that are too heavy for the devotees to accept. Śrīla Prabhupāda presented Kṛṣṇa consciousness sternly, but also expressed his optimism that the average devotee could attain the pure state. We just have to follow the *mahājanas*. The difficult becomes easy, by Lord Caitanya's grace. That's a significant difference between Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the Jewish and Christian teachers, the Kotzker and Kierkegaard. We mostly see the Kotzker and Kierkegaard as struggling. The devotee is dancing in *kīrtana*. I admit it's not easy to really dance in *kīrtana*. Our inner motives and dislikes plague the mind. But sometimes we cut through and taste something spiritual. Ultimately we recognize that our hearts are cynical and dark, but there's nothing in them that a good *kīrtana*, *prasādam*, and a *Bhāgavatam* class can't drive out.

Travel in hot summer days reminds me of the fact that much of what we call "happiness" is staving off natural miseries. We feel the relief of a cloudy day, relief when there are no mosquitoes.

I think the five Godbrothers may come here today from the camp. They say I can expect about 150 congregational members at the Sunday feast lecture, and maybe 60 devotees. I think I may speak about Śrīla Prabhupāda's Jaladuta experience and read the poem he wrote in Boston.

One Godbrother said, "We tried to get in touch with you. Were you on retreat?"

"No," Madhu replied, "we were preaching in Sicily."

Busy temple life. Lunch supposed to be at 1 P.M. Cook says, "1:30. What can I do? I'm all alone." At 1:15, M. gets

called out for a phone call. I busy myself with crayons. "God is color." At 1:24, a *brahmacārī* knocks on the van. I go up to the window. He says, "*Prasādam* is ready." I reply, "Madhumāṅgala went for a phone call. As soon as he returns, I'll tell him to go get it." Then I go back and stay calm. Just accept whatever happens. Van surrounded by voices, temple life in Slovenia. A voice I can't identify against side of van. Language I don't understand.



Classic trivia: "A cheetah can achieve running speed of 60 mph (96.54 km)." In class this morning, I gave the example Śrīla Prabhupāda gave, that *bhakti* is like a bicyclist catching onto the back of a truck and going faster than he could under his own power. We latch onto Kṛṣṇa and go by His power.

Yes, Godbrothers are returning from the camp. One from Brooklyn asked, "When is Mahārāja going to take lunch?" M. said better leave me alone today so I don't jeopardize the scheduled Sunday lecture.

Can't you get beyond all this? Can you latch onto a power greater than your own? Can you transcend yourself and the story of a fellow who comes to visit the temple in

a strange land that becomes mostly familiar because it's ISKCON family? I *can* transcend if you mean ignore all this and write of something else. But—

If they ask me how I feel, I thought of saying, "I feel happy, fulfilled (or say optimistic, satisfied, *creative*).” And then add, "Physically, I am the same.” I need to remind them of my weak health so that I am not overrun.

Get beyond this life? Then you're talking of fiction.

Svevo bedazzled the poof. Did not go jogging with his Godbrothers in the religious institution. Did not join a New Age soul movement. In black clothes he—wait, this isn't 1964. He don't wear black. Saffron. Who is he?

Chief. Components. I mean to convey the irritable, ruffled surface of life in the temple courtyard in a van. Everything is okay as long as I can deliver that lecture about Śrīla Prabhupāda coming to America. The rest is my private stuff and maybe not so important, huh?

Post-lunch dream: One Godbrother in a U.S. Naval officer uniform with full regalia. I come walking toward him in the ship's passage wearing the clothes of an enlisted man. There is a stain on my Godbrother's jacket. His mother appears and we all study it closely. He concludes the uniform is ruined by that stain. I am wearing a brown shirt over my dungaree shirt, and my Godbrother thinks for a moment that I am imitating an officer. Next, I see myself putting on a U.S. Naval ensign's uniform and looking in the mirror. Just in case Lieutenant Richardson comes and sees me doing this, he should know that I am not imitating an officer—the uniform belongs to someone else—maybe Ravindra-svarūpa's son—and I am just trying it on.

Are these the dreams of a former GBC man?



For my lecture: anyone coming to ISKCON will notice that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the center of attraction (except for Lord Kṛṣṇa) and that he is the final authority. His leading disciples quote him to establish their own authority. If you want to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you should follow Śrīla Prabhupāda—not blindly or dogmatically, but by making his acquaintance and gradually developing love for His Divine Grace. To get to know him, we can study his books and hear about his life. The lecture is taking on shape. I'm keenly aware that my Godbrothers are listening as well as the Slovenian devotees and congregation. "For those coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, knowledge and appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda are very important."

Fan running from skylight and I, in my own world, hear only the louder parts of the temple *kīrtana*. Śrīla Prabhupāda in the Bowery loft, June 1966, said he was always busy there, working alone, something reading or writing, something reading or writing, "Simply when I feel hungry I take some food. And simply when I feel asleep, I go to bed. . . . You can ask Mr. Paul whether I am not doing this."

Me too in this van.

"Hello, hello."

"Can we meet and talk?"

"Sure, why not?"

How to prepare for each onslaught?

Ecstatic time in temple lecturing on Prabhupāda. God-brothers were there and that added to the joy of it.

Some of my notes are like spoilsport complaining compared to the mood I felt when speaking just now. It seemed like the ecstasy increased more and more as I was able to explain the verses of Prabhupāda's poem.

The questions afterwards were excellent. One of them pushed me to further describe how Prabhupāda combined the qualities of humility and confidence. For an answer, I turned to the poem Prabhupāda wrote at sea. He described himself as the *via medium*. Confidence surged through him. He knew his Guru Mahārāja would be victorious and that he was the instrument to attain that victory. Yet he felt unqualified. I quoted Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, who said that when one has love of God, the first symptom is that he feels he has no love.



Then a young man with stumbling English asked a good question: “What’s the difference between a neophyte devotee who has no love of God and who thinks he has no love of God, and the advanced devotee who thinks in the same way?” I said that even in the neophyte stage, such spiritual poverty is a jewel and the devotee can increase it. It’s better than having no love of God and thinking that you have it.

When I finally finished, the audience burst into applause, which is something they probably do for all speakers, but it was nice. Then the translator announced that I would sign copies of the *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* and people came up respectfully to have me write their names and sign their books. Their piety seems to come partly from their national situation and their material poverty. Being with them made me feel proud to be part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. It also made me think that my life of running and hiding, trying to spend time alone to develop attraction to Prabhupāda’s books, and writing to attain self-honesty, can be used profitably so that when I speak about Prabhupāda, I can come out with solidity and freedom from pretense, integrity.

After sitting in the temple signing books, I finally made it back to the van, but Madhu brought in more books and I continued to sign them.

Happiness: underarms of *kurtā* soaked from sweating while lecturing.

July 31

Yesterday I autographed books. Today I am back to point blank, asking myself if I am humble, whether or not I have any love for Kṛṣṇa, and whether or not I am compassionate? I looked at my essay, “Kṛṣṇa Recognizes the Preacher,” to see why my Godbrother had been inspired by it. The main thing he found inspiring was the quotes from Prabhupāda. The essay focuses on the Vaiṣṇava’s compassion and quotes one of the best references to preaching in Prabhupāda’s purports. It’s no wonder that he would find this inspiring. The quote is from Lord Śiva’s expression when he went to swallow the ocean of poison to save the universe:

It is said that great personalities almost always accept voluntary suffering because of the suffering of people in general. This is considered the highest method of worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is present in everyone’s heart.

—*Bhāg.* 8.7.44

I should never desert the preaching field. Śrīla Prabhupāda said he wanted to die on that field, like a warrior who dies in battle. How I may preach—whether by writing, taking care of disciples, and how to do that—these are important details. But somehow don’t forget that people in

general are suffering, and Kṛṣṇa consciousness is great mercy for them. Take trouble to give it to them.

“The Vaiṣṇava understands that Kṛṣṇa wants to bring the conditioned souls back to Godhead; therefore he takes the same mood as Kṛṣṇa. He doesn’t become Kṛṣṇa yet he thinks like Kṛṣṇa: ‘Kṛṣṇa wants all the conditioned souls to go back to Godhead. Look at them, they’re all suffering. They should be enjoying with Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa wants to enjoy with them. They are so unfortunate.’ That’s the mood of the Vaiṣṇava . . . Within the realm of devotional service, the quickest way to get Kṛṣṇa’s recognition is to become a preacher. Kṛṣṇa notices those who try to help others come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

Our prayer is, “Please engage me in Your compassionate mission.” Whether we become compassionate, I said, that is secondary. But please engage us in Your mission.

We have to risk and suffer to help others. I try to avoid danger, and therefore I don’t go to countries like Croatia and Serbia. I prefer to travel on the *autostrade*. I ask for medical exemption, for concessions for senior devotees, to be treated gently. I’m a writer. Don’t intrude on my privacy because in solitude I’m preparing a nice message for the people—so don’t strain me or subject me to the wear and tear of socializing. Yeah, yeah.

The Beatles sang, “She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah.” I’m a devotee, I’m an angel, a special writer, a jewel of ISKCON, yeah, yeah, yeah. I’ve got bad ankle, bad headache, good purpose in prose and poem, and as for why my eye goes flitting around the room, well . . .

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

It’s important to be vigilant, cautious. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that in the purport to today’s verse. Mahārāja Bharata was somehow not vigilant, so affection for a deer ruined

his worship of the Supreme. Be vigilant. Therefore I joke about my lack of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Heschel: “The Kotzker and Kierkegaard revealed how twisted man’s inner condition was and suggested a way out of it that was straight if hard. Both were passionately concerned with the problem of what man means to himself. Beckoned to soar to infinite heights through his spirit, he proves too earthbound to make the voyage.”

Heschel says that the Kotzker and Kierkegaard were criticized for not being concerned with the sociopolitical dimension of religion’s existence. They regarded individual choice in its purest form as the key issue. I seem to have a kindred sympathy for that way of life. I focus on myself. I thus imply that everyone should focus on the self, on purity of inner motives. We see how motives can be corrupted even while carrying out religious duties. I want to talk on that if they ask me to give the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class.

Mahārāja Bharata gave up things that are hard to renounce, and he surrendered his life for the spiritual cause, but then he again developed material attachment. I think many young persons, such as those here in Slovenia, come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and give up careers and girlfriends, etc., but in the guise of religious life, our material desires may resurface. Śrīla Prabhupāda called these “hippie seeds.” Or he gave the example of the bed bug who appears to be dead but when the season is right, bites again. Dangers: pride as a preacher or a devotee, faultfinding, misuse of facilities offered to a preacher, laxity in chanting and hearing. Follow the two tracks, *bhāgavata* and *pāñcarātrikī*.

Therefore, I ask myself, “Am I a hoax?” I catch myself at something. One writer called this “catching butterflies.” Like a butterfly hunter (unseemly analogy), we are always looking to catch the absurd and inconsistent *anarthas* in ourselves. “Ah, there you go again, being a nonsense.” See

it at an early stage; be prepared to nip it in the bud. Be able to laugh at yourself.

Even *teaching*—always thinking of oneself as the instructor—can be a wrong attitude. I try to write for myself to escape that. One has to teach and be crafty when lecturing, but then afterwards, find some relief from it. The teacher also has to go back to being a student. I crave that, to always remain Śrīla Prabhupāda's student as I read his books and repeat his teachings in new ways and in my own words. And I am a student of life. A student because I admit I am not a master. The teacher assumes that he is better, somehow, than the students in his class. At least he doesn't use that time before them to focus on his own imperfections.

Heschel: "Once a religious man ponders religion, his thoughts reflect back upon the reflector. 'What about yourself?' they seem to ask." It's important for me to do both—to teach, lecture, guide, share, especially with these young folks, but also to practice it myself, to inquire how my life is transforming from the truths I teach.

How to pursue this? I lecture and then write privately. This kind of writing has to be primarily for self-improvement.

One way to do it is to skip beyond logical, merely intellectual writing and thinking. That's the method in the madness of free-writing. Skip to m' Lou. Find a better one than you, my darling, skip to m' Lou—and catch the surprised face of the auditor.

He says, "But this is impossible. This is not our orthodox method of inquiry."

Skip to m' Lou. Free-writing must be based on a life of simple prayer and pure chanting.

Now I have to go put in time on the beads. Do you see that black bear in the woods? Look ahead to your future. There's a deathbed ahead (you may not even get the comfort of a bed, but you could die on a forest floor or the

macadam of the highway). Prepare here. This is your last will. Scatter my ashes in the Yamunā, please, and my assets to the ISKCON cause. Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind.

I couldn't follow all the trains of thought—I got interrupted by the sound of the actual train here in Ljubljana.

Free-writing will help me escape the syndrome of always being a man who is writing his diary. I mean, it will help me escape the *pose*, the consciousness that “Here I am writing inner thoughts in my diary just like a Kierkegaard or some other religious writer of inner truth.” Escape the syndrome of preparing a diary for others to look at later (even if it's only for yourself to read later). Writing can do better than self-consciousness.

Dream: A split appears in a temple community. I give up my position of authority but side with one group. Our group decides to kill another group using a gas spray. They hole up in one part of the temple and resist us. We can't seem to kill them.

I overhear two devotees talking outside, deciding who will be the new authority. They notice I'm listening. I tell them not to worry about me. I want to be replaced. It's just a matter of who will replace me. I explain to them how, in the absence of authority, a country is turned over to the robbers, as is explained in the *Bhāgavatam*. Now this temple has fallen into chaos, and I admit we have resorted to bizarre actions.

Tolerate being insulted by rude devotee. Don't brandish a knife. Give them milk sweets.

Aside from what this dream may mean specifically, it indicates to me the difference between public attitudes in temple behavior and private thoughts.

Break loose in language. You are your own main reader, and you are willing and able to follow this when you read it. Let it jump. Why? Because it is necessary to get beyond the routine.

But aren't appearances important? Don't we need to give devotees a straight presentation? What is the justification of this other?

I told you, it's private. Even so, it's coming out Kṛṣṇa conscious, sort of.

I don't know.

Here, let us take breakfast together and talk it over. It's only an hour before the morning program recommences.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said to be cautious. A little inattention can lead to havoc.

Ups and downs. Anticlimax of my *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class this morning. I felt their lack of inspiration in hearing me; it weighed in the air and on my body. I carried a load of feeling, and my phrases were tired. It was hard too because two Godbrothers were sitting before me, right in front of me. I had prepared my speech with Post-its. They were somewhat ISKCON clichés, and in the questions and answers it became even more like that. When I said, "Prabhupāda said," I thought, "This will satisfy my Godbrothers." As a result, I feel . . . what? Let down. I only went through the motions, and that's the way it is.

Don't want to carry that mood over into this writing. This is supposed to be a perpetual place of wonder, freshness.

Kīrtana in the courtyard. They are seeing off a Godbrother who is traveling to Switzerland. Does that mean we will end up with them there? Are we on a preacher's circuit?

Question in class: How can ISKCON devotees prepare themselves for marriage?

What do I know?

Brr, brr. The forest is cold. The sentences are supposed to make sense, but I don't want to be confined to that or else it's just telling you a rehash of what M. and I have already discussed, which is mostly plotting our way through the forest of social etiquette.

I want to write a marathon of words. To go somewhere, not the same as where this van takes us. Not exactly the same as what we go through on the road or at the temple. When I write of July 31, 1995, can't there be something else that occurs when I go to write it?

Write upside down. Draw a face that way. Maybe just calm down and read *Kṛṣṇa* book and be a regular devotee like you appear to be. Sarvabhāvana said if the *brahmacārīs* put down *grhastha* life, and if they should later become *grhasthas* themselves, they will be ashamed to have changed *āśramas* and will become hypocrites engaged in illicit sex. Yes, I agree. Hypocrites. People who act one way but are different underneath, in private life. I wanted to twang that chord for them. Get them to think about it. The life they need to live with full stamina, a whole lifetime in *Kṛṣṇa* consciousness in the *āśrama* that's best for them.

Hurts, write until it hurts. Sad boy, he ain't more of a devotee of *Kṛṣṇa* because at present he doesn't want to be more of a devotee than this. He's not inspired by anyone. He's not cynical, but maybe he is. He thinks if he could have more time alone, he might cut through in writing.

Mourning dove. Pots. Girls in *Kṛṣṇa* consciousness. They do the work, but I tended to ignore their presence in class. I spoke of the men changing *āśramas* but didn't mention the women, as if they don't count, the young lasses and *mātāṅīs* who when I asked, "Do you have any questions?"

said nothing at all, no movement of raised hands, although I know they are full of feelings.

What about lust? he asks.

Lust? Lust? Oh, it's a bust

I say. Forget it. It brings
anger, the all-devouring enemy
of the soul.

It's a new kind of literature, as Emerson said. The truth. People may get to like it even though it isn't tight and great lapses are allowed when we sink into a mundane valley. At least it's all true.

What made you happy?

I cannot recall. Then recall now. The breakfast did not make me happy. It was my mind, dissatisfied, did not feel perked up by the taste of hot cereal with milk and honey. Either too sweet or not sweet enough, that was the problem. I had better find my happiness in something eternal.

Svevo seems out of it, hardly a trace of him. Don't want to write of me before I was a devotee. And I'm not any "Svevo" now, so he's been dropped. I feel more interested in the discussion of truth.

Lunch will be a social affair today. Mediocre sort of fellow getting ready to pretend. Can't speak his mind. Just eats some peas or bread with adhesive-held teeth and doesn't speak his soul but carefully calculated points in sensible and interested talk. Fortunately, we say in Vaiṣṇava circles that talk during lunch should be light and noncontroversial.

1:06 P.M.

You know I think your little life reads well later if rendered honestly in detail. Is it Kṛṣṇa conscious enough?

Well, the falling short is poignant. I can't help but reflect worldly stuff, how I learned to read and write and imbibe literature. Words like "stuff," "poignant," "reflect"—practically every single one I learned in some school or context and it comes out now. You can't invent language; you can only borrow it all. Therefore, you are not unique or wholly original when you write.

But the soul is unique, so when you write of your life as best you can, it may approach the real self. There's benefit in that because we are tired of clichés and the mediocre. When you repeat *paramparā*, that's not borrowed. It's not like you are being *influenced* by *sāstra* and Śrīla Prabhupāda. Rather, you are repeating them without change. You are a loving tape recorder, even if you record their words and then repeat them in your own words.

Put on *tilaka*. Twenty minutes until the social scene. By 5 A.M. tomorrow we hope to be rolling again, on our own for a couple of days.

Nothing turns out quite as I anticipate it. Does that mean that death and the next life will be . . . ?

I'll just have to wait and see. Or maybe I won't see. Does the consciousness dim and then come on again and suddenly you are another person? A new someone, but the same old self. Who can understand exactly how it happens?

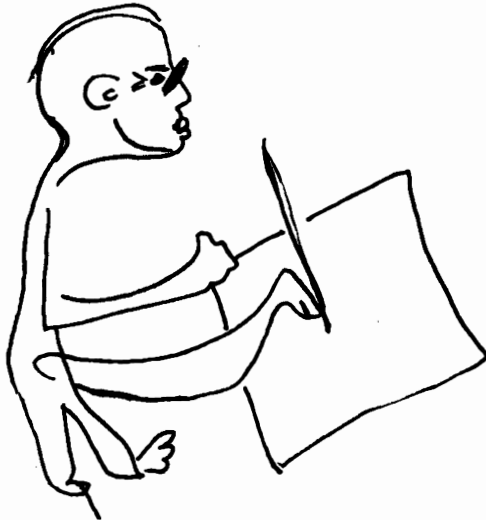
Kṛṣṇa book in big-print, 1974 edition. The book is warped a little, the surface of each page not exactly flat, but wavy. I read a little and then close my eyes and review it—the Introduction. Śrīla Prabhupāda pays respects to his spiritual master and the *paramparā*, says Lord Kṛṣṇa comes when there's evil (so in Kali He comes in *hari-nāma*). Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu . . .

Now it's 1:14. Maybe I'll be able to spontaneously say something good in my conversation with a Godbrother.

August 1

2 A.M.

I have been trying to take a new attitude toward old pain. I don't want to resent or fear it, or even wish it away. It has been sent by Kṛṣṇa as an opportunity to think of Him. But here it is again, impinging on my desire to read *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and to write.



I do wish it would go away. It would be a relief, "Ah, it has subsided," like the end of a traffic jam when you can suddenly go forward and flow. In a subterranean way,

however, I can try to commune with the Lord in the spirit of *tat te 'nukampām*. I'm getting off lightly. It's token karma. The material world is a place of misery.

I went to sleep last night—not attending my Godbrother's *Gītā* class—with only a small headache in the early stage. Then I dreamt that I was dressed in a suit and tie and walking through the streets of Great Kills Village. It was about 8 A.M. on a Sunday. I heard coming from the other direction some drunken, menacing singing from members of a young men's gang. They had been up all night. Some were singing, "A hundred bottles of beer on the wall, a hundred bottles of beer, if one of those bottles would happen to fall, there'd be 99 bottles of beer on the wall." I thought of walking quickly in another direction so that they wouldn't see me, but it was too late. It seemed they would leave me alone, respecting that I was returning from Sunday morning Mass. Some of them were bloodied. They had a gang leader.

One old man in their group objected to something in my appearance or behavior. I tried to appease him by saying we were like-minded. Then I woke and discovered a sharper head pain. It canceled my early morning plans to rise at midnight and read and write and chant and attend *maṅgala-ārati* and lead the singing and then be fit and happy for the drive. Things don't always go as we plan. I probably shouldn't even be writing this because anything I do at this point only causes more pain, but I want to keep my marathon moving and learn to enter a deeper, spontaneous state. The marathon is the writing itself, so I can't allow the time to pass in silence; it's my service. Also, I want to state something about adjusting my approach to pain to something more positive. At least we are not driving as previously planned today to see a *prāṇa* therapy doctor in Switzerland. My *prāṇa* doctors are Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Kṛṣṇa,

and I will try to think in that way. No other cure except getting a spiritual body and going back to Godhead. But also, healthier habits in this life.

It's important for me to write this mixture of the Absolute Truth and my perception of the world through my imperfect senses and intelligence. People may criticize me for mixing it and presenting it as if it's Vaiṣṇava literature, but I reply (for myself) that if I can go deeper with this, the mixture can bring me to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. If we look closely, we will find that many sâstric statements also contain this mixture. Even examples to describe Lord Kṛṣṇa's beauty and pastimes are analogies from the material world. We are spirit souls, but we now live in the material world and can't help but see what goes on. Kṛṣṇa says the liberated soul sees everything in Kṛṣṇa and sees Kṛṣṇa everywhere. I hope for that vision, but at present, I'm bombarded.

When I can write down a dream I had concisely, it seems a victory. When I can present a mixture of Absolute Truth and sense perception honestly, it seems like a gain, an addition to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. And if I can present it clearly, then it's a presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the art of writing. They may call this a Pyrrhic victory and say that whatever I have gained, I have lost the essence of straight Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I disagree. If I can go deep and remain pure and simple, the mixture won't be vain aesthetics or literary vanity. I pray for Lord Kṛṣṇa's protection as I take some inevitable risks.

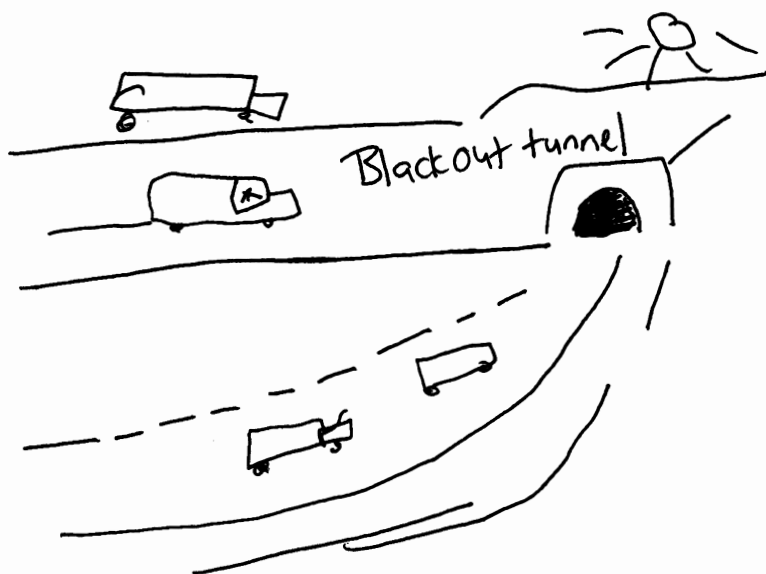
8:30 A.M.

Over the border, easy does it. Wavy-haired, young guy allows us into Italy. His co-worker says, "Whoa!" as we start to pull away. He wants to look into the van. Then cruising in green land, big ball of the sun up, countryside,

deviating off *autostrade* before Denezia, then back on, M. driving hard to reach Como, Italy, where we'll stop for the day. I try to sleep, and I think of time and when I can write. Look at the shelf of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and think, "What might I find fresh and interesting even when I don't have the best time and energy of the day?" I pick out a *Let-ters* volume and open to 1968. Śrīla Prabhupāda is telling Subala in New Mexico that he'll send Umāpati down to join him. Maybe I can read these letters from time to time.

Oats, boats, coats
 cock-a-doo, travel is too
 excruciating to think
 pink sweater packed away
 until autumn in India
 and . . .
 check out a poet and write
 your own, something new,
 for a change
 but stay on the track.

He doesn't accept me, he says, as absolute anymore. What does "absolute" mean? That whatever I said he accepted as true. He could do that if he believed that the *param-parā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda and the previous *ācāryas* and the Vedic *śāstras* are absolute, but he doesn't believe that anymore. He says nondevotees may be more evolved than devotees. I agree that not every Hare Kṛṣṇa member is so deeply committed to the truth, to love of God, but a deeply committed and realized devotee such as Rūpa Gosvāmī or Śrīla Prabhupāda knows more than any highly evolved nondevotee. So you don't accept me as absolute anymore. You see me as just an ascetic. And how do I see you?



Autostrade

This book should contain some flavor of the road.

I get interrupted. The van stops. What's up? Are we in a traffic jam? Do I have to do something?

Surface: khaki shorts. *Sannyāsī* Godbrother wears shorts and shoes, goes jogging every day. What's it to ya?

Once a minuscule fellow heard of artificial intelligence. He was riding in the back of the van and had lurched to a stop. He fell over. Then it pulled forward and he swayed in the opposite direction, but kept on writing with a pen labeled "MAGROS d.o.o. OPATIJA."

Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement goes slow, repeats same mistakes of burning out the public with ruthless book distribution tactics. They see the cult as made of cheaters. One way to stop this is to have seminars and

train leaders. Impress on them how costly it is. Better to be aware of quality, not just quantity. They may not agree. Push on book distribution. Another approach is to quietly visit temples, speak on what Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the purports, read his books daily, and write these books.

Earthbound sinisters. I'm just a passenger in this van. They are filling us up with Agip diesel.

You bend over. You lie down. You stay away from. The temple life in Slovenia was a surprise in that senior devotees were visiting. I interacted okay. They will say to others, "He's in the same ballpark as we." I saw that I'm doing what's regarded as simple *sannyāsi* duty, and it's approvable, although not regarded as tremendous work to bring about change. Or some may say it is. According to *The Seven Habits*, we give our power over to others and live the lives they want us to live. We do what pleases them. This is not good. Neither should we go to the other extreme of total independence. The author said that there are quadrants of behavior: urgent-important, urgent-not-important, not-urgent-not-important, and not-urgent-important. Mostly, he said, we act in crisis management and do urgent things, but the best is not-urgent-important. I guess reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and my own writing is not-urgent-important. So I'm okay?

Stop for half a moment, and the guy behind you beeps his horn. Roll on, find a campground, shade tree, please. We've got money; give us shade. Under that shade I'll read and write not-urgent-important. Yes, I too have to watch out I don't escape to not-urgent-not-important trivia.

Van careening. M. goes into Como to shop. Buys something and asks directions to a campground. I go on reading

The Best I Could Do (March '95, Wicklow). I like it! I thought it failed, but so far I like it. I'm on the author's side. Even if later in the book he writes less and says, "I'm petering out. This isn't working," I'll still be on his side. He's inspiring me to write this one.

Stopped again. He's in some quiet town, hot noon, at the tourist office? Where is a campground? I don't see anything, just the walls in back of the van with pics of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, back windows covered. Sweat and careen and happy to discover today that I can write in a pad while moving. I thought it would be impossible.

Get past that guy who writes.

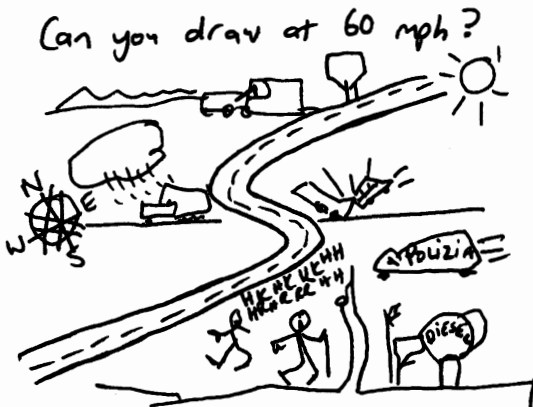
But it takes so much
acceleration,
it will give me a head-
ache, I fear.

Apply wet rag to head.

One for Madhu too.

He's passionately
seeking the campground and I'm
passionately seeking the—
cigar?

No, the emblem, bull's eye
of modern prose.



If someone were to ask me, "What are you looking forward to in life?" I'd say, "Getting up at midnight after a good rest, reading *Bhagavad-gītā* for an hour in the quiet, and then writing in that atmosphere. Feeling that Kṛṣṇa, the instructor-guru, the divine friend, the all-in-all is with me." He's in the book directly and personally, and He's in my heart in a friendly way. He never leaves me even though I sometimes forget Him. May He keep me aware of Him. I want to surrender, and even before I do, I want to help others. That's what's nice about preaching—you can do it even before you are perfect.



We went around and around, got trapped in a return to the *autostrade* before we found the entrance to the campground. The office had just closed for the Italian lunch hour, 12:30–3:00, but M. somehow roused a white-haired woman to let us in. I watched all this from the van. You have to pay to bring your dog here. Tattered American flag. Passport. Shade? Now we drive into the heart of the place, packed with campers. Beware of loose, exposed, young

flesh. I look out just so I can decide it's better to stay in the back of the van, my cell, my reading booth.

Surrounded by radios and TVs, we turn on our motor fan and drown it out.

5:15 P.M.

Fan motor blots out the world. Small space we live in. If you had to stay here all the time in solitary confinement, you'd go batty. Imagine—writing, pushing the micro tapes out of a small opening in the door, receiving a plate of food through that opening, never going outside. I have all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and tapes here, and I can chant on my beads and write. Maybe people would write me letters and I would reply. They would even publish my books and the books I write start telling about the strange, limited existence in a space about 12 feet by 4 feet. Could I do it if I had to?

Śrīla Prabhupāda said he stayed indoors and was satisfied with knowing that he could go out if he wanted, but if he *had* to stay indoors, he'd feel imprisoned. He presented this example as an analogy to prove a point he was making.

We pass over some things that occur to the mind. Teeth loose. Poor people who read you get weary of same old particulars. Tell them, "I'll be dead soon enough, folks. Then this show will be over. Sorry for the repeats. I can make something up, but I prefer not to."

An elephant was churned, and a horse, and Dhanvantari, and the goddess of fortune.

She split her sides laughing,
the poet in the grave.
The soul goes up, up to next
body and concocters can't know.

Matthew Fox says, "Here's a picture
of our liver. Now thank your
liver for the work it does.
Here's the pancreas . . ." Yeah,
where's God who makes
it all function? Why not pray
directly to the Supreme Person?
That's what I say.

Don't eat all afternoon, don't hear nondevotee music or
read their books or go out and look around at their scene.
Have faith and keep on going.

This is the summer marathon. In the last place, I heard
severe criticism of certain lying tactics used by book distrib-
utors. After all these years, it's still a controversy. The
next temple, Zurich, is world famous for top book distrib-
ution scores. I'll go there and hear respectfully something
of their spirit. Or will I? I'll mostly stay to myself and pre-
pare lectures. Śrīla Prabhupāda doesn't directly talk much
about book distribution or "*sankīrtana* stories," and my
talks are reviews and enlargements of what he says in a
particular purport. If the *sankīrtana* men have something
to say about book distribution's glories, however, I'll hear
them and not mention the criticisms I just heard.

This is the summer marathon. I keep going, approaching
new sentences. Try to convey Kṛṣṇa consciousness from the
heart and memory. I read how Lord Kṛṣṇa sat atop Garuḍa
with Satyabhāmā beside Him, and He killed Narakāśura's
soldiers with an inconceivable display of military might.

This is the summer marathon. I avoid killing insects as
much as possible, but sometimes it happens and one

appears in a bath tub and I don't take time to pick it out and it goes down the drain. I could take more care, like Mṛgāri brushing aside the ants. I could stop burning votive candles to protect the moths. They have a right to live. I am counting twenty-one days for this book and figuring to write many more, but an insect may not live even for twenty-one days. I shouldn't cut his life shorter by my neglect.

Summer marathon, Madhu chanting his rounds at night after driving seven hours this morning. I'm resting, I told you. I'm avoiding subjects that don't seem suitable.

What made me happy? That the headache went down. That we made a quick getaway from the temple at the end of *tulasī-ārati*. That we crossed the border early (it seems so long ago). The morning and the rest I was able to take on my cot, the fact that I wrote while the van was speeding along. I feel relief (if not happiness) that we reached our destination, a campground, and that we have all day tomorrow with no duties except reading, chanting, and writing. Happy to be a devotee and to be aloof from the many contentious struggles and disagreements about this movement's slow progress, be aloof from the social politics of the material world. It's important to stay away from material influences or they will leak into my writing, my life, my dreams.

Right now reduce moment to what is here in present in this van space—the fan motor above my head, M. chanting *japa* next door. Stay focused on a limited sphere. Kṛṣṇa is here, and this is my day or what little is left of it. Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, the holy names pronounced in chest, in jest, even inattentively have great power. I want to be free of distractions to write a song of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, recalling

good times I've spent as Swami's student and finding the essence now.

Tomorrow may be a longer chapter reposed in Como. I'll tell whatever comes, the blank noise, the blank wall, the Kṛṣṇa conscious version of Zazen. I beg, I say—but even that is just a word, a pen scratch, hoping to find a self that feels real, my pen scratch, a trace of love, time passing. I'll do a little exercise before anyone is out and then the rest of the day in here.



Sats leaving temple
room while tuksi
kirtan is still going on.
Aug 1, Slovenia

August 2

1:21 A.M.

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. In the van I have to whisper my first rounds so as not to wake Madhu. I want to bring those mantras somehow to the forefront of my consciousness and to dwell in them. Make this mental and prayerful effort.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. What else happened in Los Angeles? I am curious to know the result of the GBC resolutions. Did you hear about the *sannyāsī* who had to go to the hospital? What about the one who has dropped out of external circulation? What's the latest about this and that? I tell myself not to be so curious. The essential news always seems to reach me eventually, if slowly. Better I tune in again and again to what Kṛṣṇa is doing in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and what Śrīla Prabhupāda was doing, as described in his letters in 1967. I'm curious to savor the sweetness of his personal dealings with disciples, his care for them, his teaching, and his pushing them to preach and expand ISKCON. Curious to read the eternal *sāstra* and the life and teachings of our founder-*ācārya*.

Be a source person.

Svevo enters the deep precincts. He creates indigo-colored works. He draws lines and circles and then sees in them possible images he can develop. Usually he settles

for some simple, cartoony human or animal figures and brings them into shape—sits back and watches them, firms them, colors them.

Inner life, inner vision cannot be so easily depicted.

I dreamt one after another of prize fight matches. We saw each contestant and their particular appeal. Some of them seemed not so strong or young or likely to win. Someone always won though. Why should I dream of persons who never existed, whom I never met, these prize fighters and their fans and the contests, the opinions and interests of spectators and gladiators? What does it signify? That I too am one of the fighters, am old, an unlikely, billed as part of a night's entertainment? As I travel and encounter ISKCON situations, temples, and persons, is it like that, a series of boxing matches? Do I want this sporting life? How long can an old fellow keep going in the ring?

Devotion to Kṛṣṇa, as He teaches in the ninth chapter, especially verses 29–34. I can't bring it out in classes when I lecture. Something escapes me as I read or lecture, I'm aware of that. The love, the *bhakti*, which Kṛṣṇa says is the main ingredient in every offering—do I know it? This is a typical question I ask myself. I ask it sincerely and sometimes rhetorically for all of us. We shouldn't be thoughtless.

We serve the Lord almighty, then we rest after expending our energy, but Kṛṣṇa doesn't expend or need to replenish Himself.

Campground finally quiet. Several times I hear different burglar systems go off, then quiet. People living close to one another, tent by tent, camper by camper. They breathe in the night air of summer, then get up and putter around.

Kṛṣṇa Vision, Bhaktivedanta Manor and villa and *deśa* and cultural hall and library and T-shirt. T-shirts in Slovenia

worn by young boys. One shows the arching capital “M” of McDonald’s hamburger stores and then the word “Murder.” You get an odd impression seeing so many young men with the word “murder” printed boldly on their shirts. And another, “Have mercy on the animals,” and on the back a photo of a boy embracing a calf and the words, “Don’t eat my friend.” T-shirt culture. Boys with their hands in their pockets. One with secret practices—all with secret practices—of the cajoling, chortling, and fearful mind. Behavior symptoms, patterns, and talk, and finally we run out of time.

Trees, words, a speck of paint on this desk. Ink smears when the side of my hand passes over it too soon after writing.

Transcribe the poet’s experience. Straight back, sore buttocks, quotas, compilations, reviews. Beat-thump, thump-thump, the rhythmic heart. Better not bring into your mind anything that will divert you from Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Better to memorize verses. You don’t give your digester any rest. The little heart muscle, like a generator engine, has to pump and never miss. If it does, the whole show will be over and then what matters? It’s what you’ve done. Devotional service is never lost. It’s added up and likely not 100% this lifetime. If you don’t have full faith and devotion in Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual world, how can you expect to go there?

You see your own lack and shortcoming. The method to improve is to apply yourself to *sādhana*. Kṛṣṇa’s mercy is really the main ingredient, however. Can you act to attract that sooner?

10:30 A.M.

Day by day, you portion out your existence with pitifully small awareness. The goal you say you want, love of Kṛṣṇa, in such a degree that it will carry you at once back

to Godhead, seems far away. You seem to have to settle for something less. You're not even brokenhearted by that. You want peace of mind and a positive attitude—and Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to teach that optimism—so you don't weep or bemoan. You don't care so much, it seems. You mostly care to keep up at least the little devotion you do have, attachment and obedience to *vaidhi* rules. For example, I just read the Tenth Canto chapter, "Kṛṣṇa Teases Rukmīṇī." It is sublime. I read it as a faithful follower. I did that. But . . . just one chapter. Nor do the implications for my own life strike me with force, such as why don't I have the intensity of devotion for Kṛṣṇa that Śrīmatī Rukmīṇī feels. Why don't I at least love more to hear this pastime or any pastime? Why doesn't it move me more and satisfy me more?

Same is true of *japa*—you count your quota and that's it. This writing seems to be a place where I can cut more into the issues, the flame, the edge. I ramble and repeat, fall short with a gasp like a cricket jumping or a turtle crawling slowly . . . The effort is expended here.

Write, write the purpose
is told
he wants to be bold
but cannot because he truly
hasn't got what it takes,
never did,
and so should admit it at least.

But how different we are from the campers in this campground. At least our concern is *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* (or our lack of it). We allude to it in writing or mention it in passing in a temple lecture without sounding a heavy, depressive note. Alas, we are far from the goal—or at least I am—and we have no great wish to rouse ourselves. We want gentle treatment; we're not willing to strain.

In *A Passion For Truth*, Heschel condemns the mediocre, compromising practice of religion. His words sound harsh to me because he seems to be selling short the importance of the Vaiṣṇava's mercy and the power of performing simple service in a happy mood. There's even a hint of doubt in his negativity as to why a devotee can't make the supreme effort to achieve surrender and give up all other pursuits except loving service to God. He doesn't seem to be clear in his relationship with God, or else he is speculative, breaking new ground. We don't break new ground; we say it's all been charted by the munificent, expert, previous *ācāryas*, especially those in the Caitanya *sampradāya*. Yes, we may be sunk in complacency and that's not good, but what else can we do but continue to chant *japa* and to serve?

Grr, brr, be pardoned awhile. Tune in to the words willing to come, more than intellect or philosophy. Dance . . . I hear French out back of this van, young and old bodies. One in the distance (all I see is a chest) is sunbathing? Do we have to leave here tonight because they don't allow us out of the camp before 7:30 A.M.?

Please, my heart flutters, a moment of no-meaning in Zen haiku, bird on a branch. It's a relief—a breakthrough in writing. Remember when I used to take a word and see what it set off in me?

"Parson": I can cluster with it. "Parson" leads to pardon, to parsimonious, to persimmon, persons, and prisms.

In person we saw the Rheingold Girl. She was chosen by a poll. Memory trip. What is true and good? Let it go and pick up a new thread.

Parson Jones, a country preacher, marries you in the song, "Winter Wonderland." Parson—pardon me and pardon my persiflage, small talk.

Leave trails and explosions like that. A little morning exercise. Keeping private, we will travel as if with some powder like gold or magic dust kept in a box. We open it occasionally, not like sniffing a drug or calling on a hallucination. Then? A mystic doctrine? A personal secret? A hope springing from the unconscious which you cannot even express?

Something . . . drive and park in gas station parking lots. Supply of new and used earplugs. So many things we use in our control, plug into, eat, "heart of the palm tree" and couscous.

Heart of the palm. Self, tongue, eating, scheduled routine. I don't want to rip up anything, just tell my moral tales and skip
skip to m' Lou.

It should be more interesting, a road book, and maybe less calm and with less continued train of thought. More outward adventure you will get. Maybe less daring at heart of honesty.

Grr, brr. He roots out. He used a bathroom on a ferry and will do it again. Restrain and control and go on planning and gobbling up the days and months and then you and all your brothers will leave your bodies. Your spiritual master did it and you will too. It's as simple as that.

"We are impersonal and unfeeling in ISKCON," he said. "Yes, yes," I replied politely. We say this so often, it's a cliché. I don't even desire more loving friendships because how do you do it, in a mundane way based on what Scott Peck or Mr. Covey said?

Can't buy me love,

etc.

they sang.

Love, love. I would like love of God, it seems, but I can't pay the price. That significant verse—buy love of God in

the market right away, but the price is *lauḷyam*, not attainable for many lives. That says it.

Here at least you pickax at it. Your feeble shovel digs at it. I don't want love as they're talking of it. I don't want self-love, however, in a false ego sense.

Thought (still do)
that love would come down
like *śuddha-sattva*
while I chant and read
catching me unaware and
in meantime one is so busy
fending, keeping the bee
outside the van,
putting in earplugs, waiting
for another meal and ability
to travel to France and Ireland—it takes
all your attention sometimes and
you don't concern yourself
with love of God.

The best I could do. The work I could do. At my architect's planning desk and lamp, a feeble stroke here and there is not the master plan for the Māyāpur temple and city or raising the money for it. Who has that conviction?

Kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he.

Verse II in Kings 3:15, "As the minstrel played, the spirit of God came upon him," was rendered in this way by the Great Maggid:

When the minstrel was like the instrument—free of self-consciousness—the spirit of God came upon him. Only when, like the instrument, the minstrel is neither self-seeking nor self-conscious, can the spirit of God come upon him.

—*A Passion for Truth*, p. 136

12 noon

I suddenly remembered today listening to “The Clown,” Jean Shepherd telling his story with Charlie Mingus’ band playing in the background. Somehow, the memory of it moved me today. Shepherd was almost underspoken. He had a sad story to tell, one with a negative view of humankind. It made me remember that jazz musicians play blues—they have immersed themselves in the sadness and hard times of life, which they almost claim as their birthright as black people who have been mistreated in a white world, as well as the fact that we all get hard knocks who live in this material world. They turn this blues reality into upbeat music. The music is entirely made up of the bad news of life, yet it somehow shines happily, is peppy, upbeat, and it *sings*. It sings the sad life in a way that makes us feel some kind of relief. That’s the purpose of art.

What has this got to do with Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Perhaps nothing directly, but the reason I wanted to share it was because it made me think of the ISKCON blues, the blues of the Kṛṣṇa conscious *sādhaka*. I remember Haya-grīva writing a poem about *brahmacārī* blues. We try to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, we try to become perfect, but we fail. We remain earthbound, we still have our material desires after so many years of trying. And the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement sometimes seems to be going backwards; it keeps repeating its mistakes, and people leave it saying there’s no love here, and so on. There’s plenty of falling short and unhappiness, and we have to admit a kind of dose of negativity even in our perfect philosophy. The philosophy is perfect, but we remain imperfect.

When Śubhānanda dāsa left ISKCON, he gave a parting kick with an essay titled, “The Fading of Utopia.” Maybe it’s true that utopia has to fade, the misconception of how easily we would attain the perfect society in ISKCON, but

we can now make blues music, a real expression of our heartfelt attempt and determination to continue practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness despite the discrepancies. I would like to be able to express that cry more earnestly and maybe more frequently, something like that music—alto sax, laughing and crying trombone, the steady beat.

3 P.M.

Whir, whirl, mechanical sound of twin fans drowns out chatter and song and radio of surrounding campers. Don't know if we'll stay here for the night or will have to pick up quickly and cross the border into Switzerland.

Swamiji was hopeful about his San Francisco center. Wrote back to us in New York that if we were feeling his absence, we should know that the sound vibration of the spiritual master (*vāṇī*) is the real presence. He also told us we could place his picture on his sitting place and that would give us inspiration.

When I gave up my self
I mean false self
I unclenched my fist and
thought of Kṛṣṇa's mission and
the Swami's desires for me and
didn't figure myself as the center
of existence.

When did that happen?
When I no longer considered this
body as my being.
When was that?
When I breathed and thought,
"It's like a horse or dog
breathing." When I read and

was absorbed in the
commentary and worked in
the mission. When I went
on chanting after sixteen.

Sigh. Killarney. Foot dust of Vaiṣṇavas. *Kavaca* of saffron color worn around Lord Nṛsiṁha's neck. Foot dust of Govardhana Hill and Ekacakrā. Will I go there again? Too much effort produces a flutter in my head. I told you it could be a trigger to remember Kṛṣṇa and His instruction that the body is miserable, and we should not have come here. Hare Kṛṣṇa, I know it isn't easy. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a solace. Hear and be relieved even if you can't expect smooth sailing. Remember, Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that in the beach hotel room in Jagannātha Purī. He said Kṛṣṇa didn't give Arjuna a magic ash (as some so-called incarnations give their followers). He did not say, "Arjuna, just sprinkle this ash and everything will be all right," or, "You lie down and sleep on the chariot or smoke *gañja* and I'll deal with the enemy." Arjuna had to fight as Lord Kṛṣṇa had ordered him, but the Lord guaranteed Arjuna's victory. I try to think like this when the head twinge starts. We won't unnecessarily provoke it—we'll stay calm and follow our schedule of travel and lecturing, rising early and writing, although it's a strain. If pain comes, as it seems to do of its own accord, we will be thankful that it's not worse and somehow think of Kṛṣṇa in prayerful, slow mantras and appropriate feelings and thoughts.

Little spurts, one after another, not connected; in this way we bridge the marathon. Four days gone already. Each day I can't seem to write as much as if I were in a house with time for several one-hour sessions. Besides, even if I had the time, do I have the stamina? I mentioned

if the minstrel forgets his self-conscious self, then God appears in his song. What does that mean?

I can apply it to free-writing. The self as servant always remains, and through him, God plays. He becomes the instrument, like strings the Lord strums, as He did when Rāmānanda Rāya spoke to Lord Caitanya. The minstrel lets go.

Noting a stiff neck, but words come despite it. The van door sounds. I catch myself looking up, but decide to write despite it. Put periods at the end of sentences. Kṛṣṇa. Aside from what I read today, there is a backlog of consistent acts and life given to service. Plug in to that. If I don't always feel enthused and aware that I'm a servant of the servant, doing his duty and inspired—as I felt through and through while lecturing last Sunday—I am still in the right place, still refraining from sinful life, and still doing what should be done.

I noted that when I was with a respectable brother,
 I was skinnier than him,
 I bite my fingernails,
 I can't keep a tight schedule as they seem to, but a looser one. I'm doing all right.

That Svevo fellow, I thought he was supposed to help carry the burden of the marathon? And I thought you were going to tell us what made you happy each day?

Yeah, I don't know.

Svevo hits a pillar. He was in a small car and tried to merge with traffic just outside Ljubljana. There was a crack-up. The back of one car crumpled, the other's glass was all smashed in. Both cars were disabled in the middle of the highway and caused a traffic jam. Svevo was not hurt; no one needed an ambulance. They simply sat down and waited. Cops arrived and used their walkie-talkies. Svevo realized that this accident meant it was his turn to

suffer delay. Fate is a numbers game. Everyone gets a turn to be in a car accident or a traffic delay. When it's your turn, your plans are thwarted and you have to wait. You can be grateful it isn't worse.

As for my daily happiness, it becomes more what piques my interest. Happiness—I'd have to think deeply and carefully as to what would qualify. In privacy we may admit what made us happy even if it's a silly thing or at least it sounds silly to others. Be an observer. It's not so easy.

Do we call that happiness that which may be mistaken later and go away? Someone visits the man in the hospital and asks how he's doing. "All right." But what is that "all right"? Did lunch make you happy? Was it the hot *kicchari*, the sweet raisins in the *kicchari*, the bread's texture? If you explore it too much, even happiness loses its quality.

5:45 P.M.

They decided to let us out by 6:30 tomorrow morning, so we'll stay overnight. Busty woman in green bathing suit peering into our van. Shut the inner door, put patches over front window as well as rear. Talked with M. about hurts I received in Italy and our plans to return next year. Complicated ISKCON with its different subcultures and points of view. I walk into situations and speak what I do and am sometimes unaware what they are thinking. We are aware that Zurich ISKCON is a stronghold of book distribution. We respect that, but I won't strain myself to say something out of character for me. Rather, I will look at the verse and purport and say what I remember, what I have learned from Prabhupāda.

Sweat, eye twinge . . . you can't finish this day in a blaze of writing. The marathon book won't be so huge; a fairly slim chapter each day is all I can crank out.

August 3

1:15 A.M.

There was a ladybug on the *Bhagavad-gītā* page I was reading. Remember the song we used to sing whenever we saw one?

Ladybug, ladybug
fly away home,
your house is on fire and
your children—
your children are doing something
that rhymes with “home.”

And then you blow gently on the orange, spotted body of the ladybug to get her to fly away.

Read *api cet su-durācāro*. The devotee’s faults are like the marks of a rabbit one sees on the moon. Glad I got up early. The densely populated campground is mostly silent now, campers breathing in and out in tents and caravans as my pen scratches away, ladybug helping me through, the light of good desk lamp like a transparent yellow liquid flowing down onto the page. It’s welcome. The ink meets it in a dance of rapture.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not a tag we add onto our writing or our lives. It’s not a label on a shirt or sweater, “made in a union shop.” It’s the warp and woof of the threads themselves. It either is or isn’t Kṛṣṇa conscious. Of course,

by deliberate action we put Kṛṣṇa in our sentences, although He is already everywhere. I bow to Him and beg Him to inspire me. He said to Arjuna, "You should engage in My devotional service." He meant it for Arjuna and everyone. "Therefore having come to this temporary and miserable world, engage in loving service to Me." We were fools to come here. Now we should know it's "not habitable for any sane gentleman." Get out as quickly as possible. "Take to My devotional service and come quickly back to Godhead, back home."

Śrīmatī Rukmiṇī said the modes of nature are the real rulers and powerful enemies of this material world. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has defeated them, however, and His pure devotees cross over the miserable ocean of birth and death. Therefore, remember Kṛṣṇa, and chant His holy names without end.

Bhagavad-gītā 9.30 admits the power of the material energy. A sincere devotee may accidentally fall down. We shouldn't find fault with him. Bg. 9.33 states that we have come here to this dangerous place. My writing tells, unearths the worms of my past and tells us of the worms' present proximity. I keep away from the dangers of illicit sex, which I may compare to poisonous snakes slithering outside the van in this campsite. I may mention it; I may say it's here just so that we can avoid it. (Some will object that I put down the material world; that's another kind of criticism of devotional writing.)

I name the spade. Don't be adversely affected. Dear reader, if you have a problem with this, if you are quick to take objection, perhaps you had better not read me. Kierkegaard dedicated many of his books to "that *individual* whom with joy and gratitude I call *my* reader." I am the first reader, the one who draws the direct benefit.

There is joy of creativity,
and responsibility.

I have responsibility, but it's not that I can always be only an official and perfect and careful protector of others' souls. I too have to cry out. It's part of my responsibility to look within myself and to tell the truth, if only to myself. I need to undeceive myself regularly. That's why I call this writing, my vehicle for self-honesty, blessed. It is blessed with the name of Kṛṣṇa and the power phrases of quotes from *śāstra* and with preaching, and blessed with the attempt to throw off the clinging and dangerous modes.

I did not—do not—seek any trouble or illicit thoughts in this campground. Still, a woman looked in at us. I cannot find a place in the world where there are no impure women or men or where the mind does not look for enjoyment outside Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The world is full of danger. At the same time, I can be a healthy organism who knows how to throw off evil influences and demoniac spells, who laughs at them. I call them by their names and diminish their power over me. Sometimes I curse them in their own language: “You turgid worm, I remember you. You’ll not get a hold of me this time. I kick on your head, you serpent.”

Got a good morning schedule: leave at 6, head for a temple in a new country. I was there in 1974 with my Gurudeva. We flew over the Alps from Rome. He turned to me as we sat side by side in the airplane, yet I wanted to leave that service and go preach on his behalf in America. O America, I don't hanker for you now.

I've got my eye on a Sunday lecture about “dovetailing yourself with the supreme consciousness.” I'll tell them about the historical setting—how Śrīla Prabhupāda preached like that to hip musicians in the Bowery loft—and then relate it to today, to all of us. Do whatever you do, but do it for Kṛṣṇa; it's easy. Start by hearing from the

guru, even if you don't change anything else in your life. Everything will be adjusted (you'll give up sinful habits and become devotees) just by hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā* from Swamiji. He has come to the West for this purpose. Let's take advantage and become his followers.

Life going by. It's right to notice it. All folks will be washed away, like dirt or food remnants on a greasy plate. Gone in a flash, one by one. You don't believe it, and that is the most amazing thing. Churn out your books. Go join your spiritual master. "Among the dead," we say, join the ranks of the immortals. Kick the bucket, curtains, die, die, kaput. But the fact is . . .

What?

Gītā says . . .

And you believe?

Yes, I try to.

As an article of faith?

Oh, bug off, doubter. I'll keep this book *Bhagavad-gītā* to my chest and worship and hope some devotees may help me to remember it and to chant. Chanting without stoppage is good for the soul.

Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa says it's to "Me" that we should surrender and that He will protect us. Even if one commits an abominable act due to past attachments, in this war against *māyā*, Kṛṣṇa will excuse and rectify. Don't deride the devotees.

Yes, I may return to Italy next year. Yes, I may be allowed to travel and use my free will. The leaders are trying. Some say they are not well trained and that's why our movement flounders. We are not organized according to sound business and psychological principles, some say.

I emphasize chanting. Is that hypocritical? No, man, it ain't.

A cough from the campers. I don't know or even think about what they are doing in their tents. Visions of sugar-plums dance in their heads. We will start our drill-sergeant chanting now. Secret sharer, be with me. See you at the dance next Friday in lone sanctity of your van's rear section. Do write here, write as best you can.

Svevo wears khaki shorts in the campground. He is not me. He is (can be) a scapegoat. He can be a Scottish province. He can get a job with Bhakta Bob. He can publish twenty books. Glances of Lord Kṛṣṇa may fall on us all, so please worship Him, the real hero of books and spiritual space

not your fictive hero
unless you're going to construct
some tale to convince us of
the efficacy
of devotional service.

If you're going to write what comes, better warn your readers that's what it is and try not to claim it's perfect.

A good wish for health
and cooperation. May we reach
ISKCON Zurich
show sincerity to their
devotees and Deities and their
GBC direction
and our master, Śrīla Prabhupāda
who rules them and my heart.

(ten pages in an Ecology pad in an hour, like the good old days)



Smooth border crossing, immigration guys wore no uniforms, were unshaven, and spoke in Italian to Madhu. Agents in the other lines wore uniforms and pistols in holsters. I sat chanting, enjoying the 6 A.M. atmosphere and high hills and harbor, trees, I saw high corn growing.

That's the outward. Inward, a contented cat, he looked at the tourists, thought what is it to be a devotee, wondered whether he could attain love of Kṛṣṇa. Could he even think of that? Keep chanting.

Ask now—what would it take for me? I seem unable to do much. Kierkegaard wanted Christians to admit their failure. That was the first big step, but they couldn't take it; they were too complacent and wanted a religion to lull them in this unhappy world.

I cannot do much more. What austerities would I perform? Eat less? Increase *japa*? Dive into ISKCON's front ranks? None of the above? Write better?

If I could discern the truth amid all the deception and follow that truth, I'd be a devotee according to the Lord's desire. I know that in theory, but it seems hard. We act for our own pleasure. In ISKCON, including its outer reaches and critics, everyone discusses issues which almost divert

you from the real point—your individual surrender to please Kṛṣṇa. Or is it something easy to understand yet difficult to do? Something like, “Live in a temple and push on this movement and chant your rounds and go to Māyāpur”?

8:40 A.M.

Now move on to Zurich. The last thing I wrote here was rhetorically asking myself whether or not I could become a pure devotee. Could I concentrate on that, make that at least a main topic of this marathon?

How? By continuously asking myself, “How can I do it? Could I do it if I knew how? Does it mean separating what others think from what I am alone?”

Heschel writes:

Every individual has a unique vocation and task to perform. He must be his own master, not rely on other people's wisdom. Even when the Messiah and all men are redeemed, the Lord will still review each individual to ascertain whether he deserves to be redeemed on his own merit.

— *A Passion for Truth*, p. 144

What if Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Kṛṣṇa want me to try really hard to preach to others, saying that we should all be pure devotees? Should I go see what it says in scripture? What can I do? I have to first preach it to myself and gain taste for reading excellently three hours a day, which Prabhupāda gave me permission to do.

I'm free to think of this while Madhu, in sunglasses, sits up front studying the veins and arteries of the European road map. I am just the backseat driver to heaven.

I know it's no joke, Lord, but I'm a sad joke. This question, “How can I be more serious in this last part of my life

and make tangible progress toward surrender to Your will?" is not insignificant, but I tend to raise big questions or hanker for bigger gains and then fall back into routine. Start a "Going Back to Godhead" notebook?

Make some post-midyear resolutions. Pray now in your Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras this last stretch to Zurich. Kṛṣṇa never takes a sincere act as useless. He will listen to me, but I have to show my willingness to change and sacrifice. Śrīla Prabhupāda said the process has been made as easy as possible by Lord Caitanya, but we have to take it up seriously.

They say Switzerland is a beautiful country. I'm sealed up in the back of the van as we speed along, so I can't see it. Often we enter the blackness of a tunnel. I think it may be beautiful out there, the mountains especially, but there's too much sunshine in the front seat. I prefer to sit in the back and look at the spines of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhāgavatams* and the bound collections of his letters and the holy pictures and the water bottles and think, "Wouldn't it be nice to love God?"

3:45 P.M.

We arrived at the temple around noon. It is elegant. I felt a little like a gypsy foraging around in the resident GBC-guru's room looking at the books and photo albums, etc. There was one letter from a devotee who has left ISKCON and sends out his booklets on practical ways to improve material society and ISKCON too. I've seen his pamphlets before—lots of material research on how to improve democracy and to stop the cheating. He mentions in his letter that in ISKCON, the *brāhmaṇas* try to control everything while they themselves live like demigods. People should have financial incentives and not be expected to do service for

free while leaders live on a high material standard and don't disclose their bank accounts. He also says people need to see more practical results, not just philosophy and temple construction. Hard-hitting stuff, but I couldn't read through his plans for revived democracy, the American dream. As he himself writes in his letter, "I chant my rounds almost everyday. Otherwise I get mentally sick. I really can't take the material world. I study it too much and I'm getting to be known as a very intelligent politician."

I leave it, but take warning not to live high on the hog and ask others to sacrifice. Be truthful about money, about everything. As for being impractical-practical, it's not wrong for someone in society, namely *sādhus*, to go around speaking Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy. It's what I do. Someone writes books so we can have culture in our American-dream-practical society and not get mentally sick.

We are like two poor children, Madhu and I, in this suite of rooms, trying not to stain the spotless rugs or think bad thoughts. Don't use the piano or the exercise bike, don't break the shower, and don't nose around inside the desk drawers.

I've asked M. to bring the typewriter up here. Maybe I can bang away at it and feel some freedom. My Prabhupāda *mūrti* is here, bathed. He had lunch and is now resting. I'm preparing for tomorrow morning's class on prayer to the Supreme Lord.

5 P.M.

I am sitting in Harikeśa Swami's chair, and a very handsome and good, back-fitting chair it is. That does not make me a hardworking, multifaceted leader. I am still the toad, the handsome prince, the worrywart. I want to say some-

thing that will come out on the typewriter. I think they may hear me or see me through a crack in the door and think, “He is a writer. He is writing something in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

Listen, the cars are going by in Zurich. It’s another day in our life. I complain that I will have to stay up late two nights in a row to give the *Gītā* class. It means I won’t be able to follow my schedule of rising at midnight, unless I am willing to get up after only three hours of rest. I could try that. Anything to follow my schedule. I will get up and read the *Bhagavad-gītā* on my own, or I may have to use the time to prepare for the next *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class. Adjust to it, man. We’re only here for three days. It’s my *dharma* to do this, my *tapasya* during this summer marathon. The book distributors here in Switzerland, led by the legendary Harināmānanda Prabhu, have been out all week as usual and will come back for the weekend. Why don’t I think of *their* austerities and do a little of my own? Yeah, but my schedule is also my austerity. What if I told those book distributors that instead of their regular schedule for distributing books, they would have to follow another schedule? You see my point?

Yeah, but I will still do it.

They have a little balcony-porch off this room with a chair with an umbrella over it. I sat there for lunch, but it felt too hot. They said, “When you eat, you should go into the dining room,” but I didn’t want to because I’m not after luxury but privacy. To go into the dining room, I would have to first go into a big hall. We told them I would honor *prasādam* on the floor, Indian style. But that may not be orthodox. I did get a little spot of *dāl* on the floor—but don’t worry! I wiped it up. Okay.

Then I was looking in another closet and found a big collection of *Back to Godheads* from over the years. I easily

lost an hour in looking through them. I saw the years of the eleven gurus, “His Divine Grace Jayatīrtha dāsa,” “His Divine Grace Bhavānanda Goswami,” him smiling, and every face in the room where he was initiating smiling back at him. That was a trip to read through; it left me dazed. Did we really go through all that? Where does it leave me now? “His Divine Grace Gurupāda.” Are we still flourishing? In Slovenia the other day, they called out, “His Divine Grace . . .” after my lecture.

I look at this and that . . . the nice painting by Puṣkara . . . there is a chance . . .

Let me tell you a little about the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class for tomorrow morning. In the purport, Prabhupāda says that Arjuna has just praised Kṛṣṇa in four verses and now he’s asking Him, “What is this *brahmāstra* coming at me?” In other words, he wants the Lord to save him from the *brahmāstra*. Prabhupāda says that before a devotee makes a presentation or a request of the Lord, he first praises Him with respectable prayers. I plan to discuss how these prayers are not strategy. To praise the Lord in learned and heartfelt ways is itself service. It’s called *van-danam*. The prayers are instructive, theological treatises. When we read them, we can understand how the Supreme is everything, how everything comes from Him, and how He is always a person.

Then we get to the requests. If we analyze them, we’ll find that devotees ask for things to aid them in their service. I will give examples of that. Rather than read from a stack of books on the *vyāsāsana*, I will say, “I like to study these prayers and I have written some down on index cards.” Then I’ll take a few and say, “Here’s one by Dhruva, one by Prahāda, one by Devakī,” and I’ll state each devotee’s request. I will also mention *Śikṣāṣṭakam* as the best.

Then I'll say, "What if a devotee has material desires?" I'll answer that by saying that he should still pray to Kṛṣṇa as Gajendra did. Kuntī-devī asked that her material attachments be severed. Sounds like a serviceable outline.

In Zurich, the door knocks. In Zurich, he enters.

Night Notes

All right, what made me happy today? I told you I can't always ascertain that, but I'll go over the day for some peaks. When I went to rest after breakfast at a P-stop just over the Swiss border, I felt glad we were making regular progress and that we had not broken down in any way. We had a quick breakfast and M. said we had an hour. He took a nap in the front, and I laid down on the cot, which was delicious because I had been up early and knew I would certainly fall asleep while it was neither too hot nor too cold. I can call that a degree of happiness, but it all passed so quickly that I could hardly grab hold of it.

Maybe that's what I want to say—that you can't grab happiness. It just goes by. Now it is later, and I look back at it and say what? That's the way it is. Maybe a sign of becoming free of false ego is that we don't delve into the moments of happiness, although we feel them at the time, with an enjoying spirit.

I also liked a moment when I was reading *The Best I Could Do*. I liked doing the scrawly drawings. Sure, I didn't like it that my chanting was dry, and I wished I could have read better. That's the brick wall. It's almost too complicated to say that I like this and don't like that. What is lasting?

That train of thought that came while we were traveling, as if a gift from the road that I should aspire to be a pure devotee, should pray for it, and that it could be done by chanting, made me wonder, "Am I ready to make the

sacrifice?” How wonderful it would be to attain a state of acting only for Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure and not for my own. What about that now? Is it only a theoretical train of thought while real happiness comes from drinking water on a hot afternoon? Am I condemned to accept as happiness the gratification the Lord gives us to get us through. Coping is not the same as *ānanda-mayo ’bhyāsāt*.

August 4

Reading *Bhagavad-gītā*, slowly, in regular measures. The statements are so full of potency that they can touch the inner self despite its coverings of gross and subtle matter and false ego identification. The statements: Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, devotees hear from pure devotees and in faith and devotion surrender to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself to such devotees and lifts them out of this temporary, miserable world—statements like that go straight to the heart.

But we are preoccupied and we become insensitive. Therefore, we need to find a way to be open to these statements and to allow them to act upon us. Kṛṣṇa has to become real for us, our faith and devotion activated.

As I read, I think this is all I need. I think how I can tell the Sunday guests something like this. Kṛṣṇa, in the beginning of the Tenth Chapter, says He will tell Arjuna even better things than He's told him so far because Arjuna is dear to Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa is unborn, beginningless, and the Supreme Lord of all. Great sages and demigods cannot know Him by their mental power. He's known only by devotees. Nothing is auspicious in this world except working under Kṛṣṇa's direction through guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*.

The spiritual master and disciple don't have to know anything but Kṛṣṇa. I've told you how I for one want to stay

aloof from the world of nondevotees and even from the wrangling world of how to improve ISKCON and manage it. I can take this privileged position, free of other responsibility, provided I actually fill my time with chanting and hearing. Then it becomes responsible.

I tell other devotees of our main priorities in chanting the holy names and hearing about Kṛṣṇa. I myself write every day out of a life of devotional service, my flow of expression. Of course, this expression includes my falling short, the facts of blockage and distraction, the news of the world as it confronts my senses, and as I cope and experience. I am like an insect with feelers. The insect “thinks” or feels, “There is something up there ahead of me, blocking me,” or the creature smells, “Is that an enemy? Can I conquer it?” We human organisms are capable of hearing about God and our loving relation with Him. We should take advantage of our ability.

Forget self and its preoccupations. Some people tell us that. Be absorbed only in God, Kṛṣṇa, His name and *guṇa* and *līlā* and teachings. It seems, then, that we are living in a basic big mistake whereby we are concerned more with our petty selves than with God. We may be concerned with self in terms of how to get this self to render best service to guru and Vaiṣṇavas. But that’s not exactly self-preoccupation.

Skip lines, skip heartbeat. I ask for Kleenex and pen refills. My phone bill is too high. Oh, but we live in the modern world.

I started this chapter-day sublimely telling of Kṛṣṇa from *Bhagavad-gītā* and then “deteriorated,” drew a sketch of my nail-bitten fingers on the page, and said I’m hot. I write of coping, my too-high phone bill. Can I climb to the summit again?



Kṛṣṇa can't be known by sages but only by devotees. He invites us, He invites us: "Having come to this temporary, miserable world, engage in My service. Think of Me, bow down to Me, and surely you will come to Me." The impersonalists say Kṛṣṇa is not the one to whom we have to surrender; we should surrender to the eternal within Kṛṣṇa. Maybe in ISKCON we say, "It's not to Kṛṣṇa the person in *Bhagavad-gītā* that we have to surrender, but to the organization, community, development of the land, propaganda, training, organizing, etc." That's true too. Devotional service is not just *bābājī* absorption (alas) but practical work to spread the mission. Think of all that Madhu has to do to keep our van on the road and to keep me moving around so I can lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā*. Still, Śrīla Prabhupāda said a *sannyāsī* should have a cool brain for philosophy.

Outside a bell rings 1:30. I had better chant my rounds. There is not much time. Just one more page. Kṛṣṇa is God. He says that unless we are sinless, we cannot know Him. The opposite is also true: if we know Him, we will be sinless. We become sinless by accepting and receiving our spiritual master's words. He says discussion of Lord Kṛṣṇa

can only take place among those who are really anxious to know Him. Don't be guilty that you want to simply hear about Kṛṣṇa apart from how to apply the philosophy, and how to improve ISKCON, what's your role, what the GBC thinks of you, etc. The main thing is to hear from Kṛṣṇa and engage in His service.

I will, I will, I will die. I will not become president of anything. I will browse through more *Back to Godhead* magazines today.

Last night Madhu said that when he has been driving all day, he needs to wind down and likes to chant a round. He said sometimes he wakes from sleep and discovers that he's been chanting.

Is there a marathon persona? I don't mean Svevo, but is there someone else? Yeah, I guess so. He is encouraging himself, writing throughout the day, keeping at it. Wherever he goes he has a connection to this book. It's satisfying.

Dim light of Zurich temple room at 4:15, *ārati* begins.

6:35 A.M.

Here they all pray out loud one time in the morning in the temple room asking Gaura-Nitāi to please send them more new *saṅkīrtana* devotees. They say, "Our only desire is to spread the *saṅkīrtana* movement and for that we need new *saṅkīrtana* devotees." What is a *saṅkīrtana* devotee? In ISKCON, that is translated as "book distributor."

Speaking of prayers, the Lord is praised by *uttama-sloki*, beautiful prayers. It is not that all prayers are petitions. Mostly they are praise, describing the Lord's inconceivable qualities, and then some request is made in a single verse. I will talk about that in the class.

Drowsy fellow, push on. The beautiful temple room. I came up and as usual took a nap. Dreamt we were producing little books by me all in one morning. I would write it, it would get printed in color, and then be produced within a few hours. “Yes, this is due to the high state of technology,” we said. At the same time, another group of devotees were practicing rifle shooting. They were gathered outdoors in a place like Washington Square Park. Different groups of devotees were gathered around the project that interested them. I roamed around looking at the groups. I was producing literature all in one morning. “Yes, it is due to tech.,” she said. And then . . .

I woke on time for breakfast. There was once a boy in Switzerland who didn’t like being called “boy” because he was twenty-two years old and could think for himself. That was why he joined the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. When the leaders insisted on calling him “boy,” he quit.

A bird was singing melodically just outside the bathroom window. The window is such that it’s half-opened, and you cannot open it more to look out. No chance of seeing what kind of bird that was. He was there when I was in the bathroom last night around eight, then just before dawn. Not a wood thrush, but beautiful like one. It could have been one of many kinds of birds because birds are particularly melodic at this time of year.

The big picture of Lord Nṛsiṃha on this desk: look into the dark, inner sanctum of His *darśana*. A picture of Prabhupāda looking quiet and to himself even though he’s on the *vyāsāsana* with a microphone in front of him and probably hundreds of devotees out front. Still, he is thoughtful and inward, not interacting with the group. Our Prabhupāda, away from us, within. In the temple room, I looked on the altar for a picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, but there is none. I look for one in this room . . .

Who am I? I am the classic motor car, classic Coca-cola, classic earplugs. The classic joke on me is that I couldn't go to Vaikuṇṭha because I was not eligible but hoped for a concession. At least in my next life, please don't make it so difficult for me to meet devotees, and ones that I can live with. And let me get a good vocation in the movement as soon as possible. By the way, I prefer not to get married and not to be a manager. I can have whatever You think is best, Lord. It was best for Mahārāja Bharata to become a stag and associate with *sādhus*, then in his next life to become Jaḍa Bharata. Who would have known that was the best position? Only You.

9 A.M.

Lecturing is not less than writing. You get into the pure philosophy, no nonsense. Any personal disclosures are refined and used just to make a point. You use your brain to present *siddhānta*, to make it palatable and possible, to drive home the points. You go for an hour with the live audience. Are they paying attention? Are you enlightening them? It's another side of life.

11 A.M.

Wrestled with Bg. 3.17 to get a handle on it for the lecture tonight. When I first looked at it, it seemed academic or technical, about *ātma-ratiḥ* (one who doesn't have to perform the rituals of *yajña*). I wondered what it had to do with me. Then I found a copy of Prabhupāda's verbatim *Bhagavad-gītā* lectures and scanned through the one he gave in 1966 and another in 1968 touching on this same verse. He gave the example of Śukadeva Gosvāmī as *ātma-ratiḥ*. He walked naked, he spoke the verse that you can lie on the ground and don't need a bed, live in a cave and don't need a house, etc.

How does this apply to the devotees in this elegant Zurich building and to their spirit of book distribution?

I struggle to speak and feel resistance. I flail and grope. Then slowly the parts begin to come together and I come up with something to say. I make a second draft of an outline and it becomes even clearer. Then I hit on an idea that I could use the four rules and sixteen rounds as an example of *yajña* given by Prabhupāda. Follow this and you'll be beyond the duty of those who look for sense gratification. Then the idea flashes to me of what I saw here in the Prabhupāda museum—the *mūrti* holds in his hand the "Notice" Prabhupāda wrote in November 1966 telling what the devotees should do. If I read this notice point by point, I can say that this is our practical life. We cannot imitate the *ātma-ratiḥ* practiced by Śukadeva, Sanātana, and Haridāsa, but we can follow this. The perfection of *ātma-ratiḥ* is to work in the *saṅkīrtana* movement, *yukta-vairāgya*.

Okay, so I wrestled the lecture into shape. Now the morning has gone. Go worship Prabhupāda *mūrti*. After lunch and rest, prepare for tomorrow's *Bhāgavatam* lecture. Maybe tomorrow night instead of another technical *Gītā* verse on the same subject of how the devotee does his work even though not obliged, I can speak about Prabhupāda. But that also will have to be drafted into shape. They would like to hear nectar, I'm sure.

Gaura-līlā dāsa introduced me this morning before the class and said I've been a devotee for thirty years and that I am able to give unending nectar about Śrīla Prabhupāda. Twice he said that I would speak about Prabhupāda, so let me think of how to do that.

5 P.M.

Rush of head pressure. I have now outlined three upcoming lectures. That's enough. Now rest. But the door

opens and there's something new to see—he is carrying *something*—now alone again.

Tell what it is like to live in this temple for a weekend. You get good drinking water in bottles. One man living here is Italian, and he says the Swiss devotees are conservative, even skeptical, and he has few friends.

When I lecture, there is a man behind glass, like in a recording studio, who quickly translates my lecture into German. Anyone who wants can hear it on the earphones. Maybe he changes some of the words. How would I know?

Gaura-Nitāi, Jagannātha. Their clothes this morning were rainbow. Gaura-Nitāi have very attractive smiles. I can't describe it in words. Kind. The Lord in a turban, the Lord from Gauḍadeśa. I thought, "If you were in India, you would be nearer the land where it all happened, but maybe you wouldn't feel any nearer. This temple can be just as near if you are devotional. You need to chant and to see the Lord in His element, the *dhāma*. Pray to Him. He can reveal Himself to you anywhere." For some of us, we may feel more at home in a Western country, but if we are devotionally-minded, we are not really living in that country but in Vaikuṇṭha. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that. Is it like that here? Yes.



The afternoon is too hot.

Someone brought a “hand deliver” letter to me. I hope I will be all right. Prabhupāda says even if a preacher isn’t outwardly successful, he doesn’t feel disappointed. He tries to please Kṛṣṇa.

Going down to give the lecture soon. Brain a little fried. I kept trying to remember the topic but couldn’t get into the groove. Maybe when I get older it will be like that more. More reason, then, to just write whatever comes; I may be helpless to exert discipline in a certain direction. Turn the weakness into a virtue, or at least a way.

The way. Tao of free-write.

Harināmānanda and his men have returned from their week of book distribution. Hold *daṇḍa*, keep spine erect, look into book and out at audience. I’ll do all right. Just relax your inner head, and if pain comes, that’s Kṛṣṇa too.

What was it I wanted to say? That this day, August 4, is over. We decided not to use the telephone so much. M. found out why our 1991 Renault won’t accelerate—it’s a defect in the model for that year—but we can’t afford to do anything about it. I ate lunch. I cooled down.

Svevo walks. I won’t kill him; I’d never do such a thing, although Eliot and Anna are dead to my life along with my mother and father and sister and brother-in-law. Dead, dead, and I live in the sound vibration of my spiritual master. I have nothing more than the present moment in each day and my good reputation, “He’s been a devotee for thirty years and can tell us much nectar of Śrīla Prabhupāda.” Yeah, well, not tonight.

Sorry, folks, got to close out now. This may not be the fattest chapter.

August 5

One o'clock pen scratching. I couldn't read first thing this morning, but I'll get a chance again to speak twice today to the audience in the temple room. Told them last night how the Swami shocked me when he spoke against work, the *karmī* god. They laughed a little. Afterwards, M. remarked that Śrīla Prabhupāda said that it's good to tell a story in a lecture.

Last night, head was banging, and I even mentioned we are so foolish to accept a body full of pain. We perform *yajñas* to purify our acts, but at best we get a higher material body with which we must suffer. First-class and second-class prisoners.

First-class gold chains.
Did you tell what the Swami
said and is it a legend or did
you actually do that back then?
I think I did it, left the
storefront in the morning like a
brave flag, headed north
wearing Lord Jagannātha around my neck
on my way to break the picket
line at the welfare office and
on Second Avenue I met Śrīla Prabhupāda
coming back from a walk.

I bowed on the pavement
before him and he seemed
to be in ecstasy and touched me,
smiling, accepting me, his
son, his *śiṣya* going off to war.

Did I really live it—
did I phone him one
day from the office? Tell us of
the time you all went to
the Cosmic Love-in and after
you escorted him back
to 26 Second Avenue.
I'd like to hear it again
provided it's true.
Oh, yes, it's true. I can
relive it. Be there tonight.

During head pain while speaking, I thought something
like, "This is what it is to grow old. It will only get worse."
When I was young, I had no idea what pain was like. I didn't
know this would be the end, although it isn't yet.

This morning when Gaura-līlā dāsa asked me a question
after the lecture, there was an awkward silence. No one
else had questions. Then he asked, "Arjuna followed his
duty, didn't he?" I was saying that an *ātma-ratiḥ* has no
duty. Perhaps they took it as if I were saying something dif-
ferent than what their guru consistently tells them about
their duty to the *saṅkīrtana* movement. I was referring to
material duty. Devotees have duty, but in the higher stages,
we perform our duty out of love because we cannot bear
to be without that connection to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We
no longer have religious obligatory *yajñas* to offset karma.
No duty—you know what I mean.

Some visiting Tamil men in the class reminded me of Indian taxi drivers—insolent, laughing and smirking and showing their teeth and maybe not understanding at all what I was saying. Were they thinking, “Who the hell does this whitey think he is, posturing on the *vyāsāsana* as if he were a *guru-sādhū*?” I was on the verge of making a sarcastic remark, but I could see that they were like children. Their wives, dark and seated in another part of the room in *sārīs* and with red dots on their foreheads, were more respectful. Anyway, the men left during the lecture and then came back like restless kids, not finding enough to amuse themselves elsewhere. “Like children,” I thought, and later I felt my heart soften toward them.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, far beyond me, Kṛṣṇa in everyone’s heart. This temple is certainly a shelter. Where do they get the money to maintain it? Mostly on the street selling books throughout Europe.

You carp, you smirk like those Tamil men, in your writing. God may say, “If you are going to be a nonsense, non-serious in the face of deep topics and death, then why don’t you leave this movement?” When I hear that I grow fearful and contrite and say, “Please, don’t kick me out. I’ll be good.” I’ll even stop writing if that’s what He wants or I’ll . . . shut my mouth?

Our van cannot accelerate. When we’re passing another car, we inch along.

I see. So then?

So I go to the back of the van and leave it to the driver. I go inside myself a quarter of an inch under the skin and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa a few times.

When you read that this body contains foul-smelling feces, urine, pus, etc., and the skin keeps it from being horrible to look at and a feast for flies, what do you think?

It's absolutely true whether you like it or not. Still, it's the duty of a *bhāgavata* speaker to be *satyaṁ brūyāt*, to speak the truth in a palatable way. I didn't do that last night when I said, "Licit or illicit, sex is the same. The Swami spoke many strong things against marriage." I shrugged my shoulders after and took no responsibility for my casual words condemning people. I left it dangling like that, me a tough, uncaring *sannyāsī*, as if I myself can bite the bullet of austerity, which I usually can't. Just raise the temperature a few degrees on a summer afternoon and I can't function. I am also not above sex desire, anger, and cowardice. Why, then, did I put down householders? Something hypocritical here? I bob along from temple to temple with these messages . . .

I mean to be a better person, but you see how much I feel conflicting motives and emotions. I want to be accepted, to be entertaining, to show that I accept the absolute words of guru and *śāstra* even when they are beyond me. I want to say them without embarrassment or showing myself superior to them. Dare to speak what he said and leave it at that. Conflicting emotions as I want them to like me and want me to return and speak again. I don't want to burn out temples so that they don't care if I ever return. Please, Lord, let me speak better.

I should go now and pray *mahā-mantras* while the going is good.

Śacīnandana Swami is in Zagreb. A war has started there. He's trying to leave this morning to come here. Phoned ahead to make an appointment for lunch with me. Then he is supposed to travel on to another city in Switzerland and return to Zurich tonight. Madhu replied to the message saying better we meet tomorrow. If I meet with

Śācinandana Mahārāja today, I may not be able to give the lecture tonight. He is a daring preacher traveling to war zones, and I want to comply with his wishes. He is also well disposed toward me, and I appreciate his friendship.

Dimly lit temple room just before *maṅgala-ārati* on a new day. I look forward to seeing the Deities and keeping present while singing. I thought, “You had heard of Zurich and now here you are.” Will the spiritual world be like that—a place we hear about and then suddenly go to? It is beyond my imagination.

I dreamt a Vaiṣṇava *sādhū* was going to die. I had some of his last effects. Then he died. Stambha dāsa said he could calculate by astrology the exact moment of the *sādhū*’s passing away, but the calculation would take a long time.

Śrīla Prabhupāda speaking from twenty-nine years ago preserved on tape. I hear his voice, his desire to convince others to accept Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He goes over the points: the soul never becomes inactive, we always have desire, we have to change material desire into spiritual. Arjuna didn’t want to fight, but Kṛṣṇa convinced him. Does that mean he was degraded by hearing from Kṛṣṇa? No, he was improved. He carried out the Lord’s will. The pregnant meanings and their applications for us . . . Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

“Don’t live for sense gratification.” Words and phrases pass through me while I eat breakfast.

How is Śācinandana Swami doing in getting out of Zagreb? How are devotees in Armenia and Miami? How’s our family in Alachua? What are they desiring and meeting to do?

When I arrived here the other day, only one person greeted us at the door and helped us in. That was fine with

me, I don't like welcoming committees. He explained, "The managers are at a meeting and could not come to meet you." Very well. Then meet and decide what is to be done, how to arrange things so it goes on in its efficient Swiss way. I crawled up to the suite they have graciously provided for my weekend use.

Now I am ready to speak again, this time on several different sections of the outline, separated by Roman numerals. While speaking I glance down at my outline. One woman, much older than the others, smiles as I speak, and it seems she is following closely and approvingly. She seems to want me to know that. I appreciate it. Better than the stone faces. Often devotees don't make eye contact. One young woman in the rear is talking to her friend. Men hear or don't. I plow on.

The big bells ring for 6:30 A.M. News, news of the little world that concerns us. Remember when I was writing haiku and mailing it to the magazine editors? One prominent editor who published me frequently in *Modern Haiku* turned down a batch of poems that he said were more like news items than haiku. (I had written about Gītā-nāgarī Ratha-yātrā). In haiku, you are supposed to catch a special moment or feeling underneath an event. Yes, I thought, but if I can't catch or think so deeply, then am I willing to wait two years for one to come? I will tell you of the bird sitting on the fence like a spectator to the Ratha-yātrā. We'll tell you the man is cutting down the weeds along the path the Ratha-yātrā will take. We'll tell you what we can.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Freer. Free up the man inside. Let him relax and say, "Although I am not going to a war zone to preach and not moving so quickly, I think this is an important duty that I speak today's verse in this protected temple, and then on Monday morning drive out of here. It is

important to write and write. It is coming out all right. It is important to feel that and feel love for the writing. And it's most important to be Kṛṣṇa conscious, to say what Kṛṣṇa says, and I do that too."

Material body, drowsy, pushed, needs rest, keeps going, dress it up with some colored clothes, wash it, don't let it get sexually agitated, divert it from that, or from anger or other non-spiritual behavior. Move it around. It's like a donkey. St. Francis said, "Brother Ass."

Jackson Heights, childhood, names going past. They said the Studebaker for 1949 is built so that you can't tell the rear from the front. We used to pass some of them on the highway when driving to Uncle Sal's house. Uncle Sal lived in Brooklyn just over City Line, but then bought his own salt-box house in Rosedale, Long Island near the airport where the jets flew in low. Uncle Sal and cousin Steve Sessa, who was an all-star shortstop on the local league baseball team. Would he grow up to be like me? Gone. Ditch it. Now come up again in the Zurich Vedic center, Govinda Verlag. I am going to close my eyes and rest before the class so I'll be in good shape. This may not be a haiku moment. I am a soldier or sportsman on a marathon and when your energies start to lag, your supporters talk to you to keep you awake and tell you, "Keep moving, push on."

Writing this during *japa* time while the temple populace hums with the holy name. Let me go do a little more too.

8:45 A.M.

It's Saturday, so the devotee audience was a little bigger this morning. Still, they seem less responsive here than in other temples. When I ask for questions, they're silent. I wait and then finally someone, perhaps out of sympathy for me, asks a question. The questions today were not on

the points I covered. I covered quite a few topics such as the neglect of duty, not being interested in subtle science, the price of spiritual science, chanting, etc., but there were no questions. Finally someone asked, "In a previous verse it states that Lord Śiva once chased Lord Brahmā. Can you explain that?" I said I didn't know. Then another devotee said that in the purport to that verse it states that once Brahmā lusted after his daughter and Lord Śiva became infuriated. I was embarrassed that I didn't remember the incident. But why ask a question that is already answered in the purport and a question not even on today's purport?

I spoke about the misuse of this planet's resources, but no one had anything to say. I said devotees sometimes misbehave on *saṅkīrtana* and while doing other services, but no response. Maybe they are shy or this is Swiss conservatism. Anyway, I finally sighed audibly and they let me go or I let them go. "Thank you very much." Big preacher crooning into the microphone, can't get any response.

Freer:

Why don't they ask questions? Because you didn't move them. You were not simple and profound. You covered too many subjects. You were too well prepared with your Post-its, talking as if you were on stage performing. You don't know how to actually pray. They think that their gurus can preach better than you. You don't go on *saṅkīrtana* or push book distribution and neither do you work with managers or attend meetings, and all this shows when you speak. They have your number. They are not interested in what you have to say. They prefer to hear it from someone else. Or maybe they just don't listen to philosophy so well. What the hell, it's breakfast time. You've been jabbering away for forty-five minutes, so why should they prolong it when—if they don't ask you any questions—they can go

right to breakfast and then get on with the day's work? You have filled the air with your orations, now let's give silence a break. You know what it's like when a class is over, and you (in the audience) are relieved, and you just want to get out of there. That's what they felt like. And they were all in agreement, they cooperated, so none of them asked and therefore they could all exit quickly. The joke is on you.

Besides, you too wanted to get away. Go upstairs and now you have the remains of a late morning to do something with—to prepare for the next lecture. But if they don't ask, if they don't listen, then why prepare? Because you don't want to fail and fall flat on your face. At least you do the job presentably. That's what we all want. Give a presentable class, and then as soon as it's over, we can all leave.

Noon

Śacinandana Swami has safely arrived from Zagreb. I wanted to see him at least briefly, but Madhu went and saw him instead and arranged for our meeting tomorrow. SS will be leaving Zurich this afternoon to go to Basel and return tonight. I was thinking, "What's the harm in squeezing in a spontaneous meeting or lunch together?" but M. is probably right. He saw me yesterday get a banging headache, which put me out of action all afternoon. I limped down to the lecture and afterwards had a worse banging, which went away overnight. M. also saw me in Slovenia where I canceled the evening lecture. I can give two lectures a day, but can't expect to squeeze in extras. Neither can we say that a spontaneous meeting with SS could be controlled and short. I know all this, but it's making me feel a little . . . I won't say sorry—that's too strong a word—but I feel that my life is denied certain pleasures,

that I'm something of a semi-invalid. I don't have adventures a normal person does. I have to stay quiet. I like it that way, but for writing it means I have to go more within. Otherwise, I have nothing to report. Especially since my writing mostly covers what actually happens with me. It's not very interesting to say, "Canceled meeting with vivacious, daring preacher, but will see him tomorrow at 2 P.M. for an hour."

Madhu has changed our ferry tickets from France to Ireland so that we will leave two days earlier than planned. We would have spent those days at a campground at Le Havre, but now we can spend them in the more controlled environment of living in our van in the devotee community at Wicklow. That's good, but in terms of this *Summer Marathon*, I will have to go inside myself more. I'll have six days in Wicklow with nothing much happening. I can take walks in my new walking shoes or I can read and tell you about that. I can free-write. Don't feel sorry. Don't feel denied. Read your spiritual master's books. Go within and find not just the colon and pancreas, but the spirit soul or at least a voice that calls out to the Lord.

It is not necessary to run around and do a lot of things. I need to be alert and to chant and hear. And then what? Can I be interesting? Is that what I want, to be interesting? Would I rather be someone else? Would I rather have a tale to tell of how I was preaching in Zagreb but a war started, so I canceled one lecture and came back early to Switzerland? The plane was delayed, and I didn't know if I could get out of the war zone. That's not *my* tale to tell. I am not moving fast. If I was, it's likely I wouldn't be inclined to record things as they happened. Think of it that way. My life compensates for that. Most of my books are written when I deliberately stop activity. This *Summer Marathon*, for me, is a book caught in motion. It may not be the motion of a SS, but it's "on the run" for me.

4 P.M.

The day grows hot. I read a long Louis Simpson poem, or more like I glanced through it. It was about action and death of soldiers in World War II. I left it behind. Those were . . . I don't know what it was like. He talks of war without questioning the actual morality of the fighting. He just fought and tried to do right and be brave. It was a test of character and guts.

Someone like William Stafford and other conscientious objectors were also brave. We devotees say we should fight if Kṛṣṇa wants us to, but we don't accept contemporary military organizations as religious. Therefore, just because the government declares war doesn't mean we have a religious or moral duty to fight. Some devotees choose to, though. I'm sure it's difficult to practice the four rules, especially to maintain a pure, vegetarian diet, and to chant sixteen rounds in that environment, but some devotees do it.

I'm lucky. I'm too old now to be called for military duty, and those duties are behind me. Someone might say I'm coasting in my senior citizen years. I give a lecture in the morning and another in the evening and do "nothing" in between. "Two hots and a cot." I get my subsistence. I speak the philosophy, organize it into applicable points, and whether or not they ask questions or even listen is not my business.

But back to that original question: what am I doing to insure as far as possible that I can go back to Godhead? I haven't spoken yet with SS, but I heard that he said bombs were being dropped only 50 meters from the ISKCON temple building in Zagreb.

What am I doing so that I don't have to come back to Kali-yuga and go through all this grief again? I don't seem to be working very hard for it. You say our philosophy

teaches that a devotee is not interested in liberation, but then what *is* he interested in? Service to guru and Kṛṣṇa in this life and the next. “All I want is Your causeless devotional service birth after birth.” I don’t find that desire burning in me. Am I taking it too easy? That would be a sin. Of course, I have my excuses.

Prabhupāda wrote in his “Notice” of November 1966 that his followers should not mix extensively with non-devotees. They should also not waste time in idle talks or frivolous sports. Therefore, I spend a hot Swiss Saturday afternoon sitting in this VIP suite and not peeking out. Someone comes to the door with a donation of 100 Swiss francs, gives it to Madhu. I don’t know what they are talking about, so I don’t look up. M. said the man was peering in wanting to get my attention. If I look up . . .

I have my outline for tonight and tomorrow and that’s all the lectures I am scheduled to give here. They are cooking biscuits for us to eat on the road. I keep writing, and when there are no lectures to give, I return to unmotivated reading. Find Śrī Kṛṣṇa in His words and the descriptions by our spiritual master. Read carefully what he says. There is nothing more important. The wars are not as important. Prabhupāda says we need to adjust our lives so that they keep pace with the Lord’s mission. In other words, we may go on doing our own thing—working as a family man or whatever—but we have to adjust that activity so that we can chant and hear. It sounds easy, and Prabhupāda says it’s not so hard; Lord Caitanya has made the impossible possible as long as we don’t lose our focus on the main goal of life. We can do what we can, even if we’re not monks. But what about me? I have given my full time to being a monk. I should be doing better. I should be constantly absorbed . . . I should be . . .

The next life should concern us. What will people say about us after we leave this body? They will talk because they are survivors, for awhile. Will we all be cycled back into the species? An astrologer said that Pandit Nehru became one of two dogs in Switzerland in his next life. It does not do him any good that there is a Nehru museum in New Delhi and that he is praised. The actual person has gone to a dog's body, and that is all that counts. We want to come back and be with the devotees. Pray for that. The perfection would be, if we had to come back, to have complete dedication to the unlimited Lord, loving association with His devotees, and compassion for all living beings. Repeat these words and pray to mean them.

Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, "You already have the *brahmāstra* weapon. Now use it to counteract the weapon thrown by Aśvatthāmā." In other words, we have to help ourselves but remain dependent on Kṛṣṇa's mercy and direction. Get it?

They look back at me, a group of girls on the right in the corner of the temple room. The men occupy more space as they spread out throughout the temple room listening, not knowing me and me not knowing them.



Do they mind that I come down to the give the class and then immediately go upstairs? They offer me respect. Tonight I'll try to be more relaxed and tell funny stories. Almost all the stories are about me and my approach to the Swami. Although someone might think I am puffed up to tell only my stories, they are still the best ones I know. I could tell the story of Stanley asking the Swami for five dollars to buy gasoline to burn himself to death, and Swami telling him to ask the treasurer, but I was not a witness to that. I know my own stories actually happened.

August 6

I'm scheduled to meet with SS at 2 P.M. Hope I'm clear of head pain to do it. I was thinking, "What shall I present to him as an agenda for our talk?" He expects me to represent "the inner life." Sometimes we speak of this in a tantalizing, unclear way, as "mysticism" or "the life of prayer." Sometimes we allude to private (secret) interest in deeper levels of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For me, inner life means concentration, saving optimum time to read Prabhupāda's books and to chant *japa*. For me personally, it also means writing. This is the "*bābāji*" content of my life. I advocate it quietly as the inner life of a preacher. It's all up front and nonsecretive. The secret or private aspect of it has to do with something else.

I read *Bhagavad-gītā* this morning for fifty minutes. Good! Please do it every day and seek ways to have taste and disciplined practice for other readings throughout the day—even random reading in Prabhupāda's books and letters. Throughout the years one may go from one book to another, tasting nectar like a bee.

Yesterday afternoon I typed two pages intended as part of this "marathon," but then I threw them away. It's good to be detached and not to think that everything I write has to be preserved. Usually I include everything I write within

a certain time period as part of a timed book; I rarely crumple things up or rip them into pieces. I wonder what made me do it this time? I don't want to lose nerve or confidence in the worthiness of recording as much as possible. That is the meaning of endurance in this marathon.



Sometimes in a wild dance, words fly off like sparks from a spark machine. That's free-writing. Sometimes I write sarcastically, coyly, or ironically. I prefer to be more direct. When I can't find access to a soft and sincere devotional heart, however, I don't want to avoid writing. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example that we should be like businessmen who are expert to make profit in both a strong and weak economy. I can be writing profitably on one level or another.

Here are some phrases from the pages I threw in the trash (along with an empty bottle of drinking water, tissues, filings from sharpened pencils, gone-dead batteries, nervous hours, scraps of typewriter paper left after I scissored them to fit them onto the legal page, etc. You can't keep all; some is junk):

“He asked your secretary, ‘What is he really like? What is he into?’

“He said, ‘He doesn’t like to go to big festivals. He likes to read and write alone.’”

Yeah, well, I like to do that, the man said. And he likes radishes and polecats and words that have fur on them . . .

Yeah, much of it can be trashed, I admit.

Last night went well, the upbeat presentation of my reminiscences of life with Swamiji in 1966. I told oldies but goodies, vintage incidents, such as the first time I went to his room and asked questions, the time I purchased the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams* from him, the time when I resigned from my welfare job, the time I phoned him and said I’d be late for lunch, the time I bought him a mango (“Very good boy”), the time I donated money, how I missed the first initiation and he said, “If you love me, I will love you.”

Afterwards, I told M. that I may speak these remembrances in a place where they haven’t heard them. He said—he was excited and happy—that he’s heard them many times and he loves to hear them again. I think it depends on my being prepared to really tell it and live it. When I went to Prabhupāda’s an hour late for lunch, he put the food on the floor and I bowed at his feet for the first time. It’s a fact. Preserve the life of these sacred memories by retelling them. All glories to Prabhupāda and especially to those early days.

File past, march past, the moments and hours. In recent years, I don’t write as the persona who gave up all past impressions and became a simple and sincere and bumbling *śiṣya* of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Rather, in a book like *Radio Shows*, I plunge into the flow of my consciousness. I’m sometimes talking of Prabhupāda, sometimes of my

material parents, sometimes past, sometimes present, sometimes about ISKCON, sometimes about the person that I am, etc. Is it more honest?

I don't know, but how can I do otherwise? Exclusive focus on 1966 memories is something else, a special entrance or nectar that I cannot serve out all the time.

I wrote my *Svevo* book in 1964. Just prior to that I had written a traditional short story called "On the Outskirts of Gloria." It told of the USS Saratoga coming into port. I wrote it under the influence of marijuana, trying to give vivid details. Murray didn't like it much because it was restrained and formal. It was not poetry from the heart but constructed prose.

Then in the first flush of living on the Lower East Side, I broke loose and wrote fragments of my actual life—my visits to Eliot and Anna, etc. Murray said that this was *it*. I was waxing poetic. Kowit liked it too, although he thought I was showing him the notes of an outline of a book I was planning to write. I said, "No, this is it, this is the book." He took back his praise. He said he liked it as a plan, not as a book. Eliot loved it the way it was.

The fact is, when I write nowadays, I include what might be called the writer's notebook or plans for writing along with the writing itself.

Some devotees say that it was fine for me to keep a detailed diary when I was serving Prabhupāda. They wanted to hear about what he was doing. What use is it, they ask, to write of my complaints and mediocre thoughts and habits? They may say that. I have to achieve excellence in all that I write, or at least a high percentage of what I write. I write timed books. Homer nods. How often do I strive for excellence? In every line.

As in *Svevo*, I wrote what was happening, and that's what I'm doing now.

I'm glad I thought of this just now because it creates a link between today's writing and Svevo's writing. The same "problem" or challenge is present. The same two different schools of thought and theory are contending. I want to go for the poetry, the actual life, the sacrifice on the altar of writing expression, but I want the sacrifice to be made to Kṛṣṇa.

Breezes flow, sometimes hot ones. The life of a day. Avoiding headaches.

I went strong for two weeks in *The Best I Could Do*, then lost heart and quit for a few days. Then I came back and wrote, "You have to not give a damn what any critic and reader thinks. Just give it your best. These have been your own kind of books."

I tell what I'm reading in Śrīla Prabhupāda. It's harder to tell of my life of *japa*, although that's equally important as reading. In pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious days, I had no such auspicious activities. I descended to petty sins. I was becoming a louse, fit for suicide or trash, addicted to bad habits. Worse was probably ahead: "You are a Greek tragedy waiting to happen." Manhattan and its big cats would crush me, spoil me, eat me up, and spew me out.

The little saintly spark that expanded beyond any hope I had was fanned by Prabhupāda. Now I am his man. But yes, I am still interested to go on with it, to write of my pulse-beat, my loves, to pass the time, and to practice expression.

I tried looking at another Simpson poem to use as a springboard into my own expression, but he's too hard to get into.

I know these poets can't help me much. They want to be "cunningly appealing." They quote Baudelaire saying that the more you write poetry, the more you'll get into melancholy. Geez . . . the art, the way to make it come out right.

If you speak a plain message, it's not a poem. All their theories and posturings. We appreciate that their books took time to write, and that they worked to make it come out nice in many drafts, and that they keep their poems, some of them, short, and that they don't write too much,

but I write for myself

he said.

In bed at twelve the alarm

goes off and I put on the

light and now I ought to

go in the other room to chant.

Skip lines and make a fresh start. I hope I'll be all right. I'll tell SS my open secrets and hear his from him. We are fellow travelers. I appreciate that he is a rare soul. I admire that he is so active and *giving* as a preacher, although I can't do it myself. He has a great taste for both active preaching and inner cultivation.

"On the way back to the house Prabhupāda told us that it is very good to tell a story in the middle of a talk. He explained that in Kali-yuga people are less intelligent, so the *Bhāgavatam* is ideal for this age because it gives instruction by way of stories." (*Transcendental Diary*, Vol. One, p. 212)

Met SS in the temple before *maṅgala-ārati*. "You're keeping up a very heavy pace," I said.

"It's the pace of a desperate beggar," he said.

I wanted to say that it's the pace of a giver, but his words sounded so true. He wore a sweater and knit cap. He said he is overworked. Why should we overwork? I sat like a pleased cat thinking of its milk—my marathon writing.

I told Madhu I wanted a better pillow, like the one Harikeśa Swami has on his bed here in Zurich. I was serious about it. I said, “Unfortunately or fortunately, I’m not like St. Teresa of Avila who had a wooden pillow” (which we saw in her cell in Avila). Neither am I a Śukadeva Gosvāmī who said we should use our arms for pillows.

“But you quoted him the other day,” Madhu chided.

“Yes, but we can’t imitate.”

Don’t imitate. Don’t eat carob cakes either. Tomorrow is Ekādaśī and we travel. We started traveling today by walking down to the van to pack away our articles. I don’t think I’ll shave my head; I don’t want to resemble a skin-head as we cross the border into France and two days later take the ferry to Ireland. I’ll attend the Sunday afternoon lecture by SS today, Sunday, if he gives it in English.

After my lecture, he asked me how it had felt to see ISKCON and Śrīla Prabhupāda become less liberal, less intimate. I said we had to internalize the relationship. Also, Prabhupāda gave us assignments so we were able to exercise our controlling tendency. Everything was arranged by Kṛṣṇa for our own good. If we stayed too close to our spiritual master, maybe we’d have become too familiar. As I spoke, SS took some notes. I told him how Prabhupāda said, “ISKCON may be big, but I am small.” In other words, Prabhupāda said, “I’m still personal. You serve and be with me in that way.” I was still going strong telling stories at the end. SS is very accommodating, asking me to do what I want. He makes you actually feel free to do that. Like a rose. Yet he survives and thrives in this North European climate. He likes it and they like him. He’s going under his own steam as a guru and preacher in Germany, Serbia, and Croatia, where he attracts big audiences despite the danger.

I am writing this on a toad’s back with a quill feather. I have a hunched position. A hunchbacked girl named Kubjā

went to the Lord at His request. He straightened her out. Balarāma's appearance day comes up in a few days, and we will fast on the ferry boat. We don't have to observe the day by special readings. I ought to warm up for Janmā-ṣṭamī by hearing *Kṛṣṇa* book tapes on those chapters. I could wait until we get to Wicklow to do that. I will not make fun of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement except in a way appropriate for one who is a member. I am happy to have been with the Swami in the early years, especially 1966. SS said it's inconceivable how Swamijī treated us so kindly and leniently, like when he saved me lunch.

As I write, I surrender. The big brass bells sound here in Zurich for Sunday morning Mass. Sermons given. Worshipers in their Sunday best, efficient, giving money in the basket, but fallen.

Listen . . . I surrender. SS told Madhu he will speak in his lecture about something literary that I will like. I wonder what he means? Will he tell us that he studied Goethe in his youth, or Proust? I'll have to find out.

Clocks, Swiss Army knives, pillows, Harikeśa Swami's room, the bell gonging and gonging for 11 A.M. Mass. All right already. And in the distance, another church with a tall, green steeple does the same.

Svevo got out of the Navy with about \$600 in severance pay and a Navy peacoat and black crew-neck sweater. Those things he later discarded in favor of saffron. I have to run now and do Prabhupāda's *pūjā*, but maybe later I can tell you the story of how that lad gave up his literary pose. For now, I'll tell you that he was not visited by an E.T. creature and he didn't practice *prāṇa* therapy or Reiki. He's a pretty straight guy. There is no outstanding conflict in this story; he was released by his own request to God Almighty.

4:30 P.M.

I received a letter from a Godbrother who said that ISKCON has many deep-seated faults that make it hard for a preacher to maintain his enthusiasm. I told him that I preach by concentrating on the importance of hearing and chanting. He challenged that I could become an instrument for misleading people. If ISKCON were corrupt and I asked devotees to remain loyal and to concentrate on their *sādhana*, I could be displeasing Śrīla Prabhupāda. I replied that it's healthy to admit wrongs and to discuss how to reform ISKCON, but I want to stay aloof from that wrangling. I don't think ISKCON should be abandoned; I have my own niche, my own contribution to make, and that is to stress the essential priorities. I don't say everything is perfect, but I cannot tackle the problems. Neither do I expend my energies attacking persons I might suspect of being manipulative. To some degree, I trust the GBC, and I don't speak against it. I trust that Lord Caitanya's will shall prevail.

I am basically happy and simple. I encourage people to practice *bhakti-yoga*, either inside or outside the temple. Hear from Śrīla Prabhupāda.

My Godbrother said we have enough preachers who can make learned presentations of the philosophy. We need people to face facts, such as that many devotees don't follow the four rules or chant sixteen rounds, and for many, there is no lifelong future in ISKCON.

ISKCON may be in a sad state. Heading for a crisis—either it will get well or die. Maybe that's healthy. I keep thinking that if and when the conservative GBC leaders admit that plenty is wrong and become more liberal and want to improve—even *then* I wouldn't want to go to all those meetings, round table discussions, Internet forums, and seminars. I don't think it's wrong to support an ailing ISKCON. I think ISKCON's good outweighs its bad. I don't

think Prabhupāda wants me to quit it. So as long as there are temples or groups of devotees, they will need lecturers and simple presentations of the philosophy.

I too feel the pinch, the peer pressure. I am criticized for being a little different, but I seek my integrity while remaining connected but aloof from ISKCON. I don't even want to discuss this at length in my book. I'd just get swept along in the whirlpools of diagnoses and treatments. We need the kind of organization a good business has; we need community, we need *varṇāśrama*, we need, we need . . .

We also need the pine trees
and a few maroon gladiolas
in a vase on a porch
on a summer afternoon.

While SS lectures in Deutsch
we need someone sitting upstairs
writing in American-English, mining
for his own fresh perspective—
who will travel tomorrow
to France and stop
to write. Please.

With all thy faults,
ISKCON, I make my
sermon-song within your precincts.

I advised Śacīnandana Mahārāja to care for his health, and not to push himself so hard if he wants to live long. He said, "I don't want to live long; I want to burn out on the altar of sacrificing myself to preaching." He means it.

Do I want to live long? The last two hours of this Sunday I coast. Sit back, don't eat feast, don't meet guests, don't try anything much except maybe an extra round, just so that tomorrow I can perform the *yajña* of travel.

I think I am more concerned about improving myself than improving ISKCON.

Is that wrong? My Godbrother grimaced and said, “When I read your books, I think, ‘Why does he doubt that they are useful?’” He is sure that they help people.

An ominous picture of ISKCON in deep wrong, like an iceberg starting to crack from top to bottom. What’s wrong? What will be the outcome? I can’t figure it out. I’m too tiny. Neither do I want to accept anyone’s opinion and follow their program for this. I would prefer to seek out my own integrity and live according to that. Writing helps me and it is to this purpose that I write—to find out more what is right, what is wrong, and what is best for me to do. I don’t want to be manipulated by conservatives who say that nothing is wrong in ISKCON but that all policies must be supported by all members, and neither do I want to join the radicals who simply want to bash ISKCON.

The subject matter of a book like *The Summer Marathon* may seem irrelevant to these burning issues, but it’s not. It is more important for me to wake early, read *Bhagavad-gītā*, write some simple lines from the self, travel in the van, and keep chanting and writing and following a simple trail, even though I don’t get spectacular results. I want to keep asking myself in a quiet way what Prabhupāda wants of me and what I can actually do.

August 7

Write to purify yourself. Cut through as soon as possible. Cutting through can mean being keen to express feelings and gut reactions, but it also means to reach a Kṛṣṇa conscious expression, to touch a verse of *śāstra*, a profound and helpful statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda, to get close to it, to them, throughout the day. Kṛṣṇa is revealed only to those who think of Him in *paramparā*. My self-expression and honesty is for this. Otherwise, it becomes a mundane exercise.

This combination of honesty and openness, even when it means groping through confusion, *and* the striking goal of Kṛṣṇa consciousness by deliberate, prayerful embrace of śāstric words—can be possible in the timed book. The book should not confine me by adherence to some formula or “story.” Speak to the heart of the issue directly. Some of this feeling was aroused last night after talking to my Godbrother and sharing his feeling of ISKCON malaise. (I referred him to words in his German language, *angst* and *berldshmertz*—he seemed to be feeling them, an ISKCON-*shmertz*.) Madhu also encouraged me that my personal writing should do this. Whether it’s published or not is not the point; I need help, I want Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and writing can serve me. It will be readable. Will it be art?

Maybe. A sort of art. And if it's artless but vitally Kṛṣṇa conscious, what's the harm in that?

This led me to think that maybe the writing session format would serve me better because a writing session is more of an invitation to write in the moment, whatever comes. The process of free-writing can lead me to the heart of concerns quickly. Doing them one after another gives me momentum. It's similar to reading or chanting; it brings its own reward, as in, "Chanting produces chanting."

This Post-it note to myself: "Try to write uncensored. Be yourself in remaining days (of marathon)." One way to do this might be to keep this book, *Marathon*, rolling, but doing it more as a series of writing sessions. Or, remember the "scrap journal" I once kept? Or, *Writing While Reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's Books*? It can be a combination of all of these.

Let's say I wanted (and still want) to write a book to capture the summer-end experience as I travel and write in Europe while living out of my van. Let's also say that I have built up a context and achieved something in the chapters I've already written. Now I can use this achievement to allow me to go further. My reader (again, I mostly refer here to myself as the reader, the one who wants to sustain a book, to bring it into existence, and to read it) is sympathetic, willing to go where I want to take him. The reader mostly wants genuine experience. If I can develop, go further than I have gone so far, he is willing to adjust to changes in style, different kinds of reporting, and he is capable of it. It's silly to think the reader can't or won't follow me and that I have to "dumb down" my writing instinct to keep up his interest. What good is free-writing if it's not actually freer? And if I consider this a gamble—and that it might fail—it's still worth the risk. Better to be bold and go beyond—if my heart leads me there—than to keep a safe

account, “because I promised us I’d write a book in twenty-one days of life on the road, a day-by-day until Jan-māṣṭamī.” I don’t have to shape it; it’s already being shaped by time, by the fact that life occurs in divisions of days, and all the other factors.

ISKCON, ISKCON. Remember the time a devotee said to Prabhupāda that the *gurukula* building in progress in Vṛndāvana would be for ISKCON’s children? Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “ISKCON, FISKCON.” I don’t know exactly what he meant by that, but we needn’t be attached so much to any stereotyped or limited idea of ISKCON. It lives, it continues, it grows. Or it breaks down. It’s pure or impure. It’s *sampradāya* or *apa sampradāya*. We cannot control it by uttering the word “ISKCON.” Even the GBC (another word formula) can’t control the reality and destiny of what we mean by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It’s Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement, a branch of Lord Caitanya’s tree. It’s our sacred cow. The institution. It has no written constitution. It sells pizza in Māyāpur. It exists in the temples listed in *Back to Godhead* magazine.

In Slovenia, they don’t serve sweets to the devotees, but while I was there, I had sweets every day. When I ate lunch with my *sannyāsī* Godbrother, the devotees didn’t include a sweet. When I asked my Godbrother if there was a sweet, a fuss was created. I wouldn’t have made a fuss about it, but he lectured the devotees about how they should always serve Kṛṣṇa a sweet, even a little bit of sugar, because it’s one of the tastes. He described it in terms of Deity worship. It also appeared that we (at least I) were trying to satisfy the tongue’s demand for sweets. I was implicated in an embarrassing scene. It may well have left the impression that we *sannyāsīs* who preach to devotees how they should act would be seen by them as attached to sweets and demanding them, whereas the other devotees go without sweets-gratification.

I need to be careful about my behavior so that I don't appear hypocritical or demanding when I visit devotees. I am a *tridaṇḍī-bhikṣu*, a beggar, and I should accept what I am offered ("Beggars can't be choosers"). The fact is, many devotees want to serve a *sannyāsī*. When they ask what we would like and if we indicate that we would like a sweet, they usually supply plenty. I don't think I'm attached to dessert—I weigh about 118 pounds, which for a man who is 5'11" is certainly skinny—but that's no excuse for filling my little belly and allowing the pushing agents of tongue and mind to be uncontrolled and greedy. Eat to live. Take only what's necessary. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The purpose of food is to increase the duration of life, purify the mind and aid bodily strength. This is its only purpose." (Bg. 17.10, purport)

Write on, MacDuff. Scratching pen under desk lamp, no other lamp on in this guest room, M. sleeping on the other side of the desk. Now I should go and follow a schedule for our 5 A.M. departure. Chant until 2:30 and then go into the bathroom, then load the last articles into the van, including Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*.

Dreamt some devotees were adjusting to life in a rocky, desolate, offshore island where Christian monks had lived formerly. *It was very austere*. We examined little cavelike cells built into the rocks. They each had a front and rear chamber to them. Periodically, these cells would get flooded when the ocean water rolled in. It would even flood over your head, but only for a moment. Then the water would recede. We accepted it and adjusted to life there and found advantages in it. Extreme austerity in everything and a *bābājī's* existence while we practiced Kṛṣṇa conscious *sādhana*.

When I awoke, I asked why this dream had come. Is it an aftermath of hearing my Godbrother's anxiety that ISKCON

is wrong in some deep ways? Was **I imagining that we** would have to make a new start, maybe **in this life or in the** next, something similar to going to a **desolate rock island** for *tapasya*? Would Kṛṣṇa force us **to go there**? Is this a survivalist's scenario? I don't know **for sure**. I seemed willing to make the best of it. The habits **and policies** of the Christian monks who had been living **on this island in** previous times seemed to shape and **condition** our own attempts. Would ISKCON misleaders **repeat the same mistakes**? One devotee who, in waking life, **has left our society** was there, and in the dream he **immediately set himself** apart to develop a community by **his own definition**. Another devotee was hiding so he **could sleep more**, but someone pulled him out of the cave by **his ears**.

You better chant and tell the truth **quickly**. Do what you need to do to finish the marathon **strongly**. Put **anything** into the book or convert it into a **different space**. Whatever. You know, despite this talk of **changing it**, that you probably cannot change it much. You **are who you are**, and when you go to write, it comes out like **that**. But yes, you can do more than follow a routine formula. Release from formalities and bounds is good. Do **what is best for yourself** and that which is Kṛṣṇa conscious. **Read**. That's important. Keep Kṛṣṇa consciousness **close to you**, a foremost daily objective, as you find it **when you come close** to Prabhupāda's books and embrace **even a single sentence**.

Border into France

Lady with chiming voice stops **us**. Other cars go through. We pull to the side while she **runs a check** on our passports. She asked, "Where have you **been**?"

He said, "Uh . . . traveling in Italy, and we've been in Zurich for four days."

"Pull over there."

We've been here five minutes now. Traffic flows into France and we wait. Madhu studies the map. It's 6 A.M. and we have made good time so far. I slept a half hour in cozy dark of back van.

Why is she delaying us? Are we suspicious? I don't think she saw we were Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees, but something caught her attention/ intuition to give us some special scrutiny. An Irishman and an American dare to enter the Republic of France.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, I want to read your books and learn of your Kṛṣṇa there. This morning, I read *Bhagavad-gītā* for forty minutes and that was nice. Kṛṣṇa helps us in the heart.

"Listen, young lady, we are on a mission from God!"

Rain, pleasant drive, talking with M. about my resolution to see my headaches as coming from Kṛṣṇa and not to seek diagnosis and cures from the many mundane paths.

P-stop, France

Got to roll on now, due to the stop 100 kilometers short of Paris. Then very early tomorrow we can drive through Paris (which has no good beltway system around the city) before traffic builds up.

No time yet for thinking nicely or writing. Later you may get a chance. But you can utter *mahā-mantras* while you ride north on the *bonne route*.

4:10 P.M.

After about six hours of van travel today, I sit here well fed, a bit dazed, but rested. I can hear traffic zoom by on

the *bonne route*. Words on the periphery of consciousness are just like that: they zoom by and you hear them or you don't quite. You can't snatch them quickly enough to write them all down.

M. said while concentrating on driving, his mind simultaneously played a scenario where he was speaking to a group of people. He said he was sympathetic to their criticism of the institution, yet he heard himself present the *paramparā* and my side of things. How would he speak? He went ahead and did it.

What is wrong with ISKCON? Here are some of the charges made by various parties:

Its leaders are crazy—they just want to control for themselves and are not interested in the devotees' needs. It's a scorched hothouse; you can tell which house on a street is the ISKCON temple—just look for the most dilapidated building. Not enough money. They cheat while distributing books—keep ruining their own reputation that way. Sad case. All bureaucracy and no sense even trying to rejoin it. They took guruship, but Śrīla Prabhupāda should be the only one. He's not in the center. The Padayātrā is a farce. Where are the practical solutions to world problems? They mistreat women. No one is accountable.

Listen, ISKCON is a heartbreaker, fist-breaker. They have been attacked for over twenty years now by the anti-cult movement and are tiring of it, but are still thought of as a cult in days when evil cults become more and more a fearful phenomena.

They lost their head when their Guru Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda, went back to Godhead. All trouble stems from that.

They're not organized according to sound business principles. They are sectarian and don't allow help from psychologists. They could use an infusion of love among

members. Scott Peck could help, or Stephen Covey, or Erich Fromme—*somebody*—but they don't listen. They pretend they are perfect.

Too much philosophy and no human action for good. Leaders won't allow it. Emphasis on making money and no real preaching.

Or—not enough book distribution.

Too much New Age in ISKCON.

Just the opposite of what someone says is wrong. It's a madhouse of various opinions.

GBC iron fist but no heart, just laws and bylaws and committees and rhetoric and Centennial but no home, no lifelong career. No education, no justice.

Farms dead; no self-sufficient economy. That's what's wrong.

Main lack: still have not implemented *varṇāśrama*.

What's good about ISKCON?

They've captivated some good-looking women in *sārīs* (saw a guy checking out women as he sat in Zurich temple). There's good cooking if you don't mind ghee and sugar and fried food. They've got a far-out philosophy; good books if you don't mind dogmatic authority. (Hey, that's a complaint. Say something good here.)

Good music. Mice. Cats. Houses. People, yeah, people with actual lives, actual sacrifices. Blood and tears. They get beat up but don't stop. Few members but wide effect. Got some oldsters now. Geez, they got a lot of good things going for them, and it's a shame they're so small and without a five-year or ten-year plan.

Some are celibates. Nice clothes for summertime. Links with ancient and contemporary spiritual India.

I, the central eye, wrote a few letters, dictated them with loud and clear enunciation while the cupboards rattled and the van shook and hurtled forward. It sounds loud as hell,

me shouting my letter over the din to Kdd, to JS, to SS, Dear so-and-so, today is August 7 and I am hurt foot, alive, no headache (but scraped head on low, overhead doors), headed north in France, due in a couple of days to arrive in Wicklow, Ireland. Signed, can't-live-forever-Jones.

Mountains of Wicklow worn down. Don't believe predictions of tidal wave, but if the earth wants to change her coastlines and has Kṛṣṇa's permission, then it will happen. One Godbrother says he's tired of picking up the mess of ISKCON's mistakes by explaining it away, defending its wrongs as if they were right overall. He wants to separate his being and destiny from this "monstrous movement with its management boards and wrong ways and wrong results" and to live for what he, as a person, believes. First he has to find out what that is. After being so long entangled and his opinion mixed in with the group decision of the institution, finding himself has not proven easy. He wants to read Prabhupāda's books and stop defending the ISKCON way as the solution to people's problems. If you do that (some say), you are just adding to the problem. You don't fully believe ISKCON is right, yet you continue to advise people to live in it and join it. Enough! Recover yourself for now. Have the guts and principle to find your own integrity. Sound right? Or is he another crazy?

One solution is to do what they have done in Wicklow—pull out and start your own community with people you know and respect. Nothing is perfect.

We misfits of the century. Ernest Borgnine as the Centurion in charge of a hundred men. When I was GBC of Northeast U.S., Caribbean, and Ireland, we used to submit up to \$350,000 a year to the BBT. I got a few pats on the back from the members of the GBC's "millionaires' club" and polite applause at an informal GBC meeting. Was it worth it? Where did the money get spent?

In P-stop
 in France far away
 from jungles of New York
 and temples of U.S.A. and
 new New Vrindaban and
 hard-core rock scene
 and pillow fights and
 Mt. Airy Philly temple
 Jagannātha
 tears, disappeared
 scenes and disciples gone,
 he writes down
 into sunset today
 no sun out and that's good
 for driving.

Harbor police—have stubby, heavy pistols on their hips
 in holsters. Armies have weapons stuffed and ready in



hangars and silos, rifles and even spears among the primitives, to fight and kill and take rebirth and be punished for it.

There is no such thing as a nonviolent world. No such thing as inaction. Try for Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

“Yes,” he said, “despite the faults of the Hare Kṛṣṇa people, when we went to the park, we chanted and hundreds came around and I spoke to the crowd saying, ‘We are concerned about water and air pollution, but who knows about pollution of consciousness?’” He was able to speak to their mentality and . . . and he said, yes, at that moment I felt Hare Kṛṣṇa people and the movement are a wonderful, unique thing.

White spots or stripes on highway make me dizzy. I take in air and then exhale. Sleep peaceful, this body and life charmed because no matter what else happens, I have the fortunate link to my spiritual master and Lord Kṛṣṇa. It’s the next life that’s in doubt. If I am so concerned with ISKCON’s wrongs, and if, as I say, those wrongs are actually thorough and deep, then I very well may be born again into this problematic movement, the child of some ISKCON *gṛhasthas*, born and raised in one of those temples I complain about. Again I will either become part of the problem or work to solve it. I could be born life after life in a struggling ISKCON. Not so bad? Well, it could certainly be worse.

Write it, roll the dice, serpent, you are playing a dangerous game with the high stakes of *saṁsāra*. If this ISKCON house is seriously defective, and I myself don’t live in it but skirt it and travel through it, then what do I expect? Take a look. Can’t figure it out? Want to make a contribution? Claim you are not implicated by the others’ mistakes? Your bottom line is you think your spiritual master wants you to continue working for the movement. With all its faults, its good is better than its bad. It must go on; it is

a worthy cause; we have no other life; all we know is this,
 this laughable,
 scornful,
 cruel,
 impersonal,
 near bankrupt yet collecting 100
 million for Māyāpur temple,
 this broken-down porch,
 unheated in winter,
 full of memories as seen in old
 BTG magazines, this soporific,
 sleeping through the millennium,
 daily Deity worship with
 heart or not? Living
 on the credit of a few
 sincere idealists.

This movement is invincible and is directed by Lord Caitanya, but we doubt it now, we, the die-hard members doubt.

We will be born again into this
 movement. (Don't mind me, I'm just free-writing. I'm
 not responsible for what's wrong. Or, I'm trying to right it
 in my little way.)

Night Notes

What made me happy? Writing this last section, "What's wrong with ISKCON?"—I saw my place and ability to express wrongs and hurts in a way that releases me, speaks a truth and is a way to help with the problem itself.

This morning I rode in the front seat with M. and talked something about our attitude toward health—that we should depend on Kṛṣṇa and monitor our eating habits.

We broke away from the temple at 5 A.M. Rati dāsa's fiancée cooked a delightful Ekādaśī lunch for us. Things

happen, but I hope nothing terrible, like a crash on the highway. Happiness is the quiet absence of disaster. Things stay on the shelf and don't fall off due to earthquake. You don't have a heart attack, nor does your friend. As the British say, "My trip was uneventful." What a relief. Relief is also a kind of happiness. We don't always have to experience happiness by climbing peaks.

Read of Ūṣā and Aniruddha and how Bāṇa fights Kṛṣṇa.

It was important to speak of our attitude toward health, of Wicklow ahead, of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, of spiritual conviction. All we can do is to keep going. I feel more conviction after speaking with my Godbrother and hearing his intuition that ISKCON has widening cracks in its foundation, that I am doing what is best for me, and what the best response I can make to the cracks is. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Your love for me will be shown by how much you cooperate to keep this institution together after I am gone." But how is that done, that cooperative work in ISKCON? It doesn't always mean following the leaders unquestioningly as I did in the days of eleven gurus only. Was that cooperation? True cooperation seems harder to achieve. I have to stick up for my integrity. Śrīla Prabhupāda told me not to give Mr. Price a penny, even if Brahmānanda and Kīrtanānanda said otherwise.

Good night. I hope to rise early to read *Bhagavad-gītā*.

August 8

1:05 A.M.

We're at a P-stop. I have my earplugs in after reading *Bhagavad-gītā*. In my reading, Kṛṣṇa is beginning to describe a few of His splendorous manifestations in the world, as a common man can experience them. Arjuna says he never tires of hearing this nectar. Śrīla Prabhupāda says a superior devotee not only wants to hear about Kṛṣṇa Himself, but wants all humankind to hear and accept Lord Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

I was thinking of editions of the *Bhagavad-gītā* to facilitate travel—size and clarity of print, and so on. Thinking of reading habits, ways to take the nectar. A little pocket book might be nice of just the Sanskrit and English, a small one similar to those Shambala Pocket Editions. Then thinking about which *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* I should carry to India. The deluxe is the best (even though the paper is thin) but is it too heavy to carry around? These are nice, external considerations. The internal is to actually taste the nectar. Śrīla Prabhupāda asserts that transcendental reading remains fresh despite repeated readings. This I want. You can't know all about Kṛṣṇa, but you always relish hearing about Him. This is more important and more fun than discussing what's wrong with ISKCON. We may have a responsibility to discuss what's wrong and

seek a remedy for institutional ills, but that doesn't exclude the importance of continuing to relish Kṛṣṇa's statements in *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *kṛṣṇa-kathā* of *Bhāgavatam*. I know my Godbrother knows this, but I am writing it to remind myself.

Write as well as read. I am meant for this. One Godbrother said that he doesn't have writer's "karma," the drive to write. Do I have it? A little, and I expand on it, use it. I didn't feel much like writing just now, but I have begun anyway. I can develop it, but it's likely that many practical people cannot see the usefulness of it. They will write if they think it can be something "nuts and bolts," something that accomplishes a purpose. Then they try to control it and make it come out right. They don't feel the joy of ink coming onto a page.

M. says he very much likes that I question myself and ask Lord Kṛṣṇa, "What is it You want me to do?" He says it may be a gremlin or a conscience or whatever, but it's good. Of course, we have to separate out the various voices that take you in the direction of self-examination. The gremlin tries to stop the writing. Another "conscience" voice may be more friendly. Some nag weakness. Some apologize. Some manage to cut through and leave all that behind.

Would like to explain the art of improvisation to M. Why? He and others may think that on principle you cannot write for weeks without planning and expect it to come out as a publishable book. Then how do you write a publishable book? Oh, they say, by planning it. Then outlining it and writing a first draft and several others and then submitting it to an editor. I do submit my work to an editor, to proofreaders, a copyeditor, etc., but I like the main bulk of it to remain.

Thought if I lost eyesight, I could hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. I could also speak it. Chanting and hearing is to vibrate with

the tongue and to hear with the ear. Writing and printing is a kind of crutch for Kali-yuga. Yet it's glorious.

"Citralekhā" means one who is excellent in drawing pictures. Be like that. If not expert—*citra*—be a lover of drawing. I'd like that. Unload feelings, splash colors as you did twice this year and would like to do twice every year. "Paint as you like and die happy."

Hare Kṛṣṇa pictures of *līlās* and instructions and obsession theme of man reading a book. Read and pray.

Read the books and go on reading them. Draw pictures of people reading. Sometimes I sketch from a live model and try for accuracy, and when I am in a lucky mood, I draw how it feels within to read a book, to hold it in my hands. Peter London's book on art is wonderful for me, at least the first hundred pages.

Paint and draw ever more
Citralekhā drew pictures of
various heroes of the Yadus
and Ūṣā picked out the one
she'd dreamt of as her
lover. She became shy when
she saw the picture of Pradyumna who was to become
her father-in-law, and when Citralekhā drew Aniruddha,
Ūṣā cried out, "That's him! That's the one!"

Rain on roof of this van. Spotlight run by battery. When I feel raindrops, I'll close the overhead vent. I explained to my Godbrother my open secret of reading in the very early morning. When I said midnight, he wanted to write it down, although he later said he couldn't rise that early. I immediately said, "Of course not. You are a preacher and have evening engagements." But I am happy to give up those engagements so I can rise at 12. Midnight might not be auspicious by Vedic standards (Nanda Mahārāja was

arrested for going into the water too early), but Śrīla Prabhupāda set the example and I do it to follow him. Do I imitate? If so, it's the child's practice, another way of being with my master, I suppose.

I told him that this early rising is part of my inner life. It's not vague mysticism; I don't get up and meditate silently and I don't enter *rāgānugā-bhajana*, but I read for an hour (almost) in one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, then I write for an hour (almost), and then chant for an hour and a half. These are the big three activities that constitute inner life for me—reading, writing, and chanting.

Someone may say that my description of inner life is external, and it can be seen that way. I am describing how I turn the pages of the book or write with a pen or finger my beads and enumerate mantras. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have an inner spark. Why else would I do it? I don't read *any* book at this hour; I read Śrīla Prabhupāda's book. I don't write *any* thing; I free-write and steer to Kṛṣṇa consciousness (with or without gremlins along for the ride). I don't chant "Coca-cola" or "Mr. John;" I chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. The inner is outer and the outer is inner, if you know what I mean.

This marathon just passed the halfway mark. Outer activities will diminish when we reach Wicklow. Maybe I can write more or say more. Be happy and peaceful in all situations. This road life is bliss. Say it, mark it, and read it later as a true statement. Like now, reading by 12-volt light in back of van at P-stop in France—yet it's not really France. France is a huge nation with a culture all its own and great social and economic problems, its own chauvinistic language, etc. France also contains a few ISKCON places, but we are not visiting them on this trip through.

We are in our *bhajana-kuṭir*, our tin traveling bubble, parked at a P-stop. It's raining, but we are dry. We are poised an hour south of Paris, ready to jettison ourselves through that metropolis and get out of it before the *karmīs* start their passionate rush hour. I write to say I love this life of travel and study and writing.

All right, all right
 get ready to go and
 when you too have to die,
after the Centennial year—
 because we have to live through
 that, right?
 Then after due consideration
 of what's wrong in ISKCON
 and being sufficiently worked
 and smiling and laughing too
 when you are ready to
 die happy,
 after hundreds more posters
 colored by you,
 loved and loving in return your
 friends,
 yeah, after Vṛndāvana-Māyāpur,
 after plane tickets—
 exactly when I can't tell you
 and it's not something M. and I can
 plan or go to the travel agent
 about (although in another
 sense, death is something you
 do plan for, as the *karmīs*
 with their insurance and picking out
 a tombstone!)—after
 the tea and biscuits and
 the T. S. Eliot references

are done—or before—
 or anytime—
 death comes and that's
 it. But the soul goes
 on, I pray dear Lord
 carry me,
 carry me as soul,
 as I depart now
 from my friends and memories,
 blessing ISKCON with good
 fortune, if I have any power
 to bless,
 let me go in peace
 and honorably
 despite panic and pain and
 not as a mere stoic.
 Don't be tight-lipped but
 cry
 tears
 of joy
 and ask the Lord to
 let you remember Him and
 be with Him and His devotees
 in the next life.

At 70 miles per hour

I've already written about what's wrong with ISKCON,
 including some of the main objections I've heard. Here
 are more.

It don't plant 'taters,
 it don't plant cotton
 and those that plant them
 are soon forgotten.

It is an aardvark (eats ants). It is a dinosaur, prehistoric. They eat white sugar and too much ghee, use aluminum pots, plastic spoons and plates.

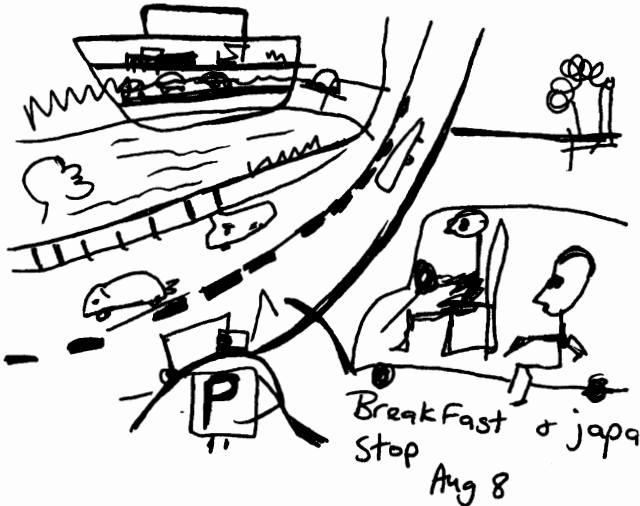
They make noise early in the morning, singing and banging a drum.

Funny looking haircuts. Women with pierced ears and noses. Incorporate rock music as *bhajana*.

They don't go out and sing on the streets like they used to. It used to be that all devotees were happy to sacrifice and dedicate their efforts to the Swami, Prabhupāda. Now that's gone. His disciples who have become authorities and gurus direct affairs according to their inclinations, but it's not the same as in the old days when everyone worked for the Swami. How can we get that spirit back? Is it possible?

Who can we trust?

No letters from Prabhupāda anymore.



(Writing this, I told you, while driving and stopping short sometimes and jolting ahead, two hours to Le Havre. Then we have to buy ferry tickets and shop in town, find a campground and go there for the day.)

Parked outside “Super U” while M. shops. I “kill” time by perusing the tourist pamphlet for Le Havre and the prospectus for Irish ferries. Why? Better to read some more of Prabhupāda’s letters. He told me what to do; think for myself and follow his orders, even if others don’t.

Eyes looking around town see an old lady with a loaf of unwrapped French bread. Advertisements catering to English and Irish ferry customers. Gray sky, cars streaming both ways at 10:30 A.M. Billboard announcing cinema, Sean Connery starring in “Sir Lancelot.” St. Joseph’s church here like an urban skyscraper with crucifix on top. Prabhupāda would like a building like that to be used in Kṛṣṇa’s service, like the twelve-story Manhattan “skyscraper.”

Read more today . . . chant . . . while you live. The body should be kept chaste, and the mind.

What will I do for six days in Wicklow? When I take a walk in the morning, how will I use that time for service? What will I say to the evergreen trees? The sheep? And of course, the devotees?

You, you, you
I’m in love with you, you, you
No-body romance
love spirit and spirit body
serve in this world and go
to that world in spiritual body.

I will follow him who says so. Write down your report and be a good old man until bath and lunch and dreams and more *śāstra*. Get tired of it? Everything has its flaws. Let’s quiet down.

4:10 P.M.

Sometimes a *saṅkīrtana* (book distribution) party goes out with the intention to do a full marathon (as the BBT

designates, at Christmas and again at the end of summer), but they decide to come back early. Why? Maybe they are not doing so well or they have been stopped by the police one too many times or the *karmīs* are simply not buying books. They phone their temple president and tell him of their poor scores. At first he preaches to them to stay out and keep trying, but after a few days, he and the *saṅkīrtana* leader decide it's counterproductive. They are losing money by staying out. They come back and continue their book distribution locally, although not perhaps with the full pitched intensity of traveling *saṅkīrtana*. Maybe a few of the distributors who were experiencing mental or physical stress stay back from book distribution for awhile.

That's one scenario. It has a tinge of defeat to it. Sometimes, however, the *saṅkīrtana* party may realistically assess that they could do a better marathon by returning to their home city and going out from the temple every day. In that case, stopping the travel does not stop the marathon. Rather, it is just a strategy to improve *saṅkīrtana* results. Superficially, we might think that such a party, on returning home, was quitting, but that would not be a fact.

I am speaking about this because today I began to think of ending *The Summer Marathon* before the twenty-one days are over. This marathon is a literary one, and we could call it fictional. No one (no Bhaktivedanta Book Trust or anyone) declared that I would write a book for twenty-one days and that I would thus prosecute a summer marathon of a timed book corresponding to a BBT summer marathon. I did announce it to myself. I don't want to "come back" from the marathon in defeat, saying, "It was too hard; I couldn't keep it up." Rather, it is the prospect of six days in Wicklow that is affecting me. While I'm there, I won't have to attend a temple program or be

obliged to give lectures, although I'll give some. It is such a change in my activities of traveling and lecturing that it may be artificial to continue this as a travel book. The writing process has to be spontaneous. I do not want to write uninspired assignments or force myself to continue something that no longer makes sense. I want writing to serve as a cutting edge in my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As I contemplate the days ahead, I feel a lack of spontaneous feeling about continuing this writing. Because I have posted signs, "Twenty-one days," and, "Now at the halfway mark," and told myself to keep going until Janmāṣṭamī, it's a little embarrassing to call it off early. Therefore, I must emphasize that I'm not planning on doing less writing over the next six days in Wicklow.

Dear reader, you know I keep writing one long book with different titles. In early July for a week it was called *Why Not Fiction?* Then for twelve days it became *A Place for Art*. Then this marathon. If I "stop" the book called *The Summer Marathon*, it doesn't mean I'll stop the endurance act of writing each day, or at least I hope that's not what it means. Ultimately, what I do depends on Lord Kṛṣṇa.

This was the way of the Kotzker. Just as there is a difference between day and night, there must be a distinction between one day and another. A man should not even imitate himself. Self-renewal must be constant. To repeat oneself is to commit forgery; one becomes mired in routine. Therefore, avoid the trodden paths! At least one day a week—on the Sabbath—keep away from sameness.

—*A Passion for Truth*, p. 169

August 9

1 A.M.



Here's a review of some of *The Summer Marathon's* themes:

1. The search for honesty on a daily basis, although I did not pursue it in a formal or systematized way.

2. The pressure of travel—it was good, but demanding. I could not always take time in the evening to quietly ask myself, "What made me happy?" I had to live and flow, but always within my Kṛṣṇa conscious duties. I know I would like to go deeper, but there's a higher priority or pressure

to simply operate, cope. At night I don't "meditate" and write down careful gut observations. No, I put out the clocks, set the alarms, and try to take rest. But here and there, I played that game and said that what made me happy was yogurt and fruit and stopping at a P-stop for breakfast, resting and driving on. In general, I like the van-traveling life, and I like the van with its handy supply of Prabhupāda's books and tapes, and its privacy and mobility. Travel days also, although potentially tiring, have their own magic. They move me along in a way that's almost symbolic: they remind me constantly that I cannot *stay* in this life. I have to flow with it and then out of it. That creates lightness and nonattachment.

M. likes to joke: after a day of van travel when we finally pull into some spot for the night, when he backs into the spot, turns off the engine and pulls on the emergency brake, he turns to me as if presenting me with something wonderful and says, "We're *home*!" Our "home, sweet home" lasts only six to eight hours, and then we're back on the road. Some "homes" are more idyllic than others. Some are in forests, some are along the road or at truck stops or P-stops. There's no control over what they are or what they will become by morning. Even the quietest place can be noisy within hours. We have learned to be detached. It's also true that our compact accommodations are comfortable. It's a blissful life, and we're out of reach of phones and other long-arm message systems.

In the Introduction, I mentioned that we'd quote from Heschel's book and we have done so. Again, life on the road didn't permit me to be too careful about this. Neither was I inclined to get into an analysis of his points. I always had to prepare for the next temple lecture, and I also felt a need to associate frequently with Śrīla Prabhupāda and his books. The Kotzker and Kierkegaard are astonishing in

their radical demand for truthfulness, but I can't read it for absolute shelter. In fact, I have to be on guard not to get carried away with it or to accept their mood as if they are my gurus. Seek truthfulness—that's important—but seek it in service to Prabhupāda.

As for Svevo, he appeared little in this book. It was something that came up as a hunch at the beginning but that was not developed. I'm satisfied, however, with his occasional "cameo" appearances. In one sense, he was always with us. That is, we introduced him as the writing life, the writer I was before I met the Swami. This book and all my writing now are a literary sequel to the pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious story of a young man writing as he lives—the art, the love and dedication of writing your life as you live it and seeing yourself as a persona in a true story. It began with Svevo and ended with Satsvarūpa dāsa. Svevo got initiated, you could say. Or he ceased to exist once I entered ISKCON. Either way, I couldn't get much interested in his old, *māyā*-bound existence. I thank God he's gone. I've moved on. Don't want to be sentimentally attached.

Related to this is the discussion of the Pyrrhic victory. If I dedicate myself to writing and use all of life as grist for the mill, I may achieve excellence in writing, but at what expense? If I am not able to actually live but always live only to write about it, that's missing the point of existence. This discussion goes on sometimes aside from the facts of God consciousness, but Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the real point. There is no harm in being a dedicated writer in Kṛṣṇa's service, but if we become a literary artist yet lose our soul, *that's* a Pyrrhic victory. Actually, it's no victory at all—only illusion. For the doubting soul, there is happiness neither in this life nor the next. Therefore, I want to continue to seek the right balance. I don't want to sacrifice myself on the altar of the writing life. Writing is simply another way to offer something to the Lord. The purpose

of all knowledge and art is to glorify the Supreme. My work is no exception to this principle.

I do think that Kṛṣṇa allows me to write. I don't have many other talents or *śaktis*, so I try to concentrate on the one I do have. It works out all right as long as I don't take myself too seriously. I do love my books and defend them and distribute them because they are part of Śrīla Prabhupāda's weaponry. I am his loyal *śiṣya*. It almost doesn't matter to me that my offering is tiny and flawed. I am still willing to place it at his feet with fear and trembling.

What's wrong with ISKCON? It's agonizing to think about it. Let's admit the wrongs and either cry or laugh. ISKCON is riddled with faults—we all know it. By expressing that as fully as possible, I hope I threw off some of the doomsday rhetoric. Don't let the analysis become fault-finding or deliberate bashing or even hopelessness or nihilism. If we go too far in that direction, we'll think we should abandon the sinking ship. But then what? Will we drown in the ocean of *māyā*? A flawed ISKCON is better than no ISKCON. Yes, we need to reform the institution, and that starts with undeceiving ourselves. It's painful.

The big question is whether (and in what way, how much) we should tell others that ISKCON is deeply wrong. People are already broadcasting it in many ways. I don't necessarily want to align myself with them. I don't agree with *everything* that is said. Therefore, I feel best working on my own integrity. Everyone has an opinion and a voice, and many people have solutions. It reminds me of how everyone has the exact thing to cure someone else's disease. I have not found that to be true even in ten years of experimentation.

Who, then, should be ISKCON's doctor? Prabhupāda! But who shall tell us what Prabhupāda "really wants"? Again, many opinions.

Therefore, I don't want to be a hypocrite. I want to be true to Prabhupāda's basic teachings, not because the institution's law forces me to be true, but because I have discovered the truth of his principles in my own life. Don't give money to Mr. Price; don't be one of the eleven zonal-gurus and set yourself above others; don't be proud; don't be a tool for cynical and mistaken forces.

Writing and being alone can help. Everything is subject to examination. Kṛṣṇa! Please let us go on serving You in *śravaṇam-kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ-smaraṇam*. Please accept the work I'm doing as a contribution to the whole.

Munīnām, Queen Kuntī prays, You are the best of persons. You create illusion. You are like an actor on stage. You are the Supreme Person but we miss the point in seeing You. You have put a curtain between us. Let us persist in calling Your names and pray that You will one day reveal Yourself to Your sincere servitors.

9:45 A.M.

I'm a clerk packing my belongings. Found a nearly new shopping bag. That will be my extra luggage to take into the ferry cabin along with the orange, cloth bag. Some items I'll need: toilet amenities, Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters book, small *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, legal pad to resume writing sessions, change of clothes, odds and ends. M. will bring the food. We fast from breakfast tomorrow because it will be Lord Balarāma's appearance day. Tonight we board by 6 P.M. and arrive at Roslaire, Ireland, around 2 or 3 P.M. the next day. Madhu predicts we'll get to Wicklow by 6. Then we'll see what comes next.

No one can know all of Kṛṣṇa's opulences, but to help the common man, He gives a small selection. He doesn't

choose only the holy and religious things, but the shark, lion, Himalayas, feminine qualities. Then He says that even this small list is not the way to understand God. These are appearances of His energies or representatives. Know that with a spark of His splendor (as Supersoul), He enters and sustains the universes. I read that this morning.

“ . . . an example of human honesty as understood by Kierkegaard, ‘That I shall do what I say . . . that I shall honestly and truthfully say *what I do* personally.’” (*A Passion for Truth*, pp. 162–63)

It may be that someday I will think that the writing life was false. My self-examination might lead me to that, but that would not negate whatever devotion to guru and Kṛṣṇa I have put into whatever I have written.

Where we are: high hedge, privacy out the back window where I look, but surrounded close on both sides and throughout the patch of land that is the camping ground. English cars here. Le Havre is a jumping off place for tourists to and from France. Bon voyage and welcome, several currencies accepted in the stores as a welcome gesture. They take our money with a smile.

Lunch should be at noon, so M. has time to clean up before we leave by 3 P.M. Bet we have couscous. Hope it isn't a stormy sea; almost twenty hours' journey in the cabin, St. Killeen or St. Patrick boat.

Inner, inner? I'd say *śāstra* is inner, but it's more Absolute Truth. It's *there*. On the page, waiting for me to take it in with submissive and attentive reading. And *japa*. Yeah, I'm on a mission. I'll go to Wicklow and later to Belfast to speak to the devotees whatever I know out of my allegiance to Prabhupāda's books.

I don't have any inner thing right now. Inner pockets of sweat pants contain earplugs and Kleenex. I'm aware I ought to write something appropriate for the end. I could give my *sankīrtana* results: how many lectures did I give over the last ten days? How many *maṅgala-āratis* did I lead? How many Godbrothers did I meet? How many miles in service?

Is our sincerity so measurable, or our surrender? Our willingness to serve and help others? Our threshold of tolerance? Our freedom from the propensity to find fault or to be envious, to be fearful, nice or not nice?

"How long?" the cobbler and the *brāhmaṇa* asked Nārada, "How long will it be—how many births—before I will get liberation and go to Vaikuṇṭha?" The cobbler was simple and faithful. Lord Nārāyaṇa said he'd come back to Godhead at the end of his present life. The *brāhmaṇa* was puffed up and doubtful when he heard of the Lord's inconceivable pastimes. That *brāhmaṇa*, Lord Nārāyaṇa said, would have to wait many lifetimes. When the *brāhmaṇa* heard that, he became angry! The cobbler was in bliss meditating on the *acintya* nature of the Supreme Person who puts a banyan tree into each seed.

Bathe, pour two bottles of water on your head. It's still summer, but I saw lots of dry and fallen leaves yesterday, in the gutter in Le Havre, under trees that lined the road. Signs of summer's end. No heat wave.

Frankly, my time is just about up. I don't want to be sardonic or even reach for a joke in closing.

Free last hopes
fritter and sputter the fire
the last hopes,
that we get no flat tire,

boat doesn't sink,
van makes it to Wicklow's
tranquil slopes and cottages
by tomorrow night and
then . . .
read and write
among friends—
no tidal wave covers Eire.

Sing and be changed and
contribute to improving
the condition of ISKCON
which they are acknowledging
is full of wrongs.
Do I have to say that too?
To show I'm hip to the times?
Outmoded is simple
fresh allegiance of
1960s and '70s?

Get ready. Say good-bye. We are going to a base which
is not a home base but of friends. I hope to be in His grace
and write something worthy.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

PASSING PLACES, ETERNAL TRUTHS

INTRODUCTION

This section contains the cream of ten years of traveling and thousands of pages of travel writing. The pieces, therefore, are not necessarily lined up in chronological order, but are a composite of years of experiences. One piece may be written from the Krishna-Balaram Mandir Guest-house, another from a friend's house in Vṛndāvana, and another from the *parikrama* path. I tried my best to avoid any jarring turns and twists, and to keep a simple narrative mood. I chose selections that did not just report the news but which resonated like "haiku moments." I wanted them to touch the heart whether in Karachi or Houston. For the Kṛṣṇa conscious aspirant, this little "moment of the heart" is not an impersonal or vague enlightenment, but the moment in which we see Kṛṣṇa in whatever we are doing and wherever we are.

Readers familiar with my writing will recognize some of the pieces because some of them were selected from previously published pieces. I enjoyed the process of forming this section; in almost every case, I could remember the time and feeling I had when I actually wrote each piece. New pieces or old, I hope you will be happy to read them and to let them become friends.

Europe

Le Muret, France

Travel means breaking away emotionally and psychologically from your present residence. We've been here eighteen days. The schedule is well tuned, life is contemplative and conducive for thoughtful writing, but now that will be disrupted. Now we'll be controlled by plane schedules and highways.

We are ready to move soon—Madhu has announced our estimated time of departure. I wash the pots and dishes, tie my baggage down with a rope, quickly take down the Deities, pack all gear so nothing flies loose. He starts the engine. I put my hand in my *japa-mālā* bag for extra rounds. Madhu puts on the earphones, plugs in a *kīrtana* tape, and the engine rumbles. We are heading for Spain. Almost no one notices this but Kṛṣṇa.

Brescia, Italy

I was chanting *japa*, but stopped to write because the sights were distracting me—statues of mermaids, etc. You can chant mechanically while the victimized eyes trip down the city streets. Instead, I am turning chastely to this notepad, although in words I seek the same closeness to the protective holy names.

Switzerland

Went through two borders before breakfast, Luxembourg and France. I'm looking forward to spending time in the van in the upcoming weeks. I notice bubbling little happiness in many things that bring me pleasure. Some of them are bodily sensations, the warmth of the heater in the front of the van on a chilly morning, etc. I suppose they can be converted to Kṛṣṇa conscious thoughts, in gratefulness to the Lord in all circumstances. Remember and chant. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that a pure devotee lives in friendship with Lord Kṛṣṇa "through thick and thin; his way of life is Kṛṣṇa."

Trust in Kṛṣṇa in any case. You can't depend on your body or the peacefulness of this parking spot. You can't depend on Madhu's keeping his health or on neither of us suddenly conking out. That's obvious because every night now my left eye hurts and a headache begins. When I say *depend on Kṛṣṇa*, it doesn't mean that you pray nothing material will go wrong. That prayer is also there. This is my theme again: "fear and protection." "May the Lord who is known as Aja protect Your legs; may Lord Maṇimān protect Your knees; may the Lord known as . . . " Mother Yaśodā prayed for Kṛṣṇa's well-being. Do we pray for our own well-being?

Please let me remember You, not forget You. Whatever happens, please let me turn to You, O Supreme Lord, and my spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

*Poland**Attraction*

After we crossed the border into Poland driving in the rain on a blacktop road, I saw an almost-hidden rest stop.

There was no "P" sign,
 but the road led off and onto the highway.
 Within, it was covered by August green.
 I guessed it was like a snug tunnel in there.
 It was 6:30 P.M. and I wanted to stop,
 but Bhakta Darek said, "Only one hour more to the farm,"
 so we left it behind.
 It was on the bank of a stream running over the rocks.
 I think we would have slept there undisturbed
 and in the morning we could have
 chanted *japa* in the woods.
 Maybe on the way back we will find it again,
 if we are lucky.
 It's important to stop, to take time
 to come closer to Kṛṣṇa in that way,
 so I hope we will find it and not speed by,
 embarrassed that we are attracted
 to a quiet place.

Prague, Czech Republic

Sweltering in the van parked on a street with tram
 tracks in Prague. It took us half an hour to find a phone.
 Nine out of ten phones in the subway were ripped out by
 robbers. Finally, when we phoned Turiya Prabhu, no one
 was home at his flat. Is there actually a temple in Prague?
 We are trying to drive to the address, but the streets are
 blocked off. Madhu is going to walk there while I wait with
 the van. Welcome to Prague.

The man who helped us find a phone was friendly, but
 soon after, some men hooted and laughed at us. The laugh-
 ter didn't cut me as American jeers do—it had a foreign
 ring to it. It sounded foolish, as if they were trying to get
 attention. But being in a foreign place does have its fears,

so let me swelter here and try to read sublime *kr̥ṣṇa-kathā* while waiting for the sight of a returning devotee.

The Prague devotees are all young boys and girls, a new ISKCON generation. As I got out of the van and walked into the temple room and the welcoming *kīrtana*, devotees crowded in after me through the doorway and out in the passage. I suddenly got the feeling that I had a very small body. I don't know exactly how to express this. It wasn't like I thought I was shrinking like Alice did when she folded up like a telescope, but I saw myself as a small man with narrow shoulders. I wonder how I look to them. As the evening went on, it became a source of amusement to me, the disparity between how I usually see myself and the actual truth. I even looked down at my pink cotton socks and then at the *daṇḍa* I held in my hand. The smaller I got, the freer I felt. Yes, that's it. I began to feel free.

Slavonic Kīrtana

The men form a ring,
facing the center with their arms
around each other's shoulders
and in the center a small boy
hits the *mṛdaṅga*.
When they sing, they end the line
with a shout, "Kṛṣṇa!"
One man stands holding
the wooden altar so that
Gaura-Nitāi don't jump off.

We are driving in transit through Czechoslovakia to Germany, trying to reach the border by 3 P.M. Our route took us right through downtown Prague. Just as we approached the city, Madhu asked me if I wanted to stop and see the

Infant of Prague. This is a *mūrti* of Jesus Christ as a child which is dressed with changes of clothes, like a Vedic *mūrti*, and kept in a worshipable place. Molded copies of this *mūrti* are worshiped in Italy, Spain, and South America. On the one hand, I wasn't inclined to stop because I thought it would be hard to park, and also the devotees might see us touring in town. When we got to the very center of the square, Madhu asked me again if I would like to at least drive in front of the church. I said all right and he made a right turn. Then we discovered that there was a huge festival going on in the city; wreaths and flowers in jars were placed around statues and monuments. I guessed it had something to do with the anniversary of the Russian invasion which took place in 1968. At any rate, the city was packed and very entangling, so I said, "Let's get out of here." We then tried to find a way out.

As we drove down the street, I saw a police car pulling someone over and dreaded that that would happen to us. Then suddenly, we heard the familiar, quick rhythms of *karatālas*, and there on our right, over rows of cars and throngs of passersby, was a *harināma-saṅkīrtana* party making its way along the street. Of course, Madhu and I exclaimed and were pleased to see their presence, but Madhu kept driving and didn't ask if I wanted to stop. It all happened too fast for me to decide otherwise, but I sensed that I was missing a wonderful opportunity. Before I could gain my determination, however, we had found our way out of the main square and were back on the highway.

Now we're rolling along desert-like stretches under the sun. By "desert," I don't mean that there are no people. There are quite a few people out, some hitchhiking, many driving, and in some of the small towns we're passing through, there are festivals going on. By "desert" I mean there are no devotees, no *harināma*, and only remorse that we did not stop back in Prague.

Italy

It occurred to me that I can't see deeply enough how grateful I should be. Śrīla Prabhupāda's example: everyone can see that a car has stopped running, but only the mechanic knows how to fix it. We see God every day, but we fail to see Him because we lack knowledge and devotion.

A gypsy beggar woman approaches Madhu in the gas station parking lot. Madhu tells her we are priests and have no money, so she asks him to pray for her marriage. He tells her about prayer beyond material requests, but she says she isn't interested in that kind of prayer. She goes back to her begging, her hair tousled and tied with a piece of bright ribbon. Rough-looking woman, spitting on the ground. O passage of time, my head is crammed with passing thoughts, including fresh resolve, this cool pre-summer morning.

Even in this parking lot,
I could shed a tear, not for myself,
but because I desire the Lord
so much.
That would be my
perfection.

Rome, Italy

Look out a window down to bright agricultural fields in the distance where devotees are cutting hay for their cows. Spring is turning into lush summer. Recently, I saw bare trellises everywhere for supporting grapevines. Now the trellises are covered with green. Old, tattered flags on poles keep the crows away. The Roman land is lush. I think how for centuries, people have been kept in *māyā* by such attraction to the beautiful gardens, the fountains and the outdoor statues, the beautiful women, the conversation, and the food and drink . . . *la dolce vita*.

I want to turn away from it to thoughts of Kṛṣṇa in His fields and forests, His crookedly meandering Yamunā, and His crooked, playful dealings with His mother, father, friends, and *gopīs*. Fill my ears and mind and heart with *that*, in hopes that I can be transformed and transported from Italia to Vraja.

Church bells ringing to say it's 7:00 P.M., time to pray.

Sardinia

At Port, Embarking For Sardinia

Thunder and rain
thunder and rain
smell it.

The van darkening inside.

The paint on my red beads, wearing off in the middle.

The sky is a plain and the clouds
are like rolling mountains

which crash against one another, I don't know how.

San Damiano, Assisi, Italy

Madhu, Nanda-kiśora, and I decided to visit the small, stone church reconstructed by young Francis and later turned over to Clare, who lived here for forty-one years with her nuns. We have met an Indian student, who is attending the University of Perugia. His family live near Hare Kṛṣṇa Land in Bombay. He and Madhu talk, but not in the mood of trying to enter the spirit of the place where St. Clare died, or the ancient dining hall with the 700-year-old wooden benches and the inscription on the wall, "*Silentium*." A brown-robed, Italian Franciscan wants to talk

with Nanda. I'm on my own for a few minutes on this cold, stone bench.

Ah, Francis, how you endured your austerities. How you punished your body ("Brother Ass"), and how you finally attained liberation from all bodily demands and fears, even while you lived in the body. You prayed to know Christ's sufferings and compassion as fully as possible, and it was granted to you. The only thing you couldn't gain was the satisfaction of seeing your movement grow as you wanted it to. It became too institutionalized, too intellectualized, and too soft, but you accepted it as God's will. Finally, in the end, you laid down on the earth surrounded by your brothers.

I come here just like any other struggling pilgrim. I do not assume that I am liberated or pure. I cannot bless a holy place. I seek an inkling of how to serve my spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda. My path is different from yours, yet the universal truth of it is the same.

I suddenly become aware that the Indian student is speaking to me. He wants to know if I personally met—he can't pronounce his name—Prabhupāda. Yes, I did. *Om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-salākayā, cakṣur unmlītaṁ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ.*

Eremo delle Carceri, Assisi, Italy

Realities of touring a holy place: pay for parking, bustle through busloads of tourists, sidestep the bars and hamburger stands. Then you go inside and see the 700-year-old (restored) frescoes by Giotto and wish that the era of Lord Caitanya was as well preserved. We couldn't enter St. Francis' crypt because a German group was there holding Mass. Other parts of the basilica were also alive with Mass,

confession, monks sitting alone praying, and the upper church was closed because we were there too early.

Then we drove to the cave where St. Francis and his brothers used to meditate. The chapel of St. Mary, where the monks used to pray together, seemed authentic—small and old—but as we entered the “Saints’ Grotto,” a nun was in there praying, and since it is also small, we felt like intruders and walked through quickly and out into the woods where other Franciscan brothers used to pray in caves. A sign said, “*Zona Sacra: Silenzio Rispetto Decoro.*” M. said we could use signs like that at our ISKCON temples for guests and resident devotees. In the woods, several signs read “No Picnic.” It was a sign: spiritual life is no picnic.

It was hard to trace the original spirit here. We three were lighthearted, taking a break from our regular duties. If you came all alone and stayed awhile, then maybe. Yet a Vaiṣṇava starts to yearn for the direct manifestations of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa’s sweet mercy. We come and see, are silent, respectful, properly dressed, and do not indulge in picnics, but we’re tourists after all.

Italy

The Lacy Curtain’s Sad Smile

After meeting with three devotees,
 when I returned to this room,
 the patterns in the lacy white curtains
 appear like sad smiles.
 Lord Kṛṣṇa, I spoke the answers—what
 a surrendered and courageous devotee would speak.
 But what shall I do in *my* case?
 Please protect my honor.
 When I fail, teach me to depend on You.

Barcelona, Spain

The van has broken down. It is taking me time to realize what that means. After two days of being forced to abandon the Renault van, I realize that we will now have to live without it. In the same way, I have to emotionally grasp and reconcile myself to other changes and losses. I am no longer a young man. I will soon be old, then die. I need Kṛṣṇa. The Renault van era was wonderful while it lasted, but everything in the world winds down and then the engine breaks. One day, as you are speeding on the highway in Spain, engaged in an intense conversation about ISKCON, your time is suddenly up, the scene ends, the players exit, and something new begins. Try to grasp it and surrender.

*En route from Avignon to New Māyāpur, France**Morning Song*

Red smudged sunrise becomes a
gray morning at this P-stop
off a highway
in France.
This is my dawn song
on our way to New Māyāpur where
we'll meet an old friend and
take *darśana* of Rādhā-Govinda-Mādhava,
the Lord who tilts to one side,
playing His flute, dancing, and enjoying
nectar *rasa*.

New Māyāpur, France

Walking in the New Māyāpur woods on the last day of my annual visit. It's a good place to take stock of the passing years. One year, while on a walk, I thought about

whether or not to publish one of my latest books. I decided not to, even though I was excited by it. Another year, on the same walk, I faced more deeply my desire not to initiate more disciples. And there have been other thoughts here. Times have changed; I have changed. New Māyāpur is in the throes of its own crisis, and it is a different season than the one in which I usually visit. One of the biggest changes I have noticed here is the change in “my” banyan tree. It seems to have been struck by lightning—branches are lying in the path and the trunk appears to have been split—big, muscular, serpentine branches curling over the ground. Time marches on, and we’ll all be scraped off the plate like peas before too long. We are helpless in the face of time.

Therefore, on this travel day, I want to note that I too will have to face the end of this body. I only hope to make sense out of my life, my tiny, psychological breakthroughs, my attempts to surrender at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. The path to surrender is already attained, by Prabhupāda’s grace.

Nantes, France

Writing at cement picnic table while sitting on cement bench. Someone’s crumbs on the table. Woman in blue shirt, blond hair pulled back, sitting at another table. A tiny spider fell off my nose and now struggles on the left arm of my sweatshirt. Birds chirping—several kinds—not unlike the sounds at Gītā-nāgarī. Spring sunshine. Cold in A.M., now warming up.

Trucks honk.

My soul is angular.

Stuff of this body is of this world.

Soul is bright, brighter than
 bird's song, bird lust,
 Vaikuṇṭha's dust is Vraja,
 is my soul in any shape or
 form
 participating
 in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes
 as a spark
 at the feet of my spiritual master
 and his other
 devotees liberated in
 the spiritual sky.

Onboard Brittany ferry

Looking in M.'s 1994 European atlas at Ireland. Ireland
 is just the causeway for me to inner life.

I went out on the deck, stood by the rail, and took some
 deep breaths. Foggy ocean. Don't want to converse with
 people or even be near them. What do you want? That
 things go smoothly. You reach your destination by end of
 day and your mind cooperates; you see your life in a posi-
 tive way. That means it will objectively have to be pleasing
 to His Divine Grace. I seek an inspired life. A quiet life of
 allegiance, nonenviousness, producing writing.

"Activities intended to satisfy the senses of the Supreme
 Lord, Kṛṣṇa, are called *kṛṣṇārthe 'khila-ceṣṭāḥ*. This indi-
 cates that one can attempt all kinds of work, but one
 should do so to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. . . . *yajñārthāt karma*." *(Bhāg. 4.18.6, purport)*

Ireland

Back of van, on queue for ferry. Pain in eye all day, en route here and now. Of course, I look forward to when it will go away, but what's the normal condition, this or relief? En route, saw "Pax Nursing Home" and "Convalescent and Retirement House," and old hag lady, white-haired man. Funeral home, cemetery. The living and the dead. The living have their photos on billboards: "Elect Pat Lynch, Rock Solid on Munster." We don't hear from the dead.

In that sense, the pain in my eye is not my permanent condition. I had better not waste time.

Irish coast

Steel drawbridge like a closed curtain in a theater. It lowers. We see daylight. Enter Ireland. Passport control. The road. Gorse in full bloom. I realize that life in the front of the van is also life. It's not just going somewhere and thinking of what you will be—it's now, traveling, this life today, as good as tomorrow. In other words, today I promise to be more Kṛṣṇa conscious and tomorrow I will try harder.

I just saw Clare Island off Clew Bay.
That sight is an inconceivable glory of God.
Dawn comes over a peak as if
there were a big fire on the other side.

Port Laoise, Ireland

We have broken our journey to Wicklow by stopping for lunch at Prahāda's house. Sitting together on the lawn, we read and discuss Kṛṣṇa's pastime of showing His universal

form to Mother Yaśodā. It's a sunny day, and many flowers are blossoming. Prahḷāda is expert in growing plants and flowers, and now he has begun another vegetable garden. Their house is in a peaceful woodland area with no neighbors on either side for a mile. But there is one unfortunate presence here: in a shed just behind their house, a farmer keeps about fifteen cows for slaughter. These cows are never allowed out of the shed, and they are never cleaned of their own stool. The farmer comes once a day, shoves feed at the cattle, and goes away. I looked in at them, and it was shocking how filthy and miserable they were. "Like a concentration camp," said Gobhaṭa. "Very unfortunate," said Prahḷāda.

Even as we speak, I hear the farmer coming for his daily chore, whistling a lighthearted tune. Ireland is known as the "slaughterhouse of Europe"; its main contribution to the European Common Market is beef. Ireland is also supposed to be pious, but there is no protest against slaughter because animals have no souls.

We are not in a position to free them, so what can we do? All we can do is keep preaching and showing the example of cow protection. Prabhupāda writes:

While living one may be proud of one's body, thinking oneself a very big man, minister, president or even demigod, but whatever one may be, after death this body will turn either into worms, into stool or into ashes. If one kills poor animals to satisfy the temporary whims of this body, one does not know that he will suffer in his next birth, for such a sinful miscreant must go to hell and suffer the results of his actions.

—*Bhāg.* 10.10.10, purport

Wicklow, Ireland

Looking at these mountains reminded me of this thought: it would be nice if busy, responsible people could make sincere prayers to the Lord before going out to control the world. They should prostrate themselves before Him and tell Him that nothing is possible unless He gives us the spiritual intelligence and mercy. Let this day and its mountainous trails be dedicated to Him.

Kṛṣṇa sparkles on the hillside in the form of light. I walk the rounding paths hearing the truth in my master's words. I don't have to go further.

Ireland

A Sunny Day

April's cold in Ireland
but yesterday was a sunny
treat.
Halfway up the hill I followed
the muddy impressions of cows' hooves,
and found a bit of turf to sit on.
White clouds floating.
Pasture and fences.
I spend my time reading.

The hare didn't stop running
until he was over the hill.
The magpies kept their distance.
It was nice to look out on the sunny day,
with white daisies popping up.
If I could only quiet my mind,
and find my heart,

I'd be face to face with Lord Kṛṣṇa.
 But if He does not reveal Himself to me,
 I want to go again through the mud,
 over the fence,
 and open His book.
 With Prabhupāda's guidance,
 He is my Lord.

Madhu said that if I ask the local people to identify any orange-tinged bird, they will say, "They're robins," but they're not all robins. Some have the tinge only in the head and neck, some on the breast, some have multicolored wings, and so on. There's also a wonderful bird with a light-colored breast and lots of speckles who sings melodious tunes as I pass under his tree.

Now leaves are showing on the roadside pussy willows, and while the morning air seems just as cold as ever, I know we're heading into spring.

As my time here comes to an end, I sense that I have hardly begun the work. I could use eons more time.

I don't have it. Therefore, I should throw off all extraneous baggage and surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa will take care of my material needs, and I have no other "religious" obligation.

One of the things I've barely begun (and wish I had more time for) is to break this pernicious habit of high self-regard. There is really no way to overcome it; it's so all-pervading within oneself. Kṛṣṇa is my only hope, and even then I wonder if I can surrender enough to allow Kṛṣṇa to fix me. I want to be able to see my tininess, my wretchedness, my rebelliousness. I like to think I'm a blissful person walking early in the morning, but the fact is, there's a rascal walking about in boots, a demon up early walking these hills (even though he packs a *Bhagavad-gītā* in his bag). I sometimes glimpse him. I pray for the chance and the strength to meet him in open combat.

Walking halfway up the hill, I stopped to read from *Bhagavad-gītā*. While standing reading, I noticed it was getting darker. A storm was brewing. I packed away the book and trudged up the hill, but not before it began to hail. The wind blew me forward and the shower of stones rattled on my raincoat. Somehow it proved an ideal situation to get closer to the earth and to speak my secret ambitions to Lord Kṛṣṇa. This was what I wanted—the time and place alone to come out before the Lord unashamed.

As I crested the hill, the storm abated and I took out my *Bhagavad-gītā*. It said, “Only by devotional service can I be known.” Our main devotional service is our *japa*. It is the essential prayer to Kṛṣṇa meant to burst from our being. Therefore, we should remove everything from our lives but the naked intent to chant and to serve the Lord. This is absolute life.

The landlord's daughter running in the pasture. The sheep stained red and blue. The suffering cattle being fattened for slaughter. A robin on top of the telephone pole, songs and whistles. And me chanting. It is bound to help. Take heart, spirit soul, slowly but surely you will overcome your offenses and will taste a drop of nectar as servant of the holy names.

April Song

The old women are walking past my stone wall.
 The neighbor's children are running around their house.
 Sunshine has melted the snow on the mountains.
 There's time, but
 don't be deceived by the pink and green buds.
 You won't live forever,
 not in this body, not in this world,
 not long enough to forever see
 your brother wringing out the wash.

Dublin, Ireland

A Minor Preaching Event

Sign on a steel wall:

"We apologize for the delay.

BLAME THE TERRORISTS."

A good-looking kid in combat boots,
with automatic rifle at a slouch,
wearing camouflage and a maroon beret.

"Hey! It's a Hare Kṛṣṇa!"

He leaned forward for the chat,
asked if we smoked dope. No.

"Then what do you do?"

Madhu said, "We chant, we pray, we read."

"Don't you get bored?"

I thought, "Yes, sometimes," but kept my mouth shut.

"You mean Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa . . ." he sang it,
then asked about God:

"If I walk down this road,
and suddenly I'm blown up by a land mine,
at that moment I'll think, 'God, why *me*?'"

Think of Kṛṣṇa at the time of death.

"See that bloke over there?"

His name is Sweeney and he's
a terrorist. I'm holding him.

He's a bloody bastard and he's going *down there!*"

After ten minutes he said,

"All right, I'll let you guys go now."

The whole time his finger
played on the trigger.

"I don't care if we don't make the plane." A voice clear
in me. Detachment. Thank you.

Now we proceed on the queue. Airport decorated with snowmen. If I had to work here, I could invest my devotion and not hate it. Somehow serve Kṛṣṇa wherever you are.

Belfast, North Ireland

The Mixture

Rādhā-Mādhava, I sing for You,
mixing *śāstra* with gray sky.
In the *Bhāgavatam* class I spoke
of friendliness among devotees,
while magpies carried twigs to the treetops.

Inis Rath, North Ireland

Getting ready to travel produces a life-sadness, uneasiness—more aware than usual that my life will eventually end, as it does for everyone.

Grass growing long here. Manu is too busy to cut it. Me too. Rats run to the leftover grains from last July's marriage *yajña* and fire arena. The cat stalks the rats. Twice I came upon fresh rat corpses on the path where I chant.

Heathrow Airport, London

Saw an old man dressed in fashionable blue suit. He looked like the next to last figure in the "changing bodies" diorama. He had some kind of attack, so he sat down, calmed down his breathing, then stood and walked off slowly toward his gate. I told M. that a devotee hopes to die in a recollected state on the "battlefield" for Kṛṣṇa.

"Not at Heathrow," M. said, "trying to make a plane connection."

America

Los Angeles, U.S.A.

“Welcome home, Sir,” said the lady at Immigration, returning my passport.

“Thank you,” I replied, and passed under the American flags and photo of Ronald Reagan. Then the man at U.S. Customs asked me why I went to India.

“To visit temples in connection with our religion,” I replied.

He glanced into my eyes. Should I have made a more straightforward reply? “Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to go. Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana are the two holiest places on earth. We go for purification.”

JFK airport, New York

We are here early and the plane is delayed an hour and a half. Now we have to wait—three and a half hours?

I am surrounded in the lounge by . . . I was just about to lump them all under one derogatory term. There is a businessman to my right who is speaking to a subordinate and it made me think again of “us” and “them.”

U.S.A.

Return Trip

With car parked in Amish country
Prabhupāda is singing *Brahma-saṃhitā*
& we're eating juicy melons
amidst the dry brown cornstalks
while the melon-colored sun sets.
Do I want to hold this moment?
Do I know how to let it go?
His Divine Grace
is our only hope.

En route to Philadelphia

At the turnpike exit, Baladeva asked the attendant if there was a park nearby.

"A park?" the man replied, as if it were a strange question. "For what?"

"Just to walk in," replied Baladeva.

"No, none that I know of," he replied curtly.

As we drove into Lancaster, everything was parceled off into properties, streets, small homes, sidewalks, then downtown stores and offices. I got the feeling that there was no rest anywhere in the land, unless one had a specific place or business to go to. Superficially it seemed to be a well-ordered suburb, but it was actually devoid of natural setting or welcome for any traveler, especially one without a car or money.

We pulled our car off the road by a farm, for exercise and a rest break. There were many signs—"No trespassing or hunting." As Baladeva and I walked up a hill, a car approached and I felt self-conscious wearing my orange *dhori* in Lancaster County. Where's my spirit of adventure, gone with youth?

Gītā-nāgarī, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

The first day at Gītā-nāgarī was like walking in paradise. Birds were crying out strong, water rushing in the streams. I loved it and wanted to see Kṛṣṇa in nature. But then, I have to love the other aspect of material nature and see Kṛṣṇa there too—nature as savage, dumb, dark, and fearful. *That* is also Kṛṣṇa and it is beautiful, if one can see the Whole Thing.

Now I am too busy and cannot deeply appreciate the spring. I cannot relax with the wild mustard flowers, the tiny spring beauties, the Judas tree blooming, the may-apple covering the forest floor, and clover everywhere. Few here know the names of birds or care much if you say, “That’s the wood thrush.” Someone even asked, “Why do you write about nature?”

How pretty everything is, my Lord. I know it is savage, but You’ve made it very pretty. Virginia bluebells, dandelions turned to puff, violets in the grass, and the wood thrush. This is all Your energy. Your personal form beyond this material world is only known to those in pure transcendence. But this world is also You, because everything is Your energy. It’s not just happening automatically.

Kierkegaard said that all souls in the creation are like an orchestra engaged in praising God. Kierkegaard saw himself adding a very sad, heavy note, but he likened it to the string bass, which is a harmonious part of the orchestra. In a similar way, this small bird with a repertoire of about five notes keeps on singing through sun and rain, hoping to contribute to His purpose.

From Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī:

“The root of all is humility and the due realization of one’s own ineligibility. If the conviction of our unfitness for the service is revealed to us, either automatically or by the

instruction of other persons, we are only then in a position to appreciate the beauty of the lotus feet of God's devotees."

I can't always be at Gītā-nāgarī standing on the top of the hill and looking through the bare trees down toward the farm and the buildings, but I can remember it. I can't always be on my way home to the cabin after a walk on the hill, during which I saw four white-tailed deer run over the hill, but I can remember it. When I record that I was heading back to the cabin about 5 P.M. on a cold March day, hoping to read a few pages of the *Kṛṣṇa* book in a receptive mood, that memory may help me to read *Kṛṣṇa* book again right now.

The rippling creek is a soothing sound, the crows' "caw!" is familiar, and I relax when I hear the bubbling top of the waterspout in the pond by the front door. I can't exactly say what it is about Gītā-nāgarī that makes it so healing, but it is.

Kentucky, U.S.A.

At the truck stop men's room
in Kentucky,
forced to preach.

Illinois, U.S.A.

Cooler weather:
Jagannātha smiles
in southern Illinois.

En route to Houston

Billboards hurt the eyes and sicken the human spirit.
The poor eyeballs frantically search out the colorful forms

and slogans, like fish jumping for bait. We have to drive through it, and there's never escape. Although the highway sign declares "Don't Mess with Texas, \$400 for littering," the state encourages advertisers to mess with our minds.

We left the campground under a night sky, Big and Little Dippers, etc. Before 7:00 A.M., the sky began to turn a faint blue, almost purple as it does on Juhu Beach. Now on the Texas horizon, all around, a faint red layer.

The uninterrupted countryside gives way to La Grange, Texas, and another deluge of signs. "Major Muffler." "American Air-Conditioning." "All You Can Eat." "Catfish Special." "Country-Style Fried Chicken." "Radio Shack." The eyes rarely get a rest. "Lone Star Beer." Lord Kṛṣṇa protects His devotees, or else we would all be drowned in this ocean of names. "Cajun Sausage." "Deer Processing." Except for the chanting of the holy names, we would be covered all over with signs.

U.S.A.

I-80 West is the nonscenic pass through the Rockies. We are taking it to avoid the wear and tear on the vehicles and on the human body. It is flat, like a plane runway from which you never take off.

After two hours, while I was sleeping in the back, the van suddenly ground to a halt. Another flat tire.

Baladeva insisted on getting another tire so that we don't have to drive without a spare. We wandered off the interstate two times trying to find a used tire at 7:00 A.M. It's like the desert out here, and yet the same unoriginal chain stores are present: Burger King ("Summer Means Whopper and You"), Best Western Motel, Texaco, Pizza Hut, Safeway . . . everything is standard moneymaking and without cheer for the heart. It's hard, at least for me, to see Kṛṣṇa in all of this.

One writer advises, “Caress the divine details,” meaning that a writer’s realm is not the abstract but the particular. We should love the particular and record it so that we and the world will not forget, but these American commercial chain stores have lost the particular. The spirit soul wants to protest against this. He wants to assert his own individuality. And if we don’t speak out, we may get consumed in the exchange of seller and consumer.

The silvery city before sunrise—in the valley, the lit-up Mormon temple.

Outside the cities, many fields of wild sunflowers with yellow petals and deep brown eyes. Barren flats, barren hills. I went on dictating letters to devotees and friends.

The Chevron man in Snowville, Utah, assured us that the “Check EGR” light on our dashboard meant smog control, and it was nothing to worry about.

As we entered Idaho, we were greeted by a picture of a baked potato. The prairie was greener with shrubs. Flats and mountains.

Not much talking, either about Kṛṣṇa or the mundane. Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, wind whipping, and the van engine vibrating.

Further into Idaho, vast stretches of short hay crop. The towns were Burley, Heyburn, Eden, and winding through them was the Snake River. More flats. The map said “lava beds.” Later, more farming, green crops, arches of water from irrigation pipes. Roadside stacks of wirebound hay. The land was no longer so foreboding; it didn’t create the feeling that we are small and lonely in an impersonal universe, or as Prabhupāda wrote, “The atmosphere is surcharged with opposition.”

We stopped at a scenic overview of lava deposits where the sign claimed that geologists have found zebra and

pelican fossils from 3,400,000 years ago. Now a river flows through a wide gorge (Maldan Gorge) with green and fertile land on one side and barren hills on the other. Ancient black rocks of lava are piled up on the hillside. We shared the wonder like ordinary tourists but with the added knowledge from the *Vedas* that time goes back much further than we can imagine. Seeing the geologic site gave us a hint of the hand of Lord Brahmā and Lord Viṣṇu.

Entering La Grand, a sign announced "Scenic Wayside." These are the same hills that we have been seeing since Utah, but suddenly they're filled with evergreens. And a quick-running stream alongside the highway.

On the route of the Oregon Trail, we passed through the Blue Mountains. The firs pressed in closely on both sides of the road—the tree nation. They stand and watch, tall, straight, and silent. If the trees could walk, and if they had bigger brains, maybe they would kill us, just as we kill them and the cows and whatever else we like.

When the highway entered the Umatilla Indian Reservation, we spoke about the Native Americans and how they were pushed off by the Europeans. More reminders of rapacity. I looked for the Indian tribes, but saw only junk cars in a field, a satellite dish, and an abandoned school bus on a hill. Exit 228, "Deadman's Pass," Exit 224, "Poverty Flat Road." Heading down a six percent decline, we saw a broad vista of the valley below, and in the distance, our day's destination, Pendelton, Oregon.

We went for a swim in a near-perfect spot on the Columbia River. No one was around, except young children at a safe distance. I had seen a dozen large carp at another spot but none where we were swimming. Three ducks quacked and moved off as we took over their beach. On a small hill

there was a chunk of solid lava about twenty feet high and twenty feet across which they say oozed up from the earth millions of years ago.

The water was cool and refreshing, but here is what I want to say:

In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you don't completely surrender at any moment unless you can directly see Kṛṣṇa there. I mean, everything was beautiful in this swimming spot—even our van parked in the distance was sparkling metallic brown, waiting for us like a friend. The trees were making that whishing sound. There was not a cloud in the sky. Everything was agreeable, but I didn't fall for it. The setting wasn't false—it's Kṛṣṇa's—but my goal goes far beyond the tiny moment of exercise in a river.

Our Kṛṣṇa conscious transcendentalism alienates us from most people. Our view is extreme. They are looking for the ideal enjoyment, but I know they will never find it. The only ideal with any hope to be realized is love and direct union with the Supreme.

While playing in the Columbia River, I also noticed white butterflies and the late summer crumpling of the leaves on the trees, and it reminded me of how I surrendered to similar surroundings while living at Gītā-nāgarī. I am often astonished at how far I took shelter there, resting in the lap of Mother Earth.

Washington, U.S.A.

We are high up in a woods clearing with a great view of thousands of acres of pines. When we were unpacking our gear, the motor home still at a tilt, Madhu said, "Did you see Mount Rainier?" *Mount Rainier*? What was he talking about? I looked out to the same place I had looked before, in the sky over the trees, and the mountaintop appeared.

"It's like seeing Kṛṣṇa!" I exclaimed.

"We couldn't see it before because of the mist."

I thought of a poet who once bowed down at the sight of a mountain—the external manifestation of God's power.

Recently I had asked a disciple, a resident of Vṛndāvana who was going to the Himalayas, to find out if one could ascend the mountain to Badrinath without walking, since my arthritic left foot has made me lame. I received this letter:

"It is so lonely and serene up there, surrounded totally by snow-covered mountains. One feels that one has reached the end of the earthly planet. That place is four thousand meters⁸ above sea level. It is a strange feeling. But I don't know, I didn't feel very close to God up there, as I do in Vṛndāvana. All you see there is His majesty, but not His personal feature as Kṛṣṇa."

She added: "Actually, you don't need to go to all these places because they are all present in Vraja-maṇḍala. Vṛndāvana and devotional service to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are the highest."

But we travel away from Vṛndāvana. For preaching, a devotee may leave Vṛndāvana while keeping Vṛndāvana in his heart.

Oregon, U.S.A.

National forests are dear to the ecologists and naturalists. Their work to protect the species is praiseworthy, but usually they do not recognize that everything belongs to God. For example, in his poems, Gary Snyder criticizes the loggers for harvesting trees without caring for their replacement ("How many people were harvested in Vietnam?"), and he condemns politicians who don't recognize the constituency of the animals and trees. This is certainly an expanded awareness, but more thoughtfulness is

required. Where do all these living entities come from? Whose nature is this? Who is the supreme intelligent being from whom everything has come? Who continues to empower the species so that they multiply? What are His intentions for the wilderness, and what is His conception of human civilization? For this information we have to turn to knowledge beyond that of the animals and the primitive races and beyond the speculations of thoughtful poets. Naturalism is poor and dumb until the Supreme Being informs us of His nature, as He does in *sāstra*.

After awhile I began to recognize the redwoods, the little vegetation around them—some scrubby pines, rough barks and cones full of seeds, but huge! By comparison, the nearby birch groves looked like match sticks. Douglas firs are also big. The redwoods are so large that only a few fill up a big space of land; competition for room is tight in the forest. Some trunks looked ten or twelve feet wide. Gray, shaggy, vertically grooved barks, like big muscles and ligaments, with moss on their sides. They grow straight up. In India, people would probably worship trees like these and place vermilion at their trunks, or sprinkle milk and circumambulate them with prayers.

South America/Caribbean

JFK airport, NY, en route to Brazil

I am in the Pan Am lounge alone while Madhu is out seeing about a luggage problem. There are lots of people here, all waiting for the flight. I am waiting for you, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I don't know what I mean by that, but I wanted to say it.

At the gate to our flight to Brazil, I was surprised to see women wearing earrings as big as bracelets and to hear the sound of Portuguese. Not a drop of English. It reminded me that we were now *foreigners*—those pitiful, ignorant people who cannot speak even a simple sentence.

In Vista Alegre
there's a luncheonette without seats
and here the people eye us,
while they're eating
and while their radio plays
George Harrison's
"My Sweet Lord."
I really want to see You, Lord,
but it takes so long,
Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa . . .
If the people would just listen
they'd hear it too,
but it takes so long . . .

Sao Paulo, Brazil

At 2:30 A.M. Sunday morning, I hear angry, drunken shouts near the wall dividing the temple grounds from the rest of the city. A man is accusing a woman, and the woman accuses him back. Human beings growling and hooting, cars roaming even at this hour. There are fifty of us on this side of the wall now rising from bunks, bathing, preparing to gather soberly before Lord Jagannātha. Some call this life insular, but I think it's best.

Brazil

Travel Day

To the traveler:
may Lord Nārāyaṇa protect
your feet in the car
may He protect your head
from bumping against the roof
may the Lord of intelligence
protect your thoughts
may the Lord of *bhakti* bless you
to follow the *boa proposta*,
to always chant Hare Kṛṣṇa
even when you've finished
the minimum *japa* quota
and even while sitting
in the "āsana" of the car.
(May Lord Nārāyaṇa also bless our assertive driver.)

Peacocks

A peahen with baby chicks
is pecking at my ball of *tilaka*
drying in the sun.
Peacocks keep away mice
and turn their stiff necks
to give you a look.

If I were a lover of Kṛṣṇa
like Murāri Gupta was,
these rainbow birds
would make me swoon
as they jump
toward the gathering clouds.

In The Garden

Twirling the scythe
by the gurgling stream,
a garden worker starts
at 6:00 A.M.,
stripped to the waist.
They say he does his *japa* later,
and in fact I often see
men chanting at dusk
on the bridge over the lake
and in the bamboo forest.

Trinidad

While driving yesterday, I saw a dead dog by the road-
side. The thought passed through my mind that if I were
dead, there would be no more hassle.

There were more animal corpses, some unidentifiable, on the road. Then our driver told us that we were passing a crematorium.

I returned to my *japa*. I am trying to discover the *mahā-mantra*. It raises its head from shallow water, and I throw my net. Is it a big turtle?

When I was sick for a day and a half here, I stayed indoors at Baladeva's little house which is right on the temple grounds. From there I saw the comings and goings of devotees and guests. Perhaps influenced by the illness, I began to see everyone as in illusion, acting out roles. The main illusion is that people don't know that they're going to die. That makes everything we do illusion. But tonight I went to the temple and gave a class. I valued the simple life of a devotee more than my "sick" viewpoint of seeing everyone in illusion. Or even if part of him is in illusion—enjoying the social scene in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement—that is a harmless side of things. The most important thing is the simplicity of rendering service and trusting in Kṛṣṇa. For a devotee, death comes as another form of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is present in the *Bhāgavatam*, in pictures on the altar, and in everything we do in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

What's Wrong With This Temple

I got an earful of what's wrong with this temple.
 He said, "The room you're in may look nice
 but come around the back and see!
 The devotees don't have a nice place to sleep.
 The person in charge is too much into business;
 he doesn't put the Deities to bed at night.
 He's a miser when it comes to the Sunday feast—
 he serves the guests *prasādam* on cardboard plates
 and then washes them and uses them again the next week!

If you can do something about it, that would be great,
 but at least I'm getting it off my chest by telling you."
 So I went to the person in charge,
 but he had a different opinion.

En route to Guyana

On the plane to Guyana, I couldn't resist telling the devotees accompanying me some animal stories from New Pāṇihātī, Guyana: the time a cougar jumped at the temple president's wife but got caught in a barbed wire fence; the story of a six-foot alligator running in front of the GBC man; the pain of the sand flies that makes you howl and jump; and the size of the roaches, "as big as *samosās*." The devotees became somewhat apprehensive after I told these stories, and I sat back in my seat feeling petty and indulgent. I was only joking, but why be so frivolous on what could be the last day of my life?

Brazil

It's dusk, and the cows have moved downhill quite close to this house. I see their brindled backs and heads moving, and hear them ripping and chewing the plentiful grasses. I'm nearing completion of the sixty-four-round quota and quietly subduing the body's demands.

The heat of the day has passed; now it's just a few minutes before the mosquitoes begin their cruising. The biggest disappointment of the day has also passed. It's quite possible that I may go on chanting sixty-four rounds for many years or lifetimes and not reach the goal because of offenses against the holy name. I chant mechanically. I don't know how to cry out for Kṛṣṇa. But evening is coming and this *dhāma* is too beautiful for me to feel much

complaint. There is so much simple, spiritual happiness here, the gushing stream, the Lent trees coloring the sharp green hills, the peacocks roosting—and an evening schedule ahead, *Bhagavad-gītā* class in the temple, *bhajan*as in our room, all night awake.

Guyana

At the Berbice temple, the road was flooded and we had to take a small boat. “In Guyana, everything is simple,” Rūpa Gosvāmī dāsa said as he paddled the boat down the street toward the temple. I would also like to become simple and happy like the devotees who greeted me at the gate.

Whistling winds,
this remote *āśrama*
is the abode of the Lord.

Puerto Rico

We were delayed at customs when they wanted to cut open my *danḍa* because the agent thought it was green bamboo. It was a passionate scene as we tried to cut off the plastic surrounding the case with the custom man’s knife. After five or ten minutes, when it still wouldn’t come open, he asked me about our Sunday feast. Then he calmed down and understood, and I calmed down and communicated. “The bamboo is a religious staff. I carry it all the time.”

“You carry it all the time?” He apologized and let us go.

We should have been more open and simple and religious and said more and preached, because the customs man was *simpatico*. But while it was happening, all we could see was delay and hassle. I kept dreading the cutting open of the *danḍa* and was preparing myself to be resigned to it. But next time, unless the country is officially atheistic, I’ll say, “Body, mind, and words dedicated to God.”

Requests from a Devotee Community to a Visiting Sannyāsī

Can you help us pay the rent?
 Do you know how we can stop quarreling?
 How can we have more faith in ISKCON?
 Can you revive our inspiration
 to go out daily and meet the nondevotees,
 to give them books, *prasādam*, and the holy name?
 Can you overcome the ennui?
 Do you know what's wrong with us?
 Can you impart some wisdom?

Do you have cures for rheumatism,
 or at least relief from boredom,
 relief from doubt and envy?
 Can you create a taste
 for reading the *śāstra*?
 Can you crash through the reluctance
 of laziness
 and the suspicion
 that if we work hard
 the others will remain lazy?
 Can you convince us—and not just
 by theoretical words of logic or
 by quoting scripture, and not just
 some momentary relief—but can you
 make changes that will last?
 Can you give us a new vision?
 Can you bring back the old days
 when Kṛṣṇa consciousness was happy and fun
 and we served without much thought for ourselves?
 Can you lead ecstatic *kīrtanas*,
 give inspiring classes?
 Will you sit and share *prasādam* with us?
 Can you stay with us?
 Or are you also
 part of the problem?

India

En route, Frankfurt to Vṛndāvana

On board. Without asking us our opinion, they suddenly upgraded us to First Class seats. I would have preferred to stay where we were. In First Class, they dote on you more and offer you wine and meat. It is embarrassing for a monk to ride First Class. They just came by with newspapers. I glanced with interest over the international *Herald Tribune* as the stewardess walked past our seats, but M. remarked, “We’re leaving that world behind.” At the same moment, my eyes rested on this verse by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura:

“Vṛndāvana is beyond the descriptive power of words. It is the best of all holy places. It is self-manifest, filled with most intense transcendental bliss, free from the touch of the material miseries of old age and death, and the place where Lord Kṛṣṇa eternally enjoys the nectar pastimes.” (Song 8, Text 1)

Karachi, Pakistan

Do you want to stay in your present space? I mean, “Be here now.” Appreciate the blessedness of life as it is given by God. Don’t try to void out when you don’t like the circumstances in which you find yourself. (That doesn’t mean, however, living for the senses and the world.)

Now we are on the ground in Karachi. I can see action typical of airports all over the world from my airplane window, but this time with Muslim touches—a half-moon on the PIA truck, beards, turbans . . . Does the present moment have any integrity? What does it mean to look at this scene and think of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? How to stay with the moment and not slip into the past or plan for the future?

We are not in Vṛndāvana, not even in India, but where we are, we are thinking of Vṛndāvana. We cannot and should not avoid that moment. I should not reject it as if it is not the theme I am seeking. It is.

Vṛndāvana, India

We made the mistake of leaving Delhi at 1:00 P.M. for Vṛndāvana. We were fried and dried-out and jarred to pieces by the taxi ride. When we were only about a hundred feet away from Krishna-Balaram, we were stopped by “police.” Our car was surrounded by people who had nothing to do with police, but who demanded that we open our luggage, pay them tolls and taxes and so on. We couldn’t tell who was official or unofficial, and I fell for the trap, becoming exasperated and headached. This was our initiation into Vṛndāvana.

Now I’m sitting on the porch under the full moon with crickets chirping away. I’m too tired and weak to pray or think straight, yet I’m aware that the spirit of Vṛndāvana is working on me.

Lights on in a few rooms,
crickets, the evening sky.

A *kīrtana* drum.

Evening sweat.

Even the surface of Vṛndāvana
brings me nearer
to the heart.

The amazing clutter of our possessions clouds my consciousness. Madhu brought over the seven steel trunks we had stored for two years at Baladeva's house. We stored them at a time when we were still planning to spend a lot of time in Vṛndāvana. Since then, we have begun to live out of the van. Madhu suggests we clean out the trunks and get rid of what we don't need. He put them on the porch for me to rummage through and now my brain is cluttered.

We had stored dozens of votive candles—I use them in the morning when I chant—but all that was left was a lump of wax. They seem to have melted during the summer heat. And so many pens! How could I possibly use them all? One doesn't think of coming to Vṛndāvana to become absorbed in such an inventory. What can it possibly have to do with simple *sādhū* life? I can't even use the porch now because the contents of the trunks have all been placed in jumbled piles—what we're keeping, what we're getting rid of.

O crows and parrots and
pigeons of Bhauma Vṛndāvana,
this too-stuffed-with-possession,
so-called *sādhū* yearns for
being
for being
he wants to be simple.

The old trees in Vṛndāvana and me out there in what we used to call Rāman Retī. That small, sandy field is now walled in with bricks. It's no longer a public thoroughfare or place to sit. I wonder who owns it?

But how can anyone be said to own a piece of Vṛndāvana? Is this land just real estate?

Painted sign on wall: "Śrī Rādhā—Never Forget."

I'm a foreigner to Vraja and the *sādhū's* culture. Śrīla Prabhupāda knew Vṛndāvana well, and he considered its culture far superior to the culture of the West. Yet he also saw the non-*bhakti* mixtures and how preaching was limited there. He transcended those limits and became a world preacher who felt at home anywhere in the world. That was his compassion. He was dedicated to the holy name and to Lord Caitanya's teachings.

It's different for me, of course. I come here to visit and fail to enter Indian culture. I'm dressed like them, but I speak differently, I think differently, and I live in Westernized ISKCON. I don't go out much to meet people or to taste the land or intense worship of Kṛṣṇa as the people here perform it (although it's sometimes confused, and not purely what Lord Caitanya and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī taught). Anyway, at least I should absorb myself in reading Prabhupāda's books, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, and associating with devotees—helping them to maintain their Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Yesterday afternoon as I looked out from the porch into a small compound of trees and old buildings, it seemed as wild as a jungle. I saw and heard peacocks, parrots and monkeys, hogs and dogs. Undisturbed wildlife living alongside the humans. In Vṛndāvana, it's live and let live.

Talking with Godbrothers,
looking out the window—
the temple domes.

*Who Touched Kṛṣṇa's Foot
In The Forest Of Govardhana?*

It was me and my brothers,
crawling into the underbrush on our knees.

A large reddish stone,
 in the shape of a human foot.
 In its center
 was a hole filled with water,
 which I sprinkled on my head.
 Almost no one knows this place.
 There are no signs, or temples there,
 no rickshaw *wallas* know the way.
 We sat in the woods and sang
 amid Govardhana-*śilās*.

“*Haribol*, Viṣṇu!” So cheerful he sounds every day, four flights below, a little boy playing. “*Haribol*, Viṣṇu!” (must be the name of his playmate). *Haribol* to you, little boy, playing in the Vṛndāvana dust, and *haribol* to the “white monkey” twins of Jayaśrī dāsī and the other junior characters roaming Krishna-Balaram Mandir, the boys in yellow *dhotīs*, our diminished *gurukula* ranks, and yes, even to you, monkey on the wall clawing into a half coconut.

The Bretons wrote in armchairs and at Parisian café tables. I write at a desk in the Vṛndāvana Guesthouse. Peacocks not calling right now; main sound is the noise of the electric heater. Be at peace.

I’m aware that I’m not in touch with the earth here, or the extreme forms of physical austerity and poverty that many *sādhus* practice. Śrīla Prabhupāda indicated that it was all right to live with amenities—cars, sewn cloth, comfortable buildings, dictaphones, and typewriters. He knew we are Westerners. He wanted us strong and enlivened to work in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I don’t have to feel guilty that I’m not barefoot in winter or that I’m wearing a sweater. I am doing what I can.

And I am not inclined to walk barefoot into the villages. Why not? Don't want your feet to get sore? It seems that instead of my mind and senses becoming peaceful by such outings, they become distracted. O *haribol*. Does it mean that whatever I write of Vṛndāvana comes from the strange and limited perceptions of the false ego? No, I write to represent a truth.

Vṛndāvana calls the devotees to respond. You make a trip to Rādhā-kuṇḍa in the cold and people expect you to say something intimate, but you are frozen inside. You are extremely conscious of your present state of mind, your fastidious diet, and minute-to-minute schedule. Just the thought of the bus ride . . . How can I benefit with a mood like that?

O Lord, O Energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service.

The devotee who gave class today spoke about the need to use our intelligence in Kṛṣṇa's service. He also spoke about surrender. He quoted a letter by Prabhupāda to Upendra dāsa in which Prabhupāda recited a prayer we can make to Kṛṣṇa. The prayer goes like this: "I'm unwilling to surrender, so You please put me in a situation where I'll be forced to surrender." The lecturer said, "The way out is the way through." We should ask Kṛṣṇa to put us through whatever karma we are due. Otherwise, he said, it's possible to live in this institution for forty years and not be more advanced in *bhakti* than we were forty years ago. Instead of trying to choose our own form of surrender, we should pray to Kṛṣṇa to put us through whatever we need. If we do that, our lives will be more glorious than we could imagine. He said that Prabhupāda exemplified this attitude when although he didn't want to take *sannyāsa*, he finally did and everything became glorious.

These seem to be solid points, but I'm still left with the question of how to surrender. We have to act. What, then, does it take to make such a sincere prayer? How to prove my willingness to accept Kṛṣṇa's guidance? We learn this, it seems, in small increments.

Yamunā Going

First we came upon a line of pilgrims,
ladies and men with shaved heads.
We rushed ahead of them over the soft sand.
We encountered a little tributary
and crossed, knee-deep delicious,
to the bank of the river.
Brown bubbles floated along.
Yamunā-devī, I placed your water on my head,
and you tugged us downstream.

Afraid of undertow,
I stayed waist-high and swam
and watched the sunrise and the people
and Madana-mohana temple and Keśi-ghāṭ.

On shore, while putting on our *tilaka*
a man stopped to watch us.
He wore an old turban and handlebar mustache,
his worn, intense face smiling,
encouraging the whites in their attempt
to bath in Yamunā
and mark their bodies with sacred clay.
All these actions form a prayer,
for entrance into the *dhāma*.

Walking for *japa* at 6:00 A.M. by Rāman Retī. A mangy dog approached me with gruff barking. I thought, "If you

come any closer, you'll get the end of this *daṇḍa*," and he went away. Madhu and I then circumambulated the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Tree. At the same spot there were two old Indian *mātājīs* bowing down in the sand. They smiled slightly to us. Then the same aggressive dog went up to one old lady. She was small and had no stick. To my surprise, she began speaking softly to the dog in low tones. He sat down before her, making gruff sounds. She then disentangled her hand from her bead bag, reached into another bag, pulled out a piece of food and threw it on the ground for the dog. By now we had passed her, and I saw this by looking back. Once again I saw that I had misunderstood the meaning of Vṛndāvana.

I don't like loudspeakers booming out religious songs from nearby *āśramas*, but I do like the general rising up of chants, melodies, and hubbub when it comes from a distance and reaches me in a welling up of sound. Such a festive atmosphere! And it is filled with the worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is filled with Vṛndāvana.

High volume of air traffic in early morning light—the mosquitoes are honing in like 747s over a city airport. I am at my observation post by the window and can see passersby. An old man stops to retch and spit. He carries the ubiquitous tiffin.

What would I like, to melt out of existence and discover myself a new person more in the footsteps of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī? Transformations like that just don't happen. Neither do they come only by our endeavor. We can only let Kṛṣṇa know of our desires, and He will arrange to fulfill them. But please, Lord, take my best desires and not my worst. I have faith that You will do that. Whatever comes, I will be assured that it is sent by You in my best interest.

Kṛṣṇa is not going to force us to surrender. He is waiting for us to voluntarily bend our wills.

I hear a constant background noise of parrots screeching. They are not so loud—just telling us that it's morning. Their constant song is punctuated by the mourning doves' occasional coos. A distant car horn reminds us that people do come and go from areas outside Vraja. This morning, an unbroken line of people in drab clothes have walked by. I also saw a dog on a roof and the pieces of broken bottles set in cement on top of the neighbor's wall.

A crowd has gathered out there. Above their heads I see a Śaivite trident and a person's foot. He is standing on his head—some kind of public austerity.

Madhu has called me to look at a "fabulous bird" on the electric wire. It is black and has a bright blue-green stripe on each wing, a white breast, and a long thin beak. Its mouth is open and it appears to be panting in the heat.

A donkey brays a short poem. *Sādhus* walk by, brown-skinned and barefoot in their dark orange cloth.

This morning I saw ants eating something white on the floor. Baladeva mused, "A real Vṛndāvana scene. It began last night. It was a lizard. About forty ants attacked it while it was still alive." I thought, "How is this a Vṛndāvana scene?" Yet it *is* happening here.

A dog walked through the front gate and sat down, "offering obeisances" with her long-extended front legs. She sat patiently and quietly, wagging her tail.

Baladeva said to Madhu, "Someone is here to see you." Madhu went to the front porch and assumed a tough expression. Baladeva said, "You know the philosophy." (Meaning, you know this dog is not an ordinary soul and has come to beg.)

“But,” I said, “if you feed this one, they will all come around.”

She went on wagging her tail and I left it to them to figure out. Then the rains came and the eye ache and still I hear the tinkling drops.

What are the obstacles? My impurities. How to remove them? Through service—humble service—and simultaneously, hearing. I understand that by my service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and by whatever work I do to help distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, I may become rightly situated. Otherwise, Kṛṣṇa consciousness will remain a locked treasure to me. When the treasure chest is opened, then the divine feast of loving devotional service will be manifest. At that time, I will hear the beauty of Vṛndāvana *līlā*, and my heart will be moved.

This is why I came to Vṛndāvana. I came to dedicate myself to this. I beg Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to please accept my faulty attempt. Please allow me to chant the holy names.

Please, Vṛndā-devī, Yogamāyā, I want to be fit to serve others. I will preach as I should, but I want to be a devotee of the true Vṛndāvana and to be released from the bonds of material life. I am prepared to perform austerities, although I am weak and unable in so many ways.

A beautiful, brown, humpbacked bull came to our front gate. He ate some grass at the entrance and then tried to open the gate by butting his head against it. A chain and lock hold the gate shut, but he hit against it again and again, hoping to gain entrance and to taste the fresh grass. I went out and raised my arm, thinking that that would be enough to chase him away, but he stared back at me. We stood facing each other awhile, and then he decided it wasn't worth it and walked off.

Mathurā, India

When we rode the auto rickshaw, sights and sounds flashed by. When we passed through one neighborhood, we saw that the sewage had been cleaned out of the gutters but was awaiting pick-up by the street sweepers. We were careening along when suddenly I heard and sensed some children laughing at us. It all happened so quickly. I turned and saw a girl of about ten standing a few feet away. She was tickled to see our white bodies dressed in saffron in the back seat of a rickshaw. She laughed as if to say, "Oh, look! How funny they are!" I saw her innocent, laughing face for a moment and then we lurched out of sight. I caught myself smiling.

Vṛndāvana, India

It's Janmāṣṭamī and it has been thundering for hours. The sky is dark. It could rain at any minute.

Bus horns (or is it a conch from a nearby temple?). White Brahma cows walk the street in front of our house. A woman sings somewhere in the distance, sad and religious. I am relieved to be free of the amplified *bhajan*s for awhile.

The rain is starting and the treetops are swaying as the breeze picks up. A bird feather blows across the floor. Baladeva has gone to the temple to cook for Kṛṣṇa. Madhu is inside. The rooms are dark; there's not even enough light to read by. A patrol of about ten big black ants marches across the gray cement.

Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī says the eternal Goloka is the same as the place in which he himself lived. He had that vision. When he couldn't see Goloka in Vṛndāvana, he bitterly lamented in separation. As for me, I can only write, "I see a donkey, I see some ants, I see a boy smoking a ciga-

rette." I know there's a limit to that, but I do see value in my sense perceptions here. I have faith that they are closer to Kṛṣṇa than descriptions of what I perceive in Ireland or America. My perceptions are not of Goloka, but neither are they ordinary because life in Vṛndāvana isn't ordinary. Kṛṣṇa is directly present in every atom.

Yesterday, while driving to Mathurā, we saw about six white "Brahma" calves cavorting wildly on the side of the road. They were romping with that energy calves have. Was that a Vraja sight? Is it connected to *kṛṣṇa-līlā*? Do I have to prove it? If ordinary life is worth rendering as it is and doesn't need an explanation since it is all divine and inexplicable, then how much more is this true of Vṛndāvana? Pilgrim, your search has ended. Caress the Vraja details.

A radio drama broadcast nearby, the villain laughing wickedly: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Is it Kāṁsa? Must be, or one of his clan. Every speech he makes is either full of fury or full of that demoniac laughter, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Vṛndāvana is so beautiful when it is green. Just imagine how it looked when Kṛṣṇa had His pastimes here. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes it: "The lakes of Vṛndāvana are surrounded by green grasses, and various kinds of lotus flowers bloom there . . . the air blowing in Vṛndāvana carries the aromatic pollen of those lotus flowers." (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 18, p. 131)

Droplets of water from the Yamunā and the lakes and waterfalls touch the bodies of the Vrajavāsīs. "Therefore, they were practically undisturbed by the summer season."

I came here with some books about Vṛndāvana and am looking through them for something to say. I look into myself, but can't find much. The books are the basis and there is nothing shameful about admitting that and then sharing something nice. It is not just by "hitting the books"

that I can enter Vraja-līlā; the *līlās* are not *only* in the verses. Rather, the verses are the experience in an expressed word form. The experience is with Kṛṣṇa and His *pāriṣads* in Vraja, and in the heart of the pure devotee of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. “This is the summit of *bhajana*, when one will be crying and there will be tears, torrently, and one will see everything as vacant for being separated from Govinda.” (*Conversations With Śrīla Prabhupāda*, Vol. 9, p. 9)

The partridges have strong legs and their tail feathers are not long. They make loud calamitous noise. When I first saw them I thought maybe they were just-born peacocks who couldn't fly. But they can fly. Two just walked along the brick wall and flew off. By contrast, a pink-necked, gray-backed dove sits on our electric line making dovey sounds. A temple bell rings again for a four o'clock *ārati* nearby. Which would you rather have, electricity to run the fans or a quiet Vṛndāvana with no amplified music?

By the description of the birds, I am reasserting the simple. Two small sparrows are twitting on the electric line. You find them at Rādhā-Madana-mohana temple, the first ones to rise in the morning, and you see them at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. You usually don't notice them while you are out worshipping and searching for the Supreme Lord, but sometimes you stop and notice and there they are with their inconsequential twit-twit and their little doings. They were here before you, and they will be here after you leave.

Mumbai, India

When we reached the beach at 5 A.M., one man was bowing in front of another man. There was a small fire next to him. The scene was strange, but I didn't want to stare. Later, I mentioned it to M. He said he thought it was some-

thing like black arts. The people were dressed in a low-class way, he said. Then he mentioned what had struck him—ponies tethered on the beach. “They work all day carrying children for rides, and at night they are tied by a short rope so they cannot walk. They are given a small box of grass to eat.” I hadn’t noticed their plight. I did notice a few camels tied up and thought that they were muscular animals and probably dumb.

Each day, the tide is higher and there is a smaller margin of hard-packed beach to walk. When we come back, the soles of our feet are dirty. It’s a good walk. We passed a lone devotee going on a longer walk. We can sail off into the sky while seeing beautiful vistas when we take a *japa* walk on the beach, provided we are able to hear the holy names in our ears and chest and keep it close.

Jagannātha Purī, India

This recently built hotel ruins the privacy of the convent next door. The nuns can’t use their back porch because all our windows look down on them. But today I saw a young nun walking back and forth on the porch, reading from a book.

Days go by following a schedule like clockwork—early rising and *japa*, *maṅgala-ārati*, dictating commentary, exercise on the beach, more *japa* on the roof, editing, breakfast. A narrow life? Yes, as one monk wrote, “The simple, narrow life helps to protect the depths of the inner life.”

Walking on the beach as usual, but while passing the Vijaya Hotel, someone shouted “Yahoo!” It was like suddenly being back in the West. He shouted again, “OAAAH!” I looked toward the hotel but all I could see was windows. Then he shouted out a mocking, “Hare Kṛṣṇa!” So we’ve

come all the way to Purī, India, where we are supposed to be a part of native culture, and some *mūḍhas* are hooting just like they do at home. It woke me up to the world beyond my quiet cultivation of reading and chanting.

New Delhi, India

Indian airplane
delayed for repair—
sound of the flute.

Trivandrum, South India

Rain on the resort hotel. Dim light bulbs make me cease reading. Thunder and lightning, rain to left and right, splashing and running down the roofs. Despite the gathering clouds, the fishermen pushed out into the ocean in their log canoes. They know the art, and they have the courage and the need.

To the southernmost tip,
Indian crows,
backyard ocean.

Here are small plump bananas,
Lord Buddha's "impermanence"
and my traveling ache.

Padmanābha Swami Mandir, Trivandrum, India

They have guards with sticks and yellow belts. "The king is coming," they say, and hurry us along. The Mahārāja of Trivandrum is due here in half an hour for his daily

morning *darśana*. The temple is his private property, a leftover from the Rāj period. Now the guard claps his hands. He wants us to move along; no more writing.

Śrī Janārdana Mandir, Varkāla, India

Tonight a tusked, blackish elephant appeared, gold-covered, with a silver Deity atop, a *shenai* player and drummer alongside; we followed in circumambulation around Śrī Janārdana. A popular custom here: for a fee they set off a big firecracker in your honor. Workers are setting up a stage. It all makes me want to go north as soon as possible to join the ISKCON Māyāpur festival. Scheduled to fly out the 20th.

Trivandrum, India

Sun lowered below the horizon now, birds quieter, girls singing hymns in the valley. I'm with Prabhupāda *mūrti* in the darkening room.

Glad to leave,
too much noise.
On the other hand . . .
We lived here.

Madras, India

Waiting and watching—Indians, Westerners, and a few Orientals. I'm hungry, tired, and feel the beginning of a headache. Trying to rest at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.

A girl wearing a T-shirt with this slogan: "Hard Rock Cafe, Kuala Lumpur." ISKCON preaches there and everywhere else in the world. I'm going to Māyāpur. My body is

weak, and I am grateful for the protected environment ISKCON offers.

It's 1995. The last time I was in India, it was 1993. Since that time, Coca-cola and Pepsi have invaded the subcontinent, especially in the rural villages of the south. "Always refreshing and always real. Take off on the taste."

En route to Māyāpur from Calcutta, India

Occasionally I see something truly beautiful—we catch an idyllic glimpse of a man sitting by a *pakoor* near yellow flowers blooming in the morning sunlight, a woman seated before a loom strung with brightly colored cloth—and I appreciate. Usually, however, Bengal's overpopulated chaos bombards my senses. It's not just Bengal that is chaotic, but the whole material world as we can perceive it with our senses. It's just too much to look at. Sometimes we feel this way about ISKCON too.

Caitanya-candrodayā dāsa told me that they have installed loud-speakers on top of the Prabhupāda Samādhī and that they broadcast Prabhupāda's *bhajan*s and lectures all day. I commented, "Loudspeaker religion," and he asked me to explain what I meant by that.

As we approach the *dhāma*, we start to see more people on the road. Mynas, which tend to congregate wherever people live, are also more visible. Mustard blooms in the fields. Suddenly a steel tower carrying heavy electric lines stretches out over the wet, green plains. White cows eat straw out of a cement bowl. The children are all barefoot, running among the roosters and hens. Men on bicycles—few cars and trucks—carry their vegetables to market or home draped over both sides of their bicycles in burlap sacks. Cow dung patties dry on outdoor walls and trees.

People wear scarves and *cādars* this time of year. Once again, we have been allowed—Prabhupāda has brought us—into the *dhāma*.

Māyāpur, India

Mosquito buzz in ear,
more friendly-sounding here
than in the South, although
Prabhupāda said
that Calcutta's mosquitoes
bite *sādhus* and non-*sādhus* alike.

Relieved that the loudspeakers are silent, I hear only occasional dogs and the Māyāpur crickets. The evening is teeming with life. We protect ourselves from it by living in this house. We are afraid—is it conditioning?—of being bitten by mosquitoes, and we prefer to remove ourselves from the natural environment. Most Bengalis live simply, more or less exposed in their straw and mud huts. We have more money, so we demand more secure housing to protect our possessions. Does that give us less contact with the *dhāma* in a natural way?

Gītā-nāgarī dāsa said he went on *parikrama* to Kāmyavana. The *parikrama* leader asked each devotee to pray for his innermost desire and then to express it to the group. Gītā-nāgarī reported that all the devotees spoke idealistically: "I pray to dedicate myself to book distribution life after life," or, "I pray to chant the holy name without ceasing." When it was his turn he said, "Prabhus, I think this takes more time than we have at our disposal." He was seeking his true, inner desire. Came up with a desire for deep peace of heart.

“Should” and who we really are—the tension between them.

I hear an animal protesting, then attacking or defending out there in the dark—a guttural, bestial sound—then quiet. Except for the crickets. Their chirping blankets everything and assures me. There seem to be two kinds of crickets. It almost reminds me of the drone of a *tamboura* accompanying devotional expression. One sound drones on unabated beneath the one-two-three beat. I find it soothing.

It’s almost 7 A.M., and I’m sitting on a roof on the long building. Here’s what I see: adjoining this building is a muddy field with puddles. Storks and herons move around, poking their beaks in the water and sometimes fighting with one another. They remind me of a verse in *Light of the Bhāgavata* describing how herons stay on the muddy banks even though the banks are rocky, just as householders stick to family life despite the problems. These herons don’t seem peaceful. Or maybe I’m projecting my mood on them.

This afternoon I was looking out my window and I saw a truck go by across the ISKCON property. Two young men were sitting in the front seat chewing thick sticks of sugar cane, and the back of the truck was stacked high with it. I was gazing out at them, not feeling anything particular, but then the dome of the Prabhupāda Samādhi caught my eye and I suddenly tuned in to the sound of Prabhupāda’s *bhajana* playing over the loudspeaker. I was jolted into remembering that I was in the sacred land of Māyāpur. I tried to go deeper, but felt stuck, so I thought of turning to free-writing to draw it out of myself. I also wanted to chant. I want to learn to trust myself to turn to Kṛṣṇa, to pray. I want to pray.

Just as I thought this, however, Madhu came to the door and told me that it was time for our daily yoga exercises. I agreed reluctantly, and we went through the motions of stretching and bending for about twenty-five minutes. Is the opportunity to reach out to Kṛṣṇa gone? Can I still make a date to express myself to Him?

A storm! First flashes of lightning, then rain, thunder, and the lights go out. Māyāpur in the rain makes me want to be a devotee. Service to Prabhupāda is my life and the fulfillment of my self-interest. Serving Prabhupāda includes serving his followers. Many important prayers make this point as devotees humbly but fervently desire service to the Vaiṣṇavas life after life. As Mahārāja Parikṣit said, if I have to be born again, let me have staunch faith in Lord Kṛṣṇa, love for His devotees, and compassion for all living entities.

Last night I told the devotees who have come to see me here that I feel I have missed out on the *dhāma*'s essence. Then I thought, "I'm not depressed about that." I have come to think more positively. By the *dhāma*'s power, I have gained something permanent from my stay here. Then the devotees shared their own realizations. One devotee said that since living in the *dhāma*, he has come to appreciate the simple and humble Bengali devotees and to aspire to be more like them; another spoke about how Western devotees come here intending to stay but get pulled away by boredom or a lack of realization. He thought it might be because Lord Caitanya's *līlā* is "hidden" in Māyāpur, unlike Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* in Vṛndāvana. Other devotees spoke of needing vital service wherever they were. One devotee said that Prabhupāda never saw devotees as failures if they weren't full-time residents of Māyāpur or Vṛndāvana. If a Western

devotee leaves, it's not necessarily because he or she is unqualified, but because his or her service is elsewhere.

Then someone added that he had found Vṛndāvana's mercy by going beyond ISKCON's walls and the *parikrama* path into the bush. "Do you know what I mean?" he asked.

Yes, we know what he means: the life of the *dhāma* has to be sought out among the people and the land by walking it humbly. I'm a million miles away from that, although I seek the life of the *dhāma*. The bushes of Vraja? I don't like it if even one Vrajavāsī mouse comes to stay with me in my room. I want my stay sterile and disturbance-free.

Caitanya-candrodayā dāsa said that Jananivāsa Prabhu gave a lecture in which he quoted Varṇśīdāsa Bābājī as speaking to his Gaura-Nitāi Deities at the end of his life, "I have served You all my life. I'm tired now." When Jananivāsa said it, he began to cry. Caitanya-candrodayā commented, "He's tired. He works so hard." We tend to think the twin *pūjārīs* are angels floating in nectar, but they work hard and become fatigued as they earn their residence in Śrīdhāma Māyāpur.

Last day in Māyāpur. I want to collect final impressions: the square stone tiles on the roof, the stone lattice work on the roof's fencing, the sandstone rail on top of that with the cement planters (plants dead in them now), the sound of the electric saws and polishers coming from the "ISKCON Youth Forum Building" going up two plots over. ISKCON Māyāpur is no longer a backyard village. There is always construction here, in keeping with Prabhupāda's ambitions.

Winter gnats, brick columns, and on this roof, two mattresses left out in the weather losing their stuffing. (They say the mice have nested in one of them.) Again the pleas-

ing sensation of sunlight on this otherwise cold and non-descript day.

I'm not crying because I'm leaving Māyāpur, but I'm ready to go forth on further adventures. Still, this is the safest place, the most sacred place, and I know that when I leave the *dhāma*, I will be back in mundane India until I arrive in Vṛndāvana. Therefore, I'm gathering my impressions, and I hope to remember the soothing winter sunshine and the way the Samādhi dome cuts across the cloudless sky.

En route to New Delhi, India

On the plane, fog outside, the captain chatting over the loudspeaker. "Do remember us. We at Indian Airlines look forward to serving you on your next flight. All the best and thank you." We hear this over our Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

The engines roar. M. is writing his Delhi shopping list. I went to the toilet and saw myself in the mirror, my face stripped of extra flesh from the diet we were following in the South. I look like an old *sādhū* who doesn't indulge in nonsense—too old for that, and too keen and occupied with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. (Besides, he appears to have no teeth. Must be quite an old guy.)

This is centered on Satsvarūpa dāsa. Back in my seat, I'm just in time to hear the stewardess moving down the aisle, "Veg or nonveg?" and as each passenger responds, she hands them one of two lumps of tinfoil. "Not taking," I say, and wave her away.

This little data of a life. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. I pray not to waste a day in superficiality. I want to know and realize Kṛṣṇa. I pray for it from my tiny, pitiable, and covered condition.

En route to London, from India

All-night flight westward. After the plane landed in an obscure Mid-East touchdown called Doha, we then flew on to London, cabin lights out, passengers sleeping. I noticed the brightness of the full moon. I realized that this was the full moon of Lord Caitanya's appearance day and regretted that I was going to spend Gaura-Pūrṇimā in a London hotel. After talking it over with my secretary, I decided to disregard the cautious health plan, and upon arriving in London we booked a flight to Belfast. Thus we were assured of being in the company of the devotees and Śrī Śrī Nitāi-Śacīnandana on Gaura-Pūrṇimā day.

London

Everything seems somewhat unreal due to time zone changes, cultural changes—from sunny, mild India to cloudy, windy England where they have butter on the bread and cream on the apple pie and where they are experiencing the worst flu epidemic of the century. A large box of mail was waiting for me. The incoming mail sets my head spinning. I'm back in the West. I sit bewildered by the mail, by the unreal, by the jet lag. It seems as if *anything* can happen. Concurrent with these thoughts, however, is the prayer, "Please let me be a devotee."

Jagannātha Bliss

Jagannātha is checked in
to room 903.
How can the Lord
of the universe
be a Sheraton guest?
Because He consents.

First thing to do
 is make up His altar—
 today He's in yellow,
 Subhadrā red, Balarāma blue.
 And I'm collapsed beside Them.

Travel is exciting
 if you choose as your companion
 the best friend, enjoyer,
 the ruler of all.
 Nothing else really matters—jets, buses, oceans,
 the enormous world of nondevotion
 that's all illusion.
 But He is the center,
 and I am His servant.
 That's all that matters:
 surrender.

O Lord Jagannātha,
 please save me,
 please keep me,
 take me home.
 Keep me traveling.
 Keep me sick.
 Make me well.
 Whatever You want.
 Keep Your name on my mind.

Spain

This body has rattled out of joint; the used Renault is in better shape than I am. I'm glad to sleep in a room tonight, but I want to go back to that cold, steel cave, the back of the van where Prabhupāda's books are within arm's reach, where the bed is stiff, and sleep is interrupted by truck lights, but where you are free.

**MY PURPOSE WHILE TRAVELING,
SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1996**

I am a traveling writer—not a travel writer, a category I reject, but a writer who travels. That I write about place is almost incidental to my vocation . . . destiny made me a traveling writer.

— From “Traveling Writer” by Jan Morris, in *The Writer on Her Work*, Vol. Two

I never paid attention to the premise that you don’t have to leave your own bedroom to know the world . . . Rodolfo Walsh, the Argentine writer and activist, once told me when I was complaining about how much I went from one place to the next and how little I wrote: “Your writing is also made from your travels.” *

—From “Writing With the Body” by Luisa Valenzuela, in *The Writer on Her Work*, Vol. Two

INTRODUCTION

Often, one has to decide whether to travel or not. Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says that if you are undecided about this, you should stay home. *My Purpose While Traveling* is the second timed book to appear in this collection. The theme that ran through it was my attempt to answer that question for myself: should I continue to travel despite my poor health or should I stop? The prologue to this section was much longer in the original. It traced my thoughts from day to day, and even within a day, from hour to hour, as I went back and forth with the question. The more I worked with the question, the more I realized that there was a second and third issue at stake. Some people would call it “cold feet.” I thought that I had nothing to say that would add anything to the temples I planned to visit. I felt unworthy. I also felt a strong desire to stay in one place for awhile in order to deepen my hearing and chanting. No matter how noble the purpose behind traveling, travel never fails to disrupt regulation.

In the end, I felt that Prabhupāda had given me a deep taste for and a need to travel, that it was part of my fulfillment as a preacher and a devotee, and that I should get out on the road. And I did.

My struggle reminded me of these lines by Basho:

The moon and the sun are eternal travelers; even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat, or in old age leading a tired horse into the years. Every day is a journey, but from the earliest times there have always been some who perished along the road. Still, I have always been drawn by wind-blown clouds and to dreams of a lifetime of wandering. Coming home from a year's walking tour of the coast last autumn, I swept the cobwebs from my hut on the bank of the Sameda just in time for New Year, but by the time the spring mists began to rise from the fields, I longed to cross the Shirakowa Barrier into the northern interior. Drawn by the wanderer spirit, Dosogen, I couldn't concentrate on things. . . . So I placed my house in another's hands . . .

—*Narrow Road to the Interior*

I suspect that I will always try to keep moving, just as Prabhupāda himself did. Even in his last days when he was unable even to move, he asked to be taken on a bullock cart around Govardhana. May I be blessed with his spirit.

AUTHORS NOTE

I want to briefly explain my *modus operandi* for writing in October 1996. Recently I have been getting more headaches than usual, and my friends have advised me to stay in one place. I have agreed and have been convalescing in a room in Manu dāsa's house in Geaglum, North Ireland. I have been here for a few weeks, but my health has not improved. Then why not travel, and what is my purpose in traveling? My repeated attempt to answer this question while on the road to Italy became the springboard for this book.

Of course, some of the answers are obvious: I need to get out and preach, I like to travel, etc. My aim, however, is not only to discuss these reasons, but to delve deeper into my actual purpose in traveling. The dictionary defines "purpose" as "intended or desired result; goal. Determination, resolve."

Since free-writing so often helps me dig up deeper purposes and reasons, I plan to write my way into and out of this question. I do not intend to make this merely a literary exercise. If, for example, while writing I find that I have no deep purpose, then I may stop traveling and do something else. Therefore, this writing is intended to help me face myself as well as the question. ("A monk is a person who asks every day, 'What is a monk?'"")

PROLOGUE BEFORE TRAVEL

September 19, 1996

6:15 P.M.

All right, start now, before we get on the road, with this question: do I want to get into the van and subject myself to the rigors of travel?

Here are what thoughts come up: I want to travel partly to respond to all the endeavor Madhu has put into preparing the van. He has worked long and hard, and if we didn't use the van to travel, all that work would go in vain. In another sense, it may be an unnecessary strain to go here and there. What is my real purpose, to read and write? That can be done anywhere, while traveling or not.

Maybe the question is whether it could be done better by traveling or by staying in one place. Am I too settled and sedentary? Would a trip around Europe stimulate my thinking and feeling? What do Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda want of me? Am I a wandering *sannyāsi* or a resident reader and writer?

September 20

Rādhāṣṭamī

Last night I told Madhu that if I could have three consecutive days of improved health, I would consider traveling. On September 18, I canceled our upcoming travels realizing that they were unrealistic for one in my condition. The headaches are coming too frequently. Madhu advised that I wait until Monday (three days from now) to decide. If we decide to travel, he said, we can make it as undemanding as possible. I can travel as a semi-invalid. Then Madhu said we could think of the van as an ambulance to carry me back to Ireland if my health breaks down. Or, we could simply stop wherever we are while I recover.

Often the outer purpose of my life doesn't seem satisfying either to myself or others. I tend to think my life is insubstantial. Others can see I don't do much, and the decision to travel or not to travel may also seem insubstantial. I tend not to judge myself quite in that way even when I ask the inevitable questions: "What am I doing? Is it important? Is it helping me develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Is it the best I can do right now?" I want to hit a vein and test my blood, follow it in writing to my heart.

In one sense, the essence of life is only acted out on the external level. For me, I find that writing goes a long way to achieve the purpose of my life. The traveling or staying

in one place is external. My service is not traveling but writing. Therefore, I find my real satisfaction there. The travel may augment my writing because it provides interesting data upon which I can report. That data, however, may also reveal the outer struggle for survival which is not the deepest aspect of spiritual life. Therefore, I say I am writing to find my purpose—"determination, resolve."

5 A.M.

Read some of the diary I kept while traveling in 1994. I had headaches (one lasted over twenty-four hours while en route to Belgium), but I continued traveling. There were benefits to that. Traveling gives you a fresh view of yourself and breaks any attachment you may feel to a particular place in this world. "Writing while traveling is an adventure because I never know what is about to happen . . . I always try to find snatches of time to write a few sentences during pit-stops. . . . Writing like that prompts the rapid, fragmented sentences that allow me to say things I might otherwise pass up. . . . Ironically, travel provides plenty of opportunity to think. . . . We spend a lot of time coping with being unsettled and pushed beyond our usual hours. Those factors make you look at things more clearly. . . . You know when you get to where you are going, you'll be a new person."

Reading that and remembering the experience of it inspires me to go forward. Still, if *prakṛti* slams me too hard, I'll have to be carried off the battlefield as Pradyumna was carried off to safety by his chariot driver. Not "like Pradyumna," but you know what I mean. An ant crawls.

10:20 A.M.

It's cold today, with a chilly wind blowing over and ruffling the surface of the lake. I'll go over to the island at noon. Feeling the cold, however, and looking at that green

island, reminds me that there is no paradise on earth. All we can do is take shelter in Kṛṣṇa. I have just finished reading the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and now I am ready to read something else. I looked at a few books—translations of verses by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī—but they have no purports. Shall I reenter the spotless *Purāṇa*? Not yet. I'm still too much under the influence of Lord Caitanya's pastimes. Since the new editions have just been published and their print is so pleasing to read, I'll browse through various chapters of the Cc., not sequentially, but according to my interest. Today I looked at the sections about Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in *Madhya* 8 and *Ādi* 4.

Train of thought while lying in bed at noon: I thought about my headaches and how they are not life-threatening. Then I thought about the poet Jane Kenyon, who was told she had leukemia and died within a year. Then I wondered what I would do if I were told I had only a year to live. Of course, I would want to go to Vṛndāvana, but perhaps I would first go to America. I'm not sure what I would do there, but I would probably visit some devotees and see Gītā-nāgarī's Rādhā-Dāmodara for the last time. Then on to Vṛndāvana.

Well, isn't this the end of my life? Whether I realize it or not, time is running out. What should I do? Thinking this suddenly made me think I shouldn't travel but stay right here to read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and write in a relaxed way. This place provides a perfect opportunity to live a hermit-like life because there's not only a temple nearby and devotees, but peace and quiet too. Surely traveling around and deepening affectionate relationships with other devotees would not be as important to me as this.

September 21

9:00 A.M.

Here we go again. Earlier this morning I thought, “Let me stay here in Manu’s house. I’ll build up my reading and writing and if we decide to travel, we can take a plane. I don’t want to be pushed into that claustrophobic van, bumping over the roads for days and days.”

Then I started reading *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and pausing to ask for the Lord’s mercy that I may accept Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *ācāryas* as absolute guides. As I prayed, a little desire popped up to go again by van and explore the Italian temples. October will be a pleasant month in that southern climate, and we can take our time. But what about the claustrophobia? Well, the body can get used to anything. Maybe I should go outside and look at the van to see if I can feel friendly toward it. Everything depends on attitude.

September 22

The further question is, how much am I capable of studying, reading *śāstra*, and deepening my conviction and ability to convey this to others? What is the best way to live to bring this about? We could say, “A life in *sattva-guṇa*,” but we are trying to transcend material goodness. Staying in one place might make me stagnant and dull rather than transcendental to the mode of goodness. Van travel may seem more passionate and less settled, but does it facilitate my rising above the modes?

Accept the austerities and inconveniences of at least part-time travel. Yesterday I admitted to Madhu that the reduced living space in this new van is a serious factor in my reluctance to live in it.

I also got a letter from Manu encouraging me to make writing my prime purpose while traveling. He suggests I give it the best hour each day. I plan to do that. He says he likes it best when I write for myself and not merely as a reporter. Manu’s appreciation demands that I give my best to writing. Unless I do, the writing will be sparse and not driven by innermost needs.

Manu commented that the van looks too small and confining. He’s the third person to say that. I passed his comment on to Madhu, but he didn’t reply. He will probably say that I *can* live and be happy in that closet space he has so

lovingly prepared for me. There's heat, light, books, desk, toilet—but it is tiny and the bed is not even six feet long. I am feeling more game to try and make it work. Maybe the intensity of the small space will help me to concentrate on writing. Obviously I'll have to get out to stretch my legs and walk and chant—but if it's cold and rainy out there?

September 23

Writer's cramp. Crampers write. The van is too small, the poems lack core. Mortal, the mortal. We can die in a road accident or on a sinking ferry. Or we can die while sitting at home. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Best to make whatever you are doing devotional.

Why am I traveling? I don't think I can *always* stay in one place. Travel is not really bad for my creative life or my inner life. I fulfill my obligations by visiting temples, especially where I have disciples, and speaking the *Bhāgavatam*. This is certainly a reason to travel.

And travel produces a different kind of writing. I am staying in one place now, but I have no compelling writing project. Getting out will get my pen moving. All the usual devotional service considerations are refracted in the light of travel pressure. As Manu put it, "The inner man has to encounter external stimuli and that is a sort of adventure of its own."

3:20 P.M. *Shed*

I have nothing to say. My little life seems inconsequential and not worth reporting. I did continue to read of the great devotees on the branches of the Caitanya tree, and the day continued to dwindle. Mid-morning I spent my time worshiping Prabhupāda with massage and bath and

fresh towels and clothes. Of course, beyond my little sphere so many things are going on in ISKCON and in the vast material world(s). I don't report them because I don't know of them directly.

September 30

6 A.M. *Manu's house, Geaglum,
just over the lake from Govinda-dvīpa (Inis Rath ISKCON)*

I'd like to make this as spiritual and as truthful as possible. Oscar Wilde said that the first duty in life is to strike a pose, and no one has figured out yet what the second duty is. That's Wilde's cynicism. I don't accept it. I believe there is sincerity under pose, although it's true that it's hard to find.

Another worldly pundit said, "Anyone who is afraid of corruption is afraid of life." I reject that statement too. Or, I'll admit that I'm afraid of hellish life. Therefore, I seek the straight path (which sometimes winds) of *bhakti*. I'll admit my corruption and not be afraid of it. Neither will I indulge in it. Lord Kṛṣṇa states, "After attaining Me, the great souls, who are *yogīs* in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection." (Bg. 8.15)

That's the goal, and our spiritual master calls it possible. He says we can attain it by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and following the devotional process in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

10:20 A.M. *Belfast ISKCON*

Backyard. Electric hookup. Broken windows in house. Girls look happy to see me, my spiritual daughters, me old

and in that mood. Nitāi also happy in his way, like me, struggling along with an infirm body. These are special people, the handful who live in this temple. Rādhā-Mādhava. Her hand blessing us, wide open.

Now I have to learn how things work in the back of the van. I have already learned that if I move the wrong way, something will collapse or break or catch on my clothes. I have also learned to keep what I need out in accessible bins and not in the deep one upon which I sit. I am already learning to be tolerant. I especially want to live centered on the deity. If Prabhupāda can ride all the time it would be great. I'll surrender to him, my secret, private deity, and I won't let anyone know how much he means to me. I will center my life on serving him, clinging to him. I have no deeper purpose in life than this. On the externals, I'll travel, lecture, deal with my health—nothing so wonderful. I won't complain except about my search for the drive or the deep mission.

I wonder where Fergus has been. He wants to know where *I* have been. Madhu and Fergus laughing and talking outside the van. My world is separated from theirs only by a thin, tin wall. This is nothing like Manu's house on Geaglum Quay. Oh, that's a nice place. You can sit and look at the lake and watch devotees row across or see the big pleasure boats and be detached from it all. The nearest town is Lisnaskea, which I still can't pronounce quickly. It's a small town a half-hour drive from Geaglum. Śrīla Prabhupāda is our tangible shelter and I can already see that I am closer to him here than in other places. He is more dominant in this "room."

6 P.M.

Spoke at the temple about going back to Godhead and how we should strive for it. Gopī-mañjarī dāsī announced

that she doesn't have faith in the destination or her ability to reach it. I encouraged her: she does have faith, but she may also have doubts. I spoke for an hour and a half and tried to be encouraging. The *ācāryas* are lenient and the guru will free his disciples from birth and death. They listened. One said, "I can't pay the price. I become discouraged when I hear that we're supposed to be detached." I told him to do what he wants but to offer it to Kṛṣṇa. We can't be afraid of renunciation because we will have to renounce at death. I spoke all the truisms, you could say. *Utsāhān niścayād dhairyāt . . .*

Then I came out and Madhu told me that he saw some twelve-year-old kids trying to break into Gobhaṭa's car. When they saw Madhu they ran away. We had better keep our van locked. I was beginning to feel the euphoria of life in our little van world with all the devotional amenities and facilities—heat, water, Prabhupāda's books, Prabhupāda's tapes, the tape recorders, dictaphones, pens, pads, and of course, the Prabhupāda *mūrti*. A thief could clean us out in about two minutes. I doubt he'd take the books or tapes, though, but I imagine he would smash the *mūrti*. It put my euphoria in perspective. As if I can live a peaceful, floating life above the highways and cops and robbers and too cold weather. As if we can find peace and quiet parked near a temple while I walk in to discuss the philosophy with disciples who don't challenge.

The kids sobered me and I thought, "Heed your own words. Death will come to each of us. This world is miserable. We have no choice but to face that misery in various ways."

Tomorrow's verse is about Vidura telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra that he is toothless and that his liver doesn't function, yet he is hanging on, humiliated, in Yudhiṣṭhira's care. Vidura came to rescue him and lift him out for spiritual life and renunciation.

Thank you for gathering and hearing, dear disciples, my back to Godhead message. Now go for it. If you do not achieve it in this lifetime, build your devotional assets. Our future is brilliant.

Such words come out of me, things I've heard, and I'm a competent speaker, but where is my heart? Where is my ounce of devotion to the holy name or the *arcā-vigraha*?

She said, "What can we expect in Kali-yuga?" Yes, when there are no trees, a castor tree looks big. Still, the *ācāryas* have adjusted the practice to suit we who are born in the age of Kali. All we have to do is strive for the goal and to be achievers. Be devotees who sincerely try to perfect our lives. We have limits, but we can still try.

October 1, 1996

1:06 A.M.

I didn't get up at midnight. Felt too cold and my mind said I needed my rest because I had to give class again this morning. Life will be different now than when I was staying on my own at Geaglum. In my mind, I saw the faces of disciples I met last night and whom I will meet again this morning, and I felt the pull between wanting to be alone and wanting to serve them. The words I spoke last night bond us together: I am obligated to help my disciples free themselves from the cycle of birth and death. We are all obligated to perfect our lives in order to go back to Godhead. Obligated.

We can't escape the grip of time. Don't live like Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He sacrificed his dignity just to get scraps of food and a residence. Better to die serving Kṛṣṇa fully. Death is inevitable anyway, so why risk our spiritual lives? If anything should be risked, risk matter and stay secure in spiritual life. When we travel in the van, we risk theft and untimely death. But death is inevitable. It's not that by staying home we won't die. Prabhupāda said he wanted to die on the battlefield. He left home at seventy and took all kinds of risks. When he was eighty-two, he said, "Bury me on the roof of the Manhattan temple." Kṛṣṇa arranged that

he leave from Vṛndāvana. “These days are my last days,” he said to me and a few others one morning.

This is the game. I get up a little later than usual because I don’t want to risk a headache too early in the day. Got to give the *Bhāgavatam* class. Last night when I looked at today’s *Bhāgavatam* verse, I felt happy and privileged to be able to speak on it. It’s a substantial section of the *Bhāgavatam*, Vidura’s cutting words to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in his shameless old age. “Get out at once! Your teeth are loose, your liver doesn’t work properly, your body is filled with mucus. These are signs of the end. Get out and make a last-minute attempt to save your soul.”

In my class, I’ll quote *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.1, which describes how real *sannyāsa* is to act for Kṛṣṇa, not for self-interest. And as Lord Caitanya quoted the Avanti *brāhmaṇa*: *etāṁ sa āsthāya parātma-niṣṭhām*. *Sannyāsa* is not merely the adoption of saffron dress, but service to Mukunda. How to serve Mukunda? There are many ways.

O Lord, O energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service. Dreamt of Girirāja and a few others playing basketball. They would quote Christ’s sayings as they played because they were helpful in perfecting the sport. I watched but didn’t participate, and they ignored me. I was left out. How did I get left out? In one scene I was with a similar group, jogging in shorts through the village of Great Kills. We came upon the short, wiry, Italian barber of my childhood. He said, “Oh, you’re all out jogging? You are really stripped down.” Yes, we were, and I was also glad to be seen as a jogger among the others.

Do the Real Thing. Join the “in” crowd. Don’t get left out.

But, if the “in” crowd is doing something different than your own path in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, don’t go along with it.

I am a mine of good advice. I think of beneficial things Prabhupāda said and pass them on. It's a role I play, but I don't resent it.

Have to go now and chant because it gets harder to chant later. It's *always* hard. Dear Lord, You have invested all Your energies in Your holy names. Please allow me to pray to You through my chanting. This is the dispensation you gave for those of us born in Kali-yuga. I don't have to invent my own dispensation. Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda have presented us with this system that is "eighty percent lenient."

Okay, Smith. I ask for things and they bring them—vitamins, Tylenol, sponges—and although I didn't ask for them, they brought cookies and tea after the lecture last night. I don't want to be like Dhṛtarāṣṭra who was humiliated at the end of his life just to receive his room and board. A *sannyāsī* should serve Mukunda. Prabhupāda wanted us (me) to preach. Reading and writing is good for that.

9:30 A.M.

I told Madhu I'd like to talk with him about Art and Literature. He said he has to go to the hardware store to get something so we can strap Prabhupāda into the van. We want him to be able to ride on his *vyāsāsana* rather than packed away in his box. What is it I wanted to say? What is Art? What is Literature? Whatever expression they take, they should invoke remembrance of Kṛṣṇa.

When you lecture so often, you find yourself defending the conservative position, ISKCON and the *sampradāya*. It happens to anyone who sits on the *vyāsāsana* long enough. The audience pumps you for opinions. One devotee asked why Prabhupāda gave *sannyāsa* to so many young men, who later fell down. Another devotee asked why ISKCON

can't supply husbands and jobs. I defend ISKCON. I would not have to do this so stringently if I didn't lecture so often. Someone else said that reading psychology has helped him. "Be careful," I say. "Freud was against religion."

Okay, so what? So you want to be alone to write. We all know that. But prepare for the next class. Vidura told Dhṛtarāṣṭra not to compromise himself just to get his room and board. I spoke against Dhṛtarāṣṭra's mentality, but how could I dare? I, as much as anyone, want shelter and my meals on time, leisure. I am privileged to get these things in a Kṛṣṇa conscious environment, so I shouldn't criticize those who may be forced to live in less than ideal circumstances. Don't criticize young women who want husbands and wonder why ISKCON doesn't supply them, or old people who can't pay their medical bills and who express that anxiety. Don't be such a conservative holder-of-the-line if you don't know what everyone is going through.

I am going through headaches, my right of passage. In his old age, Beethoven was absorbed in composing string quartets. Nothing God conscious, although he left the world his music. Where did he go next life? What do *I* want?

2:55 P.M.

Late morning: I found a note on the dashboard of the van for Madhu. It said, "Give 'em hell, Madhu!" Attached to it was a long harangue attacking the *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*. Same logic as the one written over ten years ago. They say I have committed an offense by saying that Prabhupāda was tired, that he dozed, that he was afraid. They say he had a spiritual body and did not feel human emotions. When he was gored by a cow, I should have said he felt transcendental ecstasy, not that he felt pain.

I admit I made mistakes in daring to describe Śrīla Prabhupāda's condition, but I consider these mistakes like

pockmarks on the moon. Prabhupāda, please forgive me. *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* has preached mightily all over the world. Even if they don't reprint it, it has done its job. Still, the attack depressed me.

My right eye began flashing a signal, so I dropped that mood and began to think of returning to Geaglum. Described it this way in my medical log:

We've arrived in Belfast to start our two-and-a-half months of life in van. But I'm getting headaches every day, at least one in the morning and one later in the day. I initially felt enthusiastic to start the tour. The back of the van is a self-contained world and the writing can catch the adventures. But the pressure of being parked at a temple and having to give classes may increase headache frequency. Madhu says I should take as many pills as required, but I can't take four a day every day. That would be too much; would cause addiction. It may be better to lead a quiet life that will keep headaches down and allow me to take rest by 5 p.m. if I like. It would be a stepping down to return to Geaglum, but I'm sure I could get back into a reading and writing pace.

I told Madhu and he accepts it. Then I took a nap, and on rising thought, "Let's not quit. Let's keep going." Right now the headache sign flashes off and on. Maybe take three pills a day if I need to.

Every time we go in and out of the van, we have to press the button on our portable alarm device. *But Madhu keeps forgetting* and the siren goes off! I'm very sensitive to that noise. I feel like we are disturbing the neighbors in this residential area. Again and again he forgets, and the siren screams for five or ten seconds until he reaches for the button. This in itself seems almost like a reason to go back into "retirement." But no, I'm feeling differently already.

5:56 P.M. Night Notes

In the eighth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* near the end, Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches that the *bhaktas* don't worry about leaving the body at auspicious or inauspicious times. They simply remain engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service. If they leave their bodies in an accident or during the dark moon or whatever, it doesn't matter. The crucial point is that they serve Kṛṣṇa continuously. We could die at any moment. Therefore, we can think about that if we have decided to take a nondevotional interlude or to flirt with *māyā*. We may think the interlude harmless—"This is just a little non-Kṛṣṇa conscious interlude, but I'll get back on track"—but we may die during that time. If we do something that appears at all questionable, we had better have a devotional motivation behind it. I told a devotee to pray at the beginning of each Twelve Step meeting, "Dear Lord, let me use this to become a better devotee."

O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, may You bless us all.

He is a miser who quits the body without having gained self-realization (knowledge that one is eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa). Tomorrow morning's *Bhāgavatam* verse is Vidura giving more sauce to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He asks him why he is clinging to sense gratification when his body is destined to wear out like an old garment. Eighty percent of his life has already been wasted. Vidura tries to save him at the end and he is successful.

October 2

2:30 A.M.

As soon as I lay down to rest at 7 P.M., I started hearing explosive thuds every one or two minutes. I couldn't sleep. Madhu had left me alone in the van to go make phone calls inside the temple. Twice the explosions were so near that it sounded as if something had hit the van. I began to fantasize about the noises and became anxious. I didn't like being alone. I dressed and went to get Madhu. It turned out that kids were throwing fireworks over the wall. The temple president phoned the police but said, "They aren't helpful." Around 8:45 P.M., a firecracker (or explosive) hit the van with such force that it set off our alarm. Madhu dressed and went outside, but couldn't find the culprit. During this time, I again began to think of returning to Geaglum. I'm not fit for all the risk and irregularity. A headache fog began, but the neighborhood finally quieted down. At 1:15 A.M. I took a pill and got up at 2:15 A.M. to chant.

During the night, I also thought of today's *Bhāgavatam* verse. Vidura tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra not to stay home but to get out. Take the risk to save yourself. I was prepared to tell the devotees that we have to tolerate and not compromise our lives in favor of material comfort. This is especially relevant right now as I try to decide whether or not to continue with our tour. Why has Kṛṣṇa given me this verse just when I'm thinking of "staying home"? To push ahead and travel is becoming a symbol of sacrifice. Still, I'm not com-

pletely convinced that it's the best thing I can do in Kṛṣṇa consciousness or that my travel is so important.

During my anxiety last night, I felt hurt by the attack on the *Līlāmṛta*. It's just another shaft along with all the others. No self-pity in my saying this, but admitting that people attack and that's the way it is.

Dream: devotees were cultivating a wealthy man who was favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness but who was more interested in Buddhism and other more liberal sects. This man wrote an autobiography, *Light on Sin and Rich*. We figured that "light on sin" had two meanings: that he was not very sinful, and that because he preferred New Age philosophies, he would rather practice a religion that didn't judge our activities as sinful.

Upon waking I wondered if the title of this book was my own story, *Light on Sin*? I am rich because I have received Kṛṣṇa consciousness from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Am I guilty of being too light on my own sinfulness?

11:25 A.M.

Madhu is due to arrive with Bhūrijana Prabhu from the airport at any moment. I made some notes in my notebook about what I hope to write in October, and I expressed some restlessness. I want to write something beyond travel data and my attempts to cope with health. Although that data is full of the action of my life, why aren't I satisfied with it? Perhaps I should not look restlessly for new art forms. Maybe I should just write what comes out of who I am and what is. If I am about to enter a new phase, it will come of its own accord. Trust the process. Anyway, trust or not, I have no alternative.

This morning I ran out of steam in my lecture after about fifteen minutes. Couldn't think of anything else to say, so

asked, “Are there any questions?” There were, and that gave me a second wind. Similarly, I may feel that my little life on the road, although it is worth reporting, is not enough. Then do freer writing and get a second wind and more.

Bhūrijana, brother, you’ve kindly come here to see me. We both have hurts from ISKCON, but we both want to serve in ISKCON. I won’t write about what we talked about in confidence.

I will write that we sat in chairs in the morning sunshine on the backyard lawn. The air was chilly, and vapor puffed with your breath. But you were dressed warmly enough and the sunshine was strong. Brown leaves on ground—the first I’ve noticed this year.

“What do you do to tackle material attachments?” Keśava dāsī asked. She said if we try to cut them off all at once, we may “freak out.” She hinted that maybe it’s better to pursue positive spiritual desires. Yes, *ānanda* is the basis of everything. Find enthusiasm in service and it will replace material desires. Those desires, however, may stay on for awhile. They are our “old friends”—anger, fear, faultfinding—and our versions of them are particular to us.

I think I again advocated the usual preaching points in a way that comes naturally to me when I speak from the *vyāsāsana* but which I find hackneyed. Writing is freer and more honest, it seems.

October 3

2:07 A.M.

Took rest and slept from 7 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. Then awakened by firecrackers just as I was dreaming that my father was being beaten up. As I heard the nearby explosions (which I took as a token of real bombings people have to live through), I thought again that I don't want to travel. I called M. and we spoke about it until 10 P.M. I'll write more about it later.

We did commit to travel at least as far as England. We're scheduled to leave by ferry tonight. I also resolved to write as much as possible while on the road. I taped this note to the wall: "I think in October you should write as much as possible as your first priority, handwritten free-writes, typed pages, poems if possible. (Your reading can be prayerful *Bhagavad-gītā* and to prepare temple lectures, etc.) But don't feel guilty to spend major time writing. It will justify your travels, although many well-wishers think you are too ill to travel."

Sometimes we have the tendency to analyze how many of the things that have gone wrong in ISKCON were arranged or originally set in motion by Śrīla Prabhupāda. We are dedicated to Prabhupāda, but we can't always help this analysis. Then we have to learn to appreciate that Prabhupāda worked under such difficult conditions to do his

utmost to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Regardless of the details, his motive was perfect and his absorption complete. Then, out of what could begin to approach offense, we can actually deepen our affection for Prabhupāda.

12:03 P.M.

Always fragile, hovering between old headache, interim clear, and new one. Pain doesn't seem to mount as high as usual, but I'm never actually clear of pain for long.

Bhūrījāna Prabhu is flying off to America today. We spent some good time together in nice exchanges between friends. We spoke of old days in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He quoted an early Bob Dylan song about old friends gathering: "Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat/ I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that."

Before I leave, I want to meet with disciples here at least briefly. I would like to ask Gopī-mañjarī dāsī how the college preaching is going and express my admiration of her service quality and the inconveniences she tolerates in doing management work. I would like to commiserate with Śyāmā dāsī's back pain and anxieties, and speak to Nitāi-Śacīnandana dāsa, a humble *brahmacārī*. There's no time left though, but maybe I can squeeze in at least a few minutes. It will mean a lot to me and maybe to them also.

We are booked to travel. M. pointed out that the big defect in returning to Geaglum is that we have been living there on a "honeymoon" status. That clicked. You can't go home again. It would be better to travel and to do my ISKCON duty. I imagined Prabhupāda saying to me, "It's all right that you spend so much time alone writing and reading my books. I understand that devotees like your books. But don't get yourself into trouble." I will heed that warning. And health is health at home or on the road.

I'm also feeling a growing attachment, in a nice way, to the affectionate exchanges between me and my disciples.

Vāṇī is fine, even best, but we also want to see each other. Both are required. Give it while I can.

I hope to rid myself of pride and especially faultfinding. Give credit to super-managers and bold, front-line preachers, even though I am not one. Assert your own preaching place in the movement. With fear and trembling, present your offering at guru's feet, your little piece placed into the mosaic. I think Bhūrījāna Prabhu understood me. I admire his deep study and analysis of the *Bhāgavatam*, although I can't do that myself. Just hearing how he reads each Canto three times—first the verses “for the story line,” then making notes and an overview, then again to tie it all together—made me want to go back to Cc. and read only the verses and then later the verses with purports. I think I'll try it from the beginning of *Madhya-līlā*.

4 P.M.

Last hour before leaving the Belfast temple. We are not driving back to Geaglum, but onward. Thank God for this blessing.

Look at Cc. verses. Lord Caitanya in Jagannātha Purī. Rūpa Gosvāmī understanding the confidential verse the Lord sang during Ratha-yātrā and composing one of his own. He knew the Lord's mind because the Lord had empowered him.

Learn to write as I travel. Afraid to die, to sink at sea or be smashed on the road—to die in a situation beyond my control. Think of the sincere devotees serving in the Belfast temple and with whom I just spoke: Gopī-mañjarī, Śyāmā, and Nitāi. They each came to the back of the van and stood outside while I sat inside and expressed what I could. Our exchange was both realistic and sincere. I told them I preach to them by chanting, writing, and reading so that when I ask them to surrender, it won't be hypocritical.

I asked Bhūrijana Prabhu how doing what we want is the same as pleasing Kṛṣṇa. We discussed it for awhile. He said that the disciple's duty is to completely surrender to the guru and then the spiritual master will engage him according to his nature. Also, he said if we inevitably (especially as we age) do what we like to do in devotional service, then we must try to render it in a way that pleases Kṛṣṇa. We were trying to reconcile doing what you want for Kṛṣṇa with doing what Kṛṣṇa wants. Bhūrijana Prabhu said that even Arjuna was asked to surrender to Kṛṣṇa as a *kṣatriya*, to fight, which was his nature.

I said that I'm so intent on my choice of service that I must try to purify it, increase it, and improve it. We can know if our service is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa by the fruit it bears. For example, if it increases the preaching and if it pleases the Vaiṣṇavas.

I said I was no longer leaving myself open to be redirected by my peers according to what they might think Kṛṣṇa wants me to do. I must please Śrīla Prabhupāda according to my own heart's understanding. The die is already cast. Besides, my health limits me. I am not a manager by nature. I cannot overcome my reluctance to confront people and my nonassertive nature. Therefore, I serve accordingly. We discuss these things in humility and confidence.

Departure:

Lord, let me endure the pains and inconveniences by remembering You and Your mercy. I pray to Lord Nṛsimha for protection from demons. I can't expect the Lord to cushion our path. Nor does a pure devotee pray for ease. Queen Kuntī prays to remember Him even in distress.

I do ask for courage to keep up our little tour and to preach His message. We are underway, so let's do it. May I

write a lot and keep it serious and joyful as it comes. May the *śāstra* direct our way.

American van, but still just a thin, tin membrane keeping us from the outer world. Nothing solid in this world. Pray. Do I know how? Does travel inspire prayer? Prayer is inside. I implore and intone His names, invoke His presence, Kṛṣṇa.

We're ready to go.

Not forever on *these* roads

but for now.

Gaura-Govinda Mahārāja has

gone to claim his spiritual reward.

I and Harikeśa Mahārāja and every one of us

must follow in a file

or in a group to

regroup in future lives.

"I want to live as simply as possible and make as much progress in this lifetime as I can," Nitāi said. He plans to keep his life simple; practice *brahmacarya*. Me too. Don't pick up clutter. Eat what you are given.

5:40 P.M.

We weigh 3.7 tons, which is quite a lot for a van of this size, especially in Europe. But we're American, you see. We're sailing on the Norse Irish Line, a big boat that usually carries freight. We sail all night, past the Isle of Man. What more to say? Hare Kṛṣṇa.

"How's your head?"

"I'm feeling a fog" (otherwise known as a vise).

"Because this is your time—to get out your notebook." He's jolly to encourage me and I appreciate it. The Lord smoothes our way and we shouldn't take it for granted. Just because God is kind doesn't mean He owes us a living.

B. said that he may tend to take for granted the astounding fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda saved him, because it's been almost twenty years since he disappeared. Yes, it's good to remember and praise him. I agree.

As we left the temple, the temple president stood at the door. I said, "I'm sorry I couldn't do more."

She said she was sorry about the noise (the fireworks).

"That's your . . . lot," I said.

"We're used to it." Then I saw the holes in the windows. I think of that now, how we get used to things. I'd get used to it too if I lived there.

October 4

On a boat to Liverpool. Did physical exercises while the boat rocked. Oh, hold us up, please. Be quiet, people. Life, go smoothly. Thought when I meet disciples at Gurudakṣiṇā's house, I may speak on how I don't order them in an absolute way what to do in terms of vocation or service. *Yat karoṣi*. Find out what you want to do and do it for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure. *Yat karoṣi* is not pure *bhakti*, but how else can we come to the stage of pure *bhakti* except by enacting our desires in devotional service? But the desires should be authorized by the spiritual master, and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and following the four rules is essential. Of course, the guru can't force his disciple to do those things. Impress this on them.

The boat engine is making a new noise. Slowing down? I can't tell.

Do you want to write first thoughts? Kṛṣṇa in the center. Go beyond the body. Chant mantras again and again, one round every eight minutes or so. The Lord is the supreme goal.

"I don't believe it," she said.

Increase your *śraddhā*. It's an obstacle, your doubt. Told her what to do—stay away from doubters, briefly debate and defeat the ones in your own mind.

Got to keep ahead of them (disciples) and be on my own bona fide path.

It's still possible that after England we could go back to Geaglum or somewhere else to retire for awhile. This for several reasons: (1) too much strain on health—the whole effort to avoid headaches by pills will be spent on the morning program; (2) on my own I form a relaxed and solitary schedule which enables me to do more reading in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I was thinking of that combination "writing while reading" which I did recently in *Cc. Āśraya*. Could do it as *Bhāgavata Āśraya*. It might be the most congenial writing and living for me. Just relax into it. I started *Cc. Āśraya* in a relaxed way, freely mixing *Cc.* with freer writing. Then it became performance oriented, and I found myself writing more purport glosses and striving to finish reading the chapters in the two or three weeks I had left there. Anyway, I could write and read if I can find the right environment.

10:30 A.M.

Back of the van while speeding

I was thinking of Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata." Why am I remembering it? I was pondering what made great art. I was also looking for inspiration in my own attempts to make Kṛṣṇa conscious art.

We tend to think that classical Western art is great, but it has no Kṛṣṇa conscious vibration to it. How can Beethoven's music be beyond the music of a simple Bengali chant? Why, then, do we hanker for artistry? Is it possible to inject our Kṛṣṇa conscious *bhajana* with more musicality?

Thinking of Beethoven made me think of Gandharvas sawing expertly on the equivalent of violins and intoxicating demigod audiences with their art. Or of the illustration depicting the beautiful Apsarās, accompanied by Gandharvas, who came to tempt Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi. This type of music is designed to make us forget austerity and the spiritual path. That's not the kind of music we want.

We should be careful not to be naive and to walk into things when we don't understand all the implications. For example, we might think that the "be here now" mood of Zen is nice and then suddenly find ourselves wading through an ocean of *nirviśeṣa-sūnyavādī* philosophy. We have to be careful not to walk into big areas of *māyā* without realizing what we are doing. *Māyā* will capture us again and our ignorance will prove no excuse. At the same time, is it possible to see great artistic expression and claim it as territory for Kṛṣṇa? It's difficult because sometimes we are trapped by our self-created stereotypes. We may have to explode more and enter our own honest expression.

Bhūrījāna Prabhu brought up that crucial question: "If we do what we want to do for Kṛṣṇa, how is that pure devotional service? Pure devotional service is to do what pleases Kṛṣṇa, not just what pleases ourselves."

I thought of something today to add to that discussion. That is, if I allow myself to fully express and explore myself, then that would please Kṛṣṇa. It would please Kṛṣṇa in that I had totally surrendered everything to Him. I had dared to find *all* the interests within myself and maintained the confidence that Kṛṣṇa would somehow guide me to render everything as loving service to Him. In this way, I could outdo the ordinary, run-of-the-mill presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

But I also realize the danger. We shouldn't be proud or try to do something beyond what the *ācāryas* have done. We should be content with humble—and standard—service. Nevertheless, cooks want to prepare tasty preparations for Kṛṣṇa and for preaching. They want to "knock their socks off!" Sadāpūta Prabhu "knocked their socks off" with a national TV show blasting the scientists. A thousand enraged scientists wrote in, and five thousand books

were ordered by the audience. That's not done by run-of-the-mill thinking.

Well, Prabhu, if it's stimulation you want, why not do something illicit?

Well said, staid gremlin. I hear you and your cautionary words, but of course you must know that there are other ways to stimulate the self.

Why stimulate it at all? Just serve your guru and do what he says.

Aye-aye sir. (The gob clumsily salutes his temple authority.)

"Request permission to go ashore, sir."

"Permission granted, but be back by midnight or you'll be turned into a pumpkin."

Guru-dakṣiṇā's house, London

We can't leave England with a broken exhaust pipe. Got to stay over to get it fixed. Poor M., runnin' around, trying to get someone to service our brave and sleek Econoline.

Rather die in St. Louis
parked in front of a temple.

During the night someone comes and bothers us—or worse—as we try to sleep in our van.

Deep waves at sea last night, but nothing too rough. Still, it was different than land.

I have an outline of Big Questions for the disciples' meeting tomorrow and I, I shall answer them as best I can from my relative position on the couch or floor-cushion:

(1) "As spiritual master, are you absolute or relative in your disciples' lives?"

(2) "As spiritual master, are you fit? Are you a pure devotee?"

(3) "If I do what I want for Kṛṣṇa, how do I know it's what pleases Him?"

I is alive. Wert newt boss angel
sob cast off Oliver Twist inner
city slob belly in backyard London accent—I hear them
all rising up to this third-floor attic. Madhu says that in
England it's smart to have a London accent and that even
devotees have them.

October 5

Dreamt of American politics. A third political candidate, James MacNamara of the “British” party, won the Presidency, an upset against the favorites. People were on the street, each one playing some role as a political figure or constituency member, talking back and forth—electoral madness. I was there, not taking part, but eager to hear the news. I was affected by it. I could no longer use the same bus stop because new people had gathered there since the elections. Jayādvaita Swami came up behind me late in the dream and asked who had won. I told him. At one point in the last hours before the votes were counted, Bill Clinton and MacNamara staged a fist fight and Clinton lost. What really made Clinton lose the election, however, was his apparent softness toward the IRA.

When I awoke I thought, “Ugh.” I felt the same disgust while I was dreaming. Then I thought of the outline I had written for the disciples’ meeting and it seemed too “political.” Too much analysis of our relationship and particularly of the question, “Am I absolute in my disciples’ lives?” I decided to read about Lord Caitanya’s pastimes instead.

I decided to start my lecture with a quote from Oscar Wilde: “The first duty in life is to strike a pose, and no one has figured out yet what the second duty is.” I take this

statement as a challenge. Wilde makes jokes by scandalizing standard morality; he often exposes the shallowness and hypocrisy of middle-class decency by his cynicism. *Is* there sincerity of purpose beneath the poses we each adopt to cope in this world? Is *anyone* earnest? I say yes.

We'll also discuss duty (Wilde says pose is the only duty). I'll cite Mahārāja Parīkṣit asking Śukadeva about the duty of one who is about to die. He wasn't posing, "I'm going to die, so I'll look good by asking a few philosophical questions." He was sincere. When Sanātana Gosvāmī approached Lord Caitanya at Benares, he said, "Now that You have delivered me from the material world, what is my duty?" Then there is Arjuna's duty as Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted him to understand it. His duty was to fight in devotion. Then I'll talk of guru's duty and disciple's duty.

O Hare Kṛṣṇa 12 rounds
of mantras, 12 rounds of
dryness. O Love, Love is
all, said Thérèse,
and I believe she's right—
Vaiṣṇavas say that too.

3:50 P.M.

I can't write anymore—feel like that. As soon as I begin again under the skylight in this London row house—snug, fed (a two-plate lunch and varied desserts—"You're spoiling me")—I meet up with obstacles. It can only continue like this for another day or two. M. promises we'll be off early tomorrow morning if he can get the exhaust pipe fixed today.

Did your lecture go all right this A.M.?

Yes, sir. There were fewer devotees than I expected. The number of interested disciples is dwindling. One phoned to

say he couldn't make it, but suggested I try head massage to relieve headaches. Another was told to come and said he would, but . . . smaller group is okay. I said what I could.

You mean you can't write, really can't write because of head pressure? Oh, don't worry about it. Allopathic medicine isn't the Devil, you know. We're trying to serve the Lord with our limited bodies, so more travel means more pills. Determination means writing in the back of the van even at 80 mph. (Madhu really goes when he gets the chance on an open road. No wonder he burns holes in the tailpipe.)

4:20 P.M.

Listen, Kṛṣṇa is the sound in ether. We have limited time. Go out singing His praises.

"May you write a billion books," my friend said in a jolly way. Music is often simple enough in its flowing and ordered way. Each instrument in an orchestra has its say and its role in combining the sounds that flowed from the pen of a deft composer. The Lord is present in sound. Did Ludwig van Beethoven know that? He was deaf, but we assume he heard the music in his head and heart.

She said, "I'm a head person, not a heart person," so logically decided that there was no future for her in marriage, sex, and children.

Good, go for it. ISKCON will have its day for female renunciates, and the *sannyāsīs* will grow ever more renounced.

Random thoughts. "You don't have to travel. You don't have to prove anything," my friend said to me. But I have my reasons why we travel to foreign countries.

"I know I'm conditioned, human," S. said. He said that when we first join ISKCON, we imagine we are *mahā-bhāgavatas*. Then we realize that we have not escaped our

human conditioning. He said they had been discussing this topic in committees.

Tomorrow we'll be examined by the Le Shuttle security. It won't be so bad. Just hold on to your pills and will. You'll out live 'em in your immortal flawed books.

God be with you
in Italy, my dear friend.
See you in Vicenza, another
Gaura-Nitāi house, arms upraised.

October 6

Lord Caitanya said, “Rūpa and Sanātana are your new names,” and He asked His associates to bless them. This was at Rāmakeli. In the author’s summary of *Madhya-līlā* I noticed how briefly Lord Caitanya stayed in Vṛndāvana. The reason given is that His ecstasy was so great, so churned up, that His servant Balabhadra feared for His life. He thought He might drown in the Yamunā or meet death in some other way. We can’t understand it, actually. Lord Caitanya, although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in one, stayed mostly in Purī as a *sannyāsī*. What does it mean? What am I trying to say?

Trying to understand.

Briefly we live and die.

We leave this house in less than four hours, and I should spend most of it in *japa* because I won’t find a peaceful place to chant later.

“I could have written better in another place. I might have read better there. For health, I could have rested better there.” Why bother my head with these thoughts now? I am dancing the travel dance now, so make the best of it. Madhu said that since I’m taking allopathic medicine, I might as well take enough to relieve my pain. I know I’ll get bad side effects, but I’m getting the side effects by

taking the medicine anyway, so why not get the good effect of sufficient pain relief?

Similarly, I am living in a way that I can write more. Why spoil it by holding back from writing? Be simple.

It's not that what I do is outstanding or great. I'm just a simple fellow making his small contribution. Professor Ward of Oxford reviewed *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*. He referred to my "human poverty." Yeah, poor Sats, El Poverino. Lord Caitanya said that He was not a rich man. He said He had only some fruits and flowers to distribute.

"As I get older, I get more conditioned," my Godbrother laughed, and his face lined with wrinkles. He means that he sees more clearly that he can't escape his New York origins and tendencies even while he aspires for pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Mister, this van is loaded with electronic goods. Don't bust us.

Oh, I'd bust you if I could, but you've got an alarm system and locks and bolts that make me hesitate.

A thief could steal my CD player. As I rose this morning and approached Śrīla Prabhupāda to hand him his dictaphone, I asked myself, "What do you love more, Prabhupāda or this new CD player? I am not a simple person like a Vṛndāvana *bābāji*."

Oh well, I am what I am. Life on the *auto-route*. The GBC said that we will ascend to *rāgānuga-bhakti* automatically while others argued that we have to have the desire. Whatever the path, stay at the lotus feet of your spiritual master.

Rūpa and Sanātana, please let me keep you and your meeting with Lord Caitanya at Rāmakeli in my mind's eye. I wish to beg for mercy as you did, with straws in your mouths, "We feel very much ashamed, standing here before You."

After that meeting, their material life was finished.

At tollgate for channel tunnel. Feeling light spirits of pre-dawn travel, awake through my sixteenth round. Don't anticipate trouble in passing over borders, under sea, into France, but it could be otherwise. Well, man, that's Kṛṣṇa's mercy any way you look at it. Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

"Only two of you, is it?"

Eighty-four pounds, is it? Thank you. Passports. Sunday morning.

Before 7 A.M. on a Sunday there's no security check by the British and no passport check by the French. Too early for that stuff. We roll smoothly forward, modern civilization so great and polite and people talking to us in British accents, wearing yellow fluorescent raincoats, as long as we have money.

Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting goes with us everywhere. M. turned to 76.3 FM for "Channel News." He said he wanted to brush up on his French but got a North Ireland station broadcasting in Irish. The disc jockey played "Govinda Jaya Jaya," a new hit record by Haley Mills' son.

Last words in the house before we left. Took role of mentor to one who was going to Vṛndāvana for Kārttika. Advised her not to over-socialize but to remember her inner purpose. "You don't go to Vṛndāvana for an outer purpose," I said, "but an inner purpose." What about going to Italy? Got an inner purpose? Yeah, that's what this writing is all about.

Golden rim of jagged dawn clouds. Down ramp and queue to drive onto the narrow train car. It's just a thin shell, and so is our van, and the skin encasing this body. The universal shells are thicker, and only Kṛṣṇa can protect us.

They prepared breakfast and lunch for us in separate boxes, but not for Prabhupāda. We asked them to make separate boxes for him. That happened at the last minute.

We want
to see him as a real person,
as real as ourselves.

10:20 A.M.

M. announced that we will drive for two more hours before we stop for lunch. We're on the *bonne route* heading into France. I have answered most of my mail and I am free and isolated right now. What is that freedom *for*? It's still hard to read and write in the moving van. M. said we could stay for the day at our lunch spot or continue. I don't mind much either way because bouncing around is my lot. I have no deeper inspiration right now. If I had time, a nice desk, and a good light (the back of the van is very dark because the back window is sealed with insulation; I have only a twelve-volt lamp), I'd go back to the beginning of *Madhya-līlā*. But we're still bouncing, stopping for petrol, and starting again on this beautiful October Sunday.

Oh, you wuz raised in two boroughs of New York City. I gave initiation in Prabhupāda's Samādhi Mandir one year and said, "Here's a Muslim girl from North Ireland." I was proud the devotees were from such different places around the world—Finland, China, Japan, Australia. Why expose all that? We come together as spirit souls.

But the conditioning remains.

My Godbrother and I in a pram, rolled by our mommies to Rādhā-Govinda Mandir. Not true. I'm trying to write while bouncing in rear of van, but the pen lifts up out of my control.

Kṛṣṇa was God before there was God (in any other religion).

I have always been a soul.

It's too late to rain.

I better hook on . . .

Be cautious, slow down, bed down, lone, clean celibate,
praise the *brahmacārīs* and householders too,
praise the okay KC movement,
its pennant in the breeze.

“He was away four weeks in Morocco preaching,”
his wife said.

This is all stuff in my head from letters I pass on to you.
In search of a fictive eye
a poem
a KC satisfaction.

You may have stopped committing sins, but you’ll get
the reaction to them later, in misery and pain. Devotional
service, however, wipes away all sins. It is *pavitram*, pure
and potent.

Yellow and blue flags. We’re parked in a large complex
that includes petrol station, restaurant, picnic tables, and
parking spots for cars and trucks. We could stay here safely
overnight, but M. may want to travel a little further. I’m
able, but wish I had more writing drive and shape. Lying in
the back I invite the Kṛṣṇa conscious muse and wait. Isn’t
it true that good writing for the devotees will come only
when I am enthusiastic about devotional life? I can’t fake
it. Or not for long.

Wind rushing through metal, rolling of tires—a music of
its own. Sounded like violins screeching and sighing an
outcast song.

We decided to drive for two more hours today and then
stop for the night. M. is wearing his new white sneakers,
which he says are safer for driving than his slide-off sandals.

Everything nice about lunch and travel so far, but the
purpose starts to lie a little heavily, emptily. I find the ques-
tions rising quietly inside me: “Why are we here? Where are

we going? What are we doing? Why this? Why go to Italy and temples? What can we add or gain there?" But a poor *sannyāsī* has to travel to seek God and to speak *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Certainly many other *sannyāsīs* and competent lecturers and surrendered devotees are also going this route.

The devotees in the temples know I'm not the best, and they know they are not the best either. Śrīla Prabhupāda sits on the *vyāsāsana*. He is the best, so tell us about him, of your love for him, about how you serve his mission.

How can we be tired of repeating the same teachings when someone raises their hand and asks a question with the sincere anxiety that troubles produce, willing to hear my realization—what can I say? "I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda's reply to this. He said—" He said chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, hear about Kṛṣṇa. *Su-sukham, Bhagavad-gītā* 9.2. Offer food to Kṛṣṇa, sing His praises, hear philosophical lectures. You mean *that*? That's the "joyful"? And spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Say those old standard lines
as long as I roll on still-good tires,
and can sit up straight,
and can mean them
even when they are translated into Italian.

5:30 P.M.

How is your health, pal?

I have a disease that I can't find satisfaction in brave preaching or sustained *bhajana*. Could go deeper though, by discipline, in Cc. (Told another disciple I wrote to that discipline simply means practice, like an Olympic athlete—but first you have to have serious purpose, and that's achieved by hearing in *śāstra*. Know the goal and go for it.)

But how are you doing after a long day of travel past Dijon, Nancy, Lyons, and all that?

I saw the red and white flag on a pole blowing out horizontally when the wind was strong. Life on the highway, trying to decipher safety signs in French, feeling fatigued, then seeing some sign for “*pneu*,” which I think has to do with tires. If your tires aren’t inflated enough, you could be in danger.

Coté d’Or. The sky is getting darker; that’s English-American. I forget who I was then, but the past lives on anyway. E. Leclerc is the name of the petrol station. Madhu is getting self-serve gas for our stove and heating system. I’m scratching here. Wishing. . . waiting.

It’s silly I know.

O E. Leclerc

it’s time you took your
second pill of the day.

“How is it riding back there?”

It’s dark but comfortable if you want to just lie back patiently, but I can’t read or write or hear tapes. I . . . should be in Vṛndāvana (Kārttika) or at a meeting to discuss *varṇāśrama*.

October 7

2:40 A.M.

Again I think of the classical composers and their lush, captivating sounds. They are composers and I am a composer. As I write, I can imagine I am composing pieces as they do. The German composers wrote pieces that followed a pattern. The first movement was slow, the second fast, the third slow, and the fourth fast. The pieces are usually no more than a half hour in length, with the movements anywhere from two to five minutes each. I have already said that I want to write in smaller writing sessions and it seems I don't have time while traveling (or because of headaches) for more than such small "movements." My "movements" are based on the time of day—"12:40 A.M."—and are basically diary free-writes, but maybe I can aim for more "music," poetry, more attention to the sound of words. Art in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is what I'm after.

I may write from a fictional persona, from the point of view of someone composing each writing session on the road or at a temple as a musical composition. A simple, crude starting idea. I think of Thomas Mann, who said that when he started writing a book, there appeared on his desk, as if beyond his control, a "magic circle" of a few books that became his inspiration or reference through his writing. I can think of Bach and Beethoven and derive

some inspiration from their creativity. Nondevotee music is sense gratification, and it can disturb or deviate us from our devotional lives—it's not pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness—but maybe I can use the composers' creative energy to spark my own and thus use it in Kṛṣṇa's service.

All of this is a little crude and undeveloped because I know nothing of classical music. Therefore, I have to create a fantasy, an imagination, that my free-writes are composed and then played on harpsichord and violin. Can you hear it?

Screech, screech.

He doesn't know what he's doing.

Oh, give us Lord Caitanya, give us *bṛhad-mṛdaṅga*,

Prabhupāda and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's lenient mercy. On the cover of

Madhya-līlā 1, which is in

the center of our magic circle,

Lord Caitanya is dancing and walking on the road imagined by

Nṛsiṁhānanda Brahmācārī in his meditation.

Flowers on both sides, the Lord

is very pleased to walk along it

and Nṛsiṁhānanda, eyes closed, hands in

prayer, is meditating to build the

road at every step, to provide

the Lord's happy way from

Purī to Bengal to Vṛndāvana—or for as long

as the Lord agrees

to walk upon it.

France P-stop, mini-sonata for brahma-muhūrta, approximately 15 minutes

Lightfoot, your presence is required in the court of the king, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. You are much smaller than four-headed Brahmā, who hid when the other Brahmās appeared.

Lightfoot, I beseech you. Be happy with your amenities, although they may be taken away at any moment. It is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, your blackish friend, who has awarded all these things for your use in His service. Be grateful in writing.

He's a light spirit, Bach, stockinged and wigged, sitting at the harpsichord, this time in metal *kuṭīr* back-of-van

I sing

sigh

saw the violin

suspire and feel headache pain

and for all of you guys and girls who

write me your troubles and joys

rigors and ordinary disciplines.

Now change to *andante*, (slower measure).

Mon cher, we have to stop at toll booths but have the money, by Your grace. I am so plebeian, corrupt, but desire Your association.

I do want the *kuṭīr* decorated with images of Vṛndāvana—Govardhana Hill and skinny cows and maybe Bhūri-jana walking in front of me on Vraja's sandy earth (he knows my mind and we can talk of old Bob Dylan lines in Kṛṣṇa consciousness if we like).

I share with thee this

early morning peon in

a temple we'd sing

saṁsāra and this too is

an ode.

The leaves are brown in France, we saw as we two sat in the front seat chanting *gāyatrīs*,

huge flock of dark birds

on high wires and some flying down to the ground, swept in groups by instinct, blown like waves here and there—miracle.

Sirs, I beseech you, call me to court, peccadilloes plenty, and stately measure.

(Last movement is quieter)

I can't dance because I'm fragile, but thank thee for the comeuppance, the deal is on, we run with these

the Lord was telling Śrīvāsa

"Don't call me God." But then when thousands called Him

from outside, "You are the Supreme Lord,

son of Nanda Mahārāja, please come

out and let us see You!" He did.

And Śrīvāsa said,

"Why are You exposing Yourself outside when inside you cover Yourself?"

"You have all combined to humiliate me," said Lord Caitanya. I don't know if He'll accept this. He will look for love at the center. I'm happy to be traveling and glad we didn't stay home, nursing my wounds.

O piñata

O prince of Wales

O mousy violin sighs

O sorrows O quick dance of

corrupt monarch's court

O injustice in the city's lanes

the poor

the chimney sweep (Blake)

and it's better that we stay in India and learn the *Vedas*.

I better end this one here and go bathe in cold water, Hapsburg, happy stance in the world's near-smallest shower and toilet room, to be ready to leave by 5.

8:53 A.M., *Post-breakfast minuet for the discontented,*
approximately 15 minutes

Slowly and peacefully you can begin to digest the cold waffles, yogurt, and fruit. Be grateful, you frivolous soul. You worry if your immortal works will survive your death. More pertinent would be to worry where *you* are going after death. “Automatically” we attain the *rasa*? The highest *rasa*? Automatic doesn’t mean without your own desire. You’re not a machine. “I wish to serve the Lord without reservation”—that’s the standard desire—and go to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lotus feet. Where does he want you to serve? In the *gośālā*? On the streets? In the temple office? Of course, he will take your nature into account. As a highfalutin guru with tinsel garlands up to the neck and pretty girls flashing smiles as if you were impervious (or perhaps they are testing you)?

Perhaps we were all dancing a
 minuet
 in illusion,
 a *mahā-bhāgavata* and his kids his
 lovely daughters
 and bowing down men.

Oh, forget that past
 hoist the E. Leclerc pennant
 at petrol station—we are soon to cross the border into
 northern Italy, borders once contended in bloody fights
 by soldiers beaten on by their officers beaten on by their
 commanders.

(Allegro)

High! Light! Play the
 song again
 it's 18th and 17th century
 light-footing, the long sigh
 and cat gut drawn along the
 high, high slow down me
 crude Queens 76th Street NYC
 sensibilities
 awakened by rollicking
 Sonny Rollins.

It's Christmas. Your sister (say) gives you a record of
 Bach chamber music. You sit respectfully as in church and
 hear it. Drive out thoughts of the then (17th century) soci-
 ety listening in a drawing room with peasants excluded,
 the bodies of royalty unwashed but perfumed and pow-
 dered, and the Irish under the heel of the British,

drive it out
 but then you might as well
 let your thought fly to
 Śrī Kṛṣṇa
 in Vṛndāvana—

He's walking with His friends, and the *gopīs* are plan-
 ning for a rendezvous with Him as He most desires. Hear it
 from your Gurudeva.

Sorry this wasn't much of a minuet or song. Words don't
 come to me mellifluous or liquefied, but sometimes as
 hard little pellets.

(Last sprightly movement)

But ho!

it's time soon to rev this arc, this Econoline van, across
 into *capechi* land, the friendly Italios, we hope, in their less

spacious P-stops, on motorbikes—another land of men and women and temple havens all in trouble, in need of money, but somehow going on.

You go there, Lancelot, do your lecture and be satisfied with that.

So your sister gave you the record and you and she heard it, circa 1957–58. Hard to relate to old Bach, but you think, “Yes, this is nice in some way.” All this is irrelevant because

I want Kṛṣṇa consciousness
Lord Caitanya, Lord Caitanya,

Kṛṣṇa, who in the ninth chapter tells us that devotional activities offered to Him directly and for His pleasure are the best. If the bow hits the violin string for that reason, it’s fine. Otherwise not, and I challenge you, Pogo, why go so roundabout to touch your nose by putting your arm all the way around the back of your head? Touch it directly by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Minuet is Lord’s names said again and again at 90–95 kmph—he does!—go up front and chant as van drives out,
this happy day.

10:08 A.M.

Fifty miles from Mont Blanc tunnel: exit France, enter Italy. Overcast sky. Speed limit 120. Treetops, Alps, stone face, houses on plain. All night pain in right eye.

In one dream, a small group of devotees and I were chosen to be humiliated in many ways—possessions taken away, scorned, etc. We tried to remain humble and exemplary devotees. In one scene, a woman was interrogating me, trying to humiliate me, but I remained down-to-earth and nonpretentious, and that moved her to treat me decently.

Then suddenly a dream message flashed across my screen: “Don’t rely on your ability to relate to this woman. It’s becoming sexual. You should just depend utterly on Kṛṣṇa in any condition.” They had taken my teeth and were threatening to take my eyes when I woke up—with ache in eye.

We go to dangerous places in dreams. The waking state is also full of adventure.

Sheer rock faces, rust-colored, deciduous trees, a sudden, rapid stream at roadside . . . Goodyear, Techni Deco . . . the hillside in mixed shades of orange, yellow, and green, and dark clouds.

L’Havre, Albertville, Megeve—ahead of us one mountain cone after another, and trucks hauling toward the horizon, the white road stripes. “Massif du Blanc,” elevation: 4807. Les Contamines Mont Joie, stream-rays of sunlight pour down from behind clouds, a field of uncut corn, a soccer field, everywhere the crumpled leaves on trees, soft yellow, soft green.

Gold like the color scheme of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* volumes, green like leaves in Māyāpur.

3:21 P.M.

We are parked in a place where no cars are allowed after 7 P.M. It’s a quiet spot surrounded by a small forest. Rain is pattering on the roof. M. is chanting his day’s *japa* quota, which he couldn’t complete yet because he was driving. We made good time. I’m feeling okay. We ate the last of the opulent boxed lunches given to us in London. We’ll drive more today, north of Milano, and then stop for the night.

The two Italian *polizia* at Mont Blanc were young and soft. They had heard of Hare Kṛṣṇa and chatted a little with us, impressed that M. had a photo of himself on the American visa enclosed in his Irish passport. They didn’t ask me

for my passport but waved us on. They were like two young ISKCON *brahmacārīs* you would send out on book distribution.

Is my determination one-pointed? Am I like that *Gītā* verse, bewildered by sense gratification and with splayed intelligence? The *Gītā* says that such persons cannot practice devotional service. The Second Canto agrees that the *karmīs* have too many things to occupy themselves and are not interested in *ātma-tattva*.

Well, I'll be honest here. I'm usually on track—wanting to read Prabhupāda's books and to do my writing service. I also think about getting some time alone and the pressure and obligation to mix with others for preaching.

Okay, but what's this time spent thinking about Bach and Beethoven? Do they have any real influence in my life? They are not devotees. Does thinking about their musical artistry actually help me in my writing? Give me a lift?

It's something like that. Or is it just a case of the senses hankering to contact the sense objects? Prabhupāda used to say, "The ear says let me hear that nice cinema song and you go at once to satisfy it." Any one of the senses upon which the mind dwells can carry away even the mind of a man who endeavors to control them, just as a boat can be swept away by a strong wind. They say Beethoven had a "complex and contradictory nature," and Bach was deep in Europe while Lord Caitanya's movement was bright on the firmament in India. What do his stately measures have to do with Caitanyadeva or with me in ISKCON?

While the quartet plays:

I could be chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa,

but I'm a midget. I look at the logo on the bottom of each golden volume of Cc. "The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust."

Yes, but can this meditation on the great composers' music bring me to a Kṛṣṇa conscious moment?

Me alone, not asking anyone else. Me alone. Me and my God. It's not something forbidden, but we all have to ask whether something we are doing or thinking will help us become better devotees. Better devotees doesn't mean only that when we meet up with other devotees we can recite Cc. stories because we have read them, and that we can impress others with our learning or apparent devotion. It means touching a deeper quality, touching the person that is ourselves.

We have to examine whether allowing ourselves to do something that we like to do—letting it run its course a little—and asking, “What's this that the *cognoscenti* have called the best ever? What's in it? Is there something here to speak to my emotional soul?” is beneficial. One devotee confessed to me that he has begun listening to the Beatles again. He said that the reason he did it was because this was something *live* with which he could connect. He didn't feel alive visiting temples and having no friends there, or being misunderstood or unappreciated by older devotees. The Beatles gave him life. Of course, we both knew it was silly, but there it is.

Is it functional, like the devotee equivalent of smoking a cigar to unwind or taking off our shoes, opening ourselves up to the deeper emotions that underlie our day-to-day life? Because for most of us, life tends to be mechanical, nonheroic, hackneyed. We hanker for higher *saṅga* of other lonely but talented spirits. Since we are more God conscious than Bach or Beethoven (right?), because we know *Bhagavad-gītā*, we ought to be able to elicit the God consciousness in their works and make better use of it than they did. They call this swanning: going through culture and taking out the milk from the mixture of milk and water. Hmm.

4:45 P.M.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. In the van, driving. No book up front because I forgot to bring one. I know the books, but vaguely because I have a poor memory. I'm reading the chapter again where the three Gosvāmīs, Rūpa, Sanātana, and Jīva, are mentioned, and the "innumerable" books that they wrote. I would like to get lost in the music of *caitanya-līlā*, to wake in the morning and turn to the book and to carry that meditation into all that I do. I should try for it.

"I guess I don't think I'm going to die," said baby-faced, chubby-cheeked Eloise, to explain why she doesn't chant her rounds. A puerile remark, but do I also think that way? I *could* chant to Kṛṣṇa and His Rādhā, pleading, "Please protect me. Please allow me to serve You and grant me a drop of mercy so that I may receive Nāma Prabhu."

O Holy Name, the tips of your toes are worshiped by the *Upaniṣads*. The holy name is my only shelter and treasure. Thus pray Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmīs.

O Holy Name, the power of illusion grabs me. Please wrap me in the sonata and serenade of *kīrtana*-life-giving and the breath of *japa* utterances.

October 8

2:15 A.M.

The great Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana wrote books based on Vedic evidence (*nānā-śāstra-vicāraṇaika-nipuṇau sad-dharma-saṁsthāpakau*).

Yes, I know you cannot write like that, and whatever little scholarship you could attain, you have abandoned mostly in favor of
a river of doubts and
exultation.

We are parked outside a *ristorante* connected to an Agip Petrol station. At 7:30 P.M. last night, a truck began backing up right in front of us. He didn't even see us and was about to hit us when Madhu started honking his horn and flashing his lights. The truck stopped less than a foot in front of us. I was asleep at the time and it all seemed unreal. I simply wanted to get back to sleep.

There's not much time to read this morning, but I noticed in the purport, the summaries of *Brhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* and *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* by Sanātana Gosvāmī, and Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*, and *Laghu-toṣaṇī*.

The details of the spiritual world in regard to being the maidservant of Kṛṣṇa were not revealed to Lord Brahmā, but by dint of his self-scrutiny, *tapasya*, and devotional

service, the Lord revealed to him the *śloka*s of *Brahma-saṁhitā*, which Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura advises the reader to recite as a daily function.

Oh, he said, I find many mistakes in our spiritual master's books because they weren't edited by competent persons.

I could have replied that the First Canto states that even if literature is irregularly composed, it will create a revolution among impious people, bringing them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Such literature will be appreciated by those who are thoroughly honest.

I have mistakes in my books because I am not perfect. That man attacked in many pages the presentation of Prabhupāda's biography.

These notes, written October 8th, reflect my true state for the next few minutes. I am wearing a coat, a sweatshirt, and a sweater, and reading and writing by battery-run light. I am writing to help myself.

What help do I need? I don't need to examine the maps to see how to get to Brescia or to brush up on my Italian. Madhu takes care of those things so that I can be free to read and write truths on the path of spiritual life. When I say I write to cope or to help myself, that I write to create art, then what does that mean?

Why the truth eludes the farmer (free-writer) is a puzzle. Hunters cross fields, rifles slung at the ready. We don't see the NATO planes, but they fly overhead nevertheless. On the outskirts of power we drive and the world of spirit is recorded in the *Vedas* and prescribed by Prabhupāda's followers for the peace and prosperity of humanity. We sigh and wish we were better. This is our field.

This field,
 mole work,
 true stead, self, piths, piln,
 potter's wheel, Ekādaśī—we are somewhere in Italy. I
 am merely announcing the start of another day with a
 cock's crow and going through other motions within this
 heart that beats under the simultaneously wooden and sen-
 sitive exterior of nerves and tension-producing headaches,
 all wrapped around
 my self, my spirit soul.

We all seek to make sense out of chaos and to find the
 tender essence of our lives. We have no choice but to go
 through the motions in our ISKCON and to serve partly out
 of fear of censure. Few of us like the schisms and critics,
 and most of us tend to criticize them (and other things) out
 of love or attachment or because we are afraid to leave
 Prabhupāda's lotus feet.

9:15 A.M., *Brescia*

We're at the dentist. He asks Madhu why I *still* don't
 speak Italian. They have a long conversation while the den-
 tist works on me. He gives his prognosis of what's wrong
 with ISKCON's public relations and preaching programs in
 Italy (see what I mean? We all have something to say for
 better or for worse). My gums have shrunk, so he coats my
 dentures with some kind of glue and tells me to come back
 in five days. He says by then, the glue will be baked onto
 the dentures and they will fit better.

The visit over, we rush to the *autostrada*, park for an
 Ekādaśī breakfast (I was hungry!), and rush to another
autostrada exit for a rendezvous with Nanda-kīśora and
 Dīna-dayārdra, who will escort us to a campground.

1:18 P.M.

What is my purpose while traveling? Seems confused. When Nanda told me of a Godbrother who was going to America to meet with Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja in Berkeley regarding university preaching, I perked up. Why? It signaled to me that just as they have their academic field, so I have my writing field—and I'd like to awaken to it more. One difference is that they are able to work by combining their strength, and I have to work alone.

Give me more alone. That seems to be the sole benefit of thinking about Bach sitting at the harpsichord composing his chamber music: it makes me feel alone. There are parts of the creative process—of anyone's creative process—where you have to go alone to create. The sharing comes later. First, you have to sit in the dark, small space in the back of a van, or in a cluttered room on the dark, hard bench and create. There is no superstition or falsity involved. The work is the work. There is no point trying to categorize it or justify it. Just be, let emotions play over you, feel the subtle, and if possible, sublime variations of feeling . . . until it becomes tedious.

And then? And then nothing. You remain your spiritual master's *celā*

even in this Italian campground
while the wind buffets and it rains and
it's quiet despite the fact that Italian pop music
is drifting over here like wet leaves on
the wind. And then?

You remain true, and you sit for awhile to ask the Lord to convey a new direction.

5:07 P.M.

Reading Cc. This tired fellow can't apply himself in any structured writing task. Alas, a shortcoming.

We saw numerous posters advertising the Moska Circus near Milano. Most of them depicted a bigger-than-life Ma. I won't go, but as we passed the posters in the rain, my eyes glanced on her picture—mostly face and a huge bust. She's the big attraction of the Moska Circus in this country where they like their Mas.

Then we met our friends, Nanda and Dīna, and came to this quiet place. I'm mulling over what to do, but there's not much time to worry about. In a few days we'll plunge into the temple routine.

Bob Lax writes alone in Patmos, a Greek island. He says he wants to write things down immediately as they occur to him, a journal for self-clarification. He's a poet. Listen, you can write like that, write what your senses perceive—write about the lamp illuminating this camp lot. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Again reading Cc. I look through the illustrations and see that wonderful painting of the Six Gosvāmīs. I can see the character in their faces as they live as *bābājīs* in Vṛndāvana. Each one is different, yet each is a loving servant of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

The painting of Kṣīra-corā-gopīnātha is a study of New York City's Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda Deities.

Some old favorites. Rūpa Gosvāmī knew Lord Caitanya's mind.

Tired of writing, of living sometimes. Don't know what to say. Can barely scratch out another sentence or two.

5:34 P.M.

I can't call this a sonata. I don't know what Beethoven did in the third part of his String Quartet number 12 in E-flat Major, opus 127. Was he composing gazelles in music? I picture them leaping over fences like the Wicklow deer clearing the garden fences, and think naively that this long-

haired man was a stormy genius. Probably had no guru and knew nothing of transmigration.

John Franco (the dentist) said that Christianity has no philosophy and cannot explain transmigration. He also said what sounded like, “Francesco *salvando* Christianity”—Saint Francis saved Christianity.

Beethoven used no words in his compositions. He probably wrote swiftly his Scherzand Vivace. You can imagine all those nineteenth century strings ablaze. The Hollywood String Quartet played that piece in 1957 when I was graduating from high school at a feckless seventeen. Just around the corner I would be growing out of Fats Domino and into Gerry Mulligan, but I never grew into, and therefore out of, Beethoven.

Drop it man,
I, Gary Cooper, need a drink
of water. This desert works
up a man's thirst.

They have a doctor in Milano, he said, GBC-approved, who just looks at you and knows what's wrong, a “very sensitive man.” Maybe he psyches out the disease.

Finale. We go on living.

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo from this boot-shaped country. Big stones, new guard rails on the *autostrada*. M. drives on and on, passing cars all day long, bypassing meadows and fields.

Non troppo. “Not too much.” Too much what? Too much showing off? Too much sadness? Don't be maudlin, yet be expressive.

Non troppo. Madhu told John Franco that in England, no one believes in God. “Oh?” John Franco couldn't believe it. In Italy, everyone believes in God. M. says in Ireland too.

October 9

1:28 A.M.

Dreamt I was applying to college. I wanted to be accepted at the University of California, but I wasn't. Instead, I was accepted at the University of Pittsburgh. We candidates had to make decisions and there were counselors to help us. I had gone through almost all the formalities, but a counselor informed me that I had neglected to choose a typewriter. I said that I was used to a first-class, stationary IBM Selectric and didn't want to opt for the small, cheap portable. She said I had to get the smaller one.

The dream seems to indicate the scaling down of highest possible attainments to acceptable compromises—the University of Pittsburgh instead of the University of California, the smaller typewriter instead of the better Selectric, etc. Our worlds shrink. Do I have to accept a shrunken, academic version as reality? Can't I go for the original “dream”? Why go to “college” at all?

The original dream means I have to offer Kṛṣṇa the best that I have and I have to trust in the process. Preaching doesn't mean conforming to what nondevotee artists are doing, or even what is the expected, institutional form. Preaching involves taking risks; risk means we may chance going beyond the norm that doesn't inspire to search for our own personal offering to Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda

told me that Māyāvādīs think the material world has to be rejected, but Vaiṣṇavas use it in Kṛṣṇa's service.

The *gopīs* had no tinge of sense gratification in their love for Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. When they met Him in His Dvārakā mood at Kurukṣetra, they begged Him to return with them to Vṛndāvana, where He would find the most pleasure.

Dear Lord, do I dare speak to You? Do I dare write for Your pleasure? Am I too undisciplined?

Free-write list:

1. marble heaven
2. failure
3. "Campaign Now" button with pen
4. don't prick yourself

A word isn't tangible like chewing gum. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme. O master, give us the inspiration as to where we should live and what we should do. We want the best thing, please.

O soul, does not a thing applied therapeutically cure the same thing that caused the disease?

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja tells us that the *gopīs* were not interested in art. Of course, he means non-Vṛndāvana arts. They were expert in sixty-four art forms designed to please Kṛṣṇa. We can read of those arts in *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* if we think we are qualified, but understand it through the spiritual master's instructions.

6:02 A.M.

"Oh! Let us keep *afar off* from us all that glitters, let us love our littleness, and be satisfied to feel nothing. Then shall we be truly poor in spirit. Jesus will come to seek us how far so ever we may be, and he will transform us into flames of love." (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux)

The struggle in littleness is a good thing—to have a poor spirit and to feel the pinch of poverty. That's what I maintain in my writing. It doesn't have a handsome, well-built structure or keep to a theme, follow an outline, etc. It's not that I'm trying to write something slipshod; I just want to admit that I am poor and write from that poverty. Poverty is not despicable, and neither is the littleness of ordinary life if that life is offered to Kṛṣṇa.

May He find me far off,
far in Italy boot,
not at the meeting of prominent devotees,
not in the company of greats,
but not cast out from *sādhū-saṅga*.

Soul's music sputters. I seek pure spirit, but I don't seem able to sustain reading or chanting for long. Lord Caitanya sees this in me. He sees that I am an offender and knows that that's why I can't chant Hare Kṛṣṇa properly, but He teaches *hari-nāma* as the *yuga-dharma*. He knows there's no other way for me to be purified. I *want* to finger beads, even if I cannot keep my mind under control.

"In times of aridity when I'm incapable of praying, or practicing virtue, I seek little opportunities, mere trifles, to give pleasure to Jesus; for instance a smile, a pleasant word when inclined to be silent and to show weariness. If I find no opportunities, I at least tell Him again and again that I love Him; that is not difficult and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even though this fire of love might seem to me extinct I would still throw little straws upon the embers and I am certain it would re-kindle." (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux)

I am happy and grateful to Kṛṣṇa
for this day in this campground,
my whole world in this
cubical. Lord's glories—

the *gopīs* know—beyond caring that Kṛṣṇa is God, that He is opulent and powerful
as He walks the ranks of soldiers and ladies.

The *gopīs* want Him in the *calm and quiet atmosphere* (Śrīla Prabhupāda's words) of Vṛndāvana (although when He's there, their activities are far from calm).

Some ISKCONites are chanting only in Vṛndāvana, some are not chanting much but distributing books, some do everything well, and I speak only for myself.

6:02 A.M., *Allegro*

Together, the harpsichord and violin, the birds chirping with Bachian cheer. I don't know (or care) what he and his audiences thought of his music, but I imagine in his exultation of nature the Six Gosvāmīs going about their morning duties in Vraja's sands. At least my mind goes to their lotus feet. Then wanders. I think of the dentist with his new glue and decide to wrap a scarf around my neck.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness—to grasp it—far beyond my ability. The real gem of the *gopīs*' love for Kṛṣṇa, free of *all* material desire, told in the best poetry in metaphor to describe the highest love, the highest beauty—we want to hear that.

Adagio

There are a few more months of Centennial “madness” and then the year changes to 1997. Back to business. One by one the old ones are vanishing. The ranks swell with new aspirants, all trying to touch the reality of pure devotion.

Kṛṣṇa, please give me the power to read with devotion.

Allegro assai

On Sundays people are virtuous. They head for church with their family members and feel the special lift of the holy if only for a moment. They step up and are cheered by

a combination of this world and that. *Paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo*—the transcendental nature where Kṛṣṇa is king of all worlds and we can touch His energies, high and low.

Humble yourself and speak what comes
grind to a halt

no more “inspiration”

no good thought even, but you go on anyway. Grope for the next “Prabhupāda said” that comes to mind, shut your eyes to their boredom or sleepiness or the thought of your own reputation as a lecturer. Earn your daily bread.

Chant *vivace* (life).

Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile

It's the end of the 20th century, now a hundred years since our Prabhupāda appeared. We feel his presence always. B. dāsa wants to know in his life the sweet Śrīla Prabhupāda, not the all-concrete monument of the General in command created by some followers as The Only Prabhupāda. Surely he had to lead the fight and to engage the tough guys and those with inferiority complexes who thought they should be tough in distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and he loved them. Gangsters came to him, and people like me who weren't gangsters but no better. And he loved them.

(The Italians in this campground are up and making noise now, but we are assured they're friendly.)

Someone said, “Write your book and if readers don't like it, tell them to get off the train.”

Molto, man.

I'm here with a dear assistant who
does all well and who made this
cubical livable and
lovable
he

and Nanda, a big man with some gray hair, and Dīna, who was in a car accident and lost the use of his left side.

He held his left arm and hand in his right when we met. I embraced him and noticed that he looks much older, frailer, in his saffron pants and gray *cādar* wrapped around his shoulders. He said his body was no good, but his consciousness was all right. To signify the truth of this, he held up his beadbag. I noticed the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra written across it in a strange language—"Russian," said Nanda—and picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Molto bene, molto bene.

O Savior, O Supreme Lord, You are better than all gods, and Your pure devotees, especially the *gopīs*, love You in a way unimaginable to others. Like a dog chasing its master, I read the nectar of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Cc. again and again.

4:03 P.M.

There is a typewriter in this van. It's on the small, separate deskette facing the Prabhupāda *mūrti*. It is a warm October day and quiet. I was thinking of breaking camp because people had set up tents next to us and in the late morning they play pop rock. "That's enough," I thought, "let's leave." The sound seeps into my brain and consciousness. Earplugs reduce it to a faint roar, but what's the use of enduring it when you can take shelter in a temple where the only sounds are *kīrtana*, Kṛṣṇa conscious and friendly? But now it's quiet.

M. is squashed in his section of the van, which is larger than mine but houses many things. He is not able to move about freely. Now he's trying to sort out the stuff and leave a few cartons behind. He has to decide what we can do without while traveling.

If this is travel, then where is home? It's difficult for me to say. Geaglum is a new base; I have already lived there for a couple of months. Hardly what you would call home, though. I have no home. The van is not my home either. Perhaps my home is this body, but even that has changed

from boyhood to youth to old age. The soul wanders as my body wanders. I wish I could develop a strong desire to know my original home in the spiritual world.

When Lord Caitanya met Rūpa and Sanātana at Rāmakeli (when He gave them their spiritual names), He told them that the letters they had sent Him had convinced Him of their sincerity and humility. He said He had written back to them advising them how to survive in Kṛṣṇa consciousness while in this world. He gave the example of a woman who has a paramour and who always thinks of him while doing her household duties. She does her home duties even more properly so that her family won't suspect her love. Śrīla Prabhupāda offers the same example in his Introduction to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*: develop love for Kṛṣṇa and think of Him even while living in this world and performing your duty.

All amenities here, but I am not the perfect lover. The devotee who has faith believes that by serving the Supreme Lord, he can reach perfection. Such faith drives out ignorance and doubt. Kṛṣṇa's words gradually filter through to him. Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

Raw wood varnished interior, rows of Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture tapes in their albums, the Prabhupāda *mūrti*—the whole thing cannot last forever. Therefore, I had better use the amenities while I have them. Madhu is using up petrol and the van is gradually becoming consumed by driving it. Our mighty Econoline. Use it up. The exhaust pipe is already broken. Use it up. Prabhupāda writes in the Introduction to *Bhagavad-gītā*, "If one has fifty years of life ahead of him, he should engage that brief time in cultivating this practice of remembering the Supreme Personality of Godhead." He must have been thinking of young people when he wrote that. Fifty years ahead of you and he calls it brief. Think of Kṛṣṇa while in the world.

It's natural for a devotee my age to become disappointed when he sees how little time he has left and how far he must traverse to reach the goal. Young people tend to think ahead: "By the time I'm sixty, I will have been practicing devotional service for thirty years. I'll probably be a pure devotee by then, or almost." Or perhaps he lives too much in the past and present to face the future. Youthful complacency. Now I'm almost sixty; I have to face it. I'm still spiritually young, a beginner, and time is running out. Śrīla Prabhupāda urges us not to return to material life in Kali-yuga, but what choice do I have? Will the Lord grant me a special pardon or send me back for more "seasoning" in the minor leagues of the material world?

I should exert myself and make a real sacrifice in these last years. I can't imitate my master, but I should follow his example and not retire, even if I live into my seventies. Prabhupāda kept traveling, and I should keep doing what I can to advance and to help others.

Largo

I'm back to my imaginary world with a Bach sonata, imagining the harpsichord. Imagine Śrīla Prabhupāda hearing a *largo* movement by Bach. What would he say? "It is very nice. Very nice. Now if it can only be offered to Kṛṣṇa." But who will offer Bach's sonatas? In the spiritual world, the musicians come before Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and perform a concert. Rādhā plays the *vīṇā* and teaches the other *sakhīs*.

O master, let me be faithful to you regardless of what instrument I play. I have faults and I also criticize, but we have to become free of *sādhū-nindā*. A devotee's heart is soft, and it aches for Kṛṣṇa.

Spiritual life is not free of suffering. The late sunlight slants through the back windows, and a cat purrs on a

windowsill across the way, dying of old age and bad odors, living roughly on the streets, which are devoid of sweetness.

A do-gooder tries to change others' karma by easing their suffering. "As you do unto the least of my children, so you do unto me." Help the bewildered, Prahlāda instructed. He didn't want to go back to Godhead alone. Some saints seek a sweet, lonely place from which they reach out in sound.

Allegro

Dance the cascading harpsichord.

I have found joy and

I give you

the key to open your own door—
this book.

I have found my mouse's voice,

my joke written in

the same and same poem over

until (he said) it becomes smaller and I guess clearer
and I can't avoid it.

Help your brother; help yourself.

"*The family*, is the prime cohabitation of humanity, and ISKCON leaders should not admit defeat like *karmīs* and accept the tragedy of divorce." Help my brother? Yes, but I am a *sannyāsī*.

Family of man

of one

of Acyuta

Kṛṣṇa, who

is happy alone.

Dear Kṛṣṇa, we seek measured peace.

Measured, but sad. We link such sadness with beauty. Chestnuts open on the wet ground. We traveled through France in two days. The world is top-heavy, spinning.

6:02 P.M., *Night Notes*

The Italiani are talking it up near the van's tin wall. I'm afraid when I try to fall asleep that despite my new ear-plugs, the mega rock bass may thump its way through, or even the *conversazione* and laughter . . . Then my thoughts will drift to, "Why not go to the temple ASAP?" I'll have to see what tonight is like and then decide in the morning. When it's very quiet here, then I can concentrate and do one thing after another.

The two friends, Merton and Lax, encouraged each other. Mert is doing thousands, he says, of calligraphies—Zen abstract black art marks on page. He does them quickly and they seem to give him satisfaction. I doubt his abbot would think it worth much. Lax encourages him from Greece, "Do more and more."

Church bells ringing now.

Do you dare to set the alarm for twelve? It will startle you out of sleep and maybe disturb a tent neighbor too. "He who disturbs no one and is not disturbed by others is very dear to Me," says Lord Kṛṣṇa.

I pray to banish doubts.

I looked at Bhaktivinoda Tḥākura's opening purport to *Manah-sikṣā*. He mentions that *dīkṣā*- and *sikṣā-gurus* are equal, but I prefer to find everything in my master and in anyone who teaches as he does. I don't feel capable of loving a *sikṣā-guru* who himself is not surrendered to my own Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This is a rare moment. We are finally on the road and functioning, it's October, we have come as far as Italy, and it's not cold yet.

Ate a cold lunch because M. couldn't find the pots. Fine with me—two halves of an avocado.

Until I die and leave this place, I should write for those who continue to live. Sometimes in the evening I can't concentrate on even the best scripture. I need something light.

O holy dream, you don't visit me. Always these grade B movies of intrigue and threat and hidden meaning and SDG identity going through a subtle hell. He wakes up and is afraid—afraid to be more daring in his service, or afraid he was too daring and slipped.

October 10

2:04 A.M.

I'm happy to be up reading and writing. It's important to be able to say those words. Tenters played music—I first heard it around 8:30 P.M. when I awoke. When I heard it thumping through the walls of the van, I decided to leave here immediately. But it died down after an hour at most. My earplugs did reduce it to only a dull, rhythmic thump. Now I'm not sure whether we should leave. There's a special solitude in the van. It's not like I'm in a mundane "camper" consciousness because Prabhupāda is here, right now, awake and with his dictaphone. Either temple or campground will be all right.

Another Navy dream in which a petty officer was recommending a sailor to me for initiation. The sailor, he said, never asked anything of anyone that he wasn't willing to do himself—highly recommended. I was expected to initiate him. But when I woke I realized it was one of those situations where the candidate approached me as a generic guru. He was qualified and he deserved initiation, and his authority was pushing me—but the candidate and I had no personal relationship, had barely met.

4:25 A.M.

Dear friends, I am typing this at slight risk that the tenters on the other side of this tin wall may hear it and be disturbed in their sleep. I mean the typing noise and little ring of the bell on this Canon TypeStar. Usually I write with pen, dear *amici*, but sometimes one wants a change. You know how it is. The floor in the camp shower was dirty, but M. thought it was nice to have a long, hot shower. I thought it was not so great because of the dirt, and because my shower came down hard—no spray. Tomorrow I think I'll do the whole job in the van. Yes, we will stay here despite the noise.

When I finish this little report I will chant some rounds and then "compose." Why don't I just think of Kṛṣṇa as Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī demands of his mind, or think of the Vaiṣṇava gurus, the residents of Vraja, of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's service?

I *do* think about them, but this *manaḥ* certainly does go other places. Now one could say the mind should be ignored or tossed aside. Let the nondevotee thoughts go like leaves floating down a stream. Let them go and don't record them.

Yes, one could say that, but I do record them. It's true-life experience. Someone nowadays may compile a book about Vṛndāvana *parikrama* without telling what he actually experienced when he made the walk. That's his choice and this is mine.

Kṛṣṇa, please forgive us both. Please let me chant Your holy name with attention and devotion. I cannot do it, but pray to You for the ability.

I love acknowledging my littleness and I don't love it. I am little. I must walk into a dirty shower stall—walk right on the dirt. I would like to go back to Kṛṣṇa and be divested of all foolishness, but I can't pay the price, the *lauḷyam*,

make the sacrifice. Anyway, my relationship with my guru is eternal. I don't know exactly how it works, but he won't abandon me. Questions like, "How will I know my *rasa*?" are almost silly to ask because I am so far from perfection. Just keep on. What else can we do?

My purpose while traveling is to stop and write. Writing is the purpose of the expression. I travel to be a bona fide *sannyāsī* in ISKCON and to speak *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lectures. That's no joke. In fact, for most people it's more important that I lecture than that I write. But they are mistaken. For me, it is more important that I write. Twenty-three of my books are translated into Italian, and they want to translate the rest. Matsya-avatāra Prabhu wrote me that he thinks the previous *ācāryas* inspired me in writing *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* and that it will be appreciated for generations to come. Hearing that was solace after reading the scathing attack on SPL.

6:14 A.M. *Dream and after*

I dreamt of a *sannyāsī* Godbrother walking with a *cādar* over his head down the street toward the temple. We watched him from a house window, but I don't think he could see us. I was in this house with my cousin, Mary, whom I knew only in my pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious life. We had been looking at a doll that was supposed to be able to digest food, but the model we had didn't work, then looking out the screen window at my Godbrother and feeling far from him. Remembering him as someone who used to be an American Swami, but who has made other choices.

Is this coming to me now because I'm feeling "Western" and this Godbrother is merging more and more into Indian living? I don't want to do what he is doing or be who he is, but let me love him. (Thérèse says she can't preach, but wants to stay close to the royal throne of God and love

those who will fight on God's behalf. She wants to love Him and wants others to love Him.)

When Lord Caitanya blessed Rūpa and Sanātana, the other Vaiṣṇavas were happy and cried out, "*Haribol!*" We shouldn't be envious to see someone favored by Kṛṣṇa.

My dear Godbrother whom I saw in my dream, it was raining. I saw you hurrying toward the temple, maybe to take *darsana* of the Deities.

Reform the individual. That Godbrother walking in a light, gray Vṛndāvana rain—he's far from me and I from him. I think of Western composers, and it's likely he wouldn't understand why. I can't know what it means for him and others who become Indianized and cling to the dust of Vṛndāvana.

Yo-yos on sale.

Greek Parks Department chief.

I met him in that little store

that sold yo-yos and

milk shakes and chocolate

cream sodas and hell, I can't remember what else. Sunday newspapers stacked. Great Kills Village I'm talking about.

Back to Beethoven.

Why even touch Westernisms? We can possibly justify it—old memories that come to mind. Are we trying to find out who we were in our conditioned state and to understand the continuum between that time and who we have become as devotees?

I have my own reasons. It gets me off my duff and into writing practice. It's a kind of swanning. And a fella has to have *some* structure or game going when he's trying to write. I fall asleep when I read and I have no other topic

because my life is so little in this van. Anyway, I'm not a "devotee" of Western music or its composers. It's a tool I use to inspire myself in my writing.

Culturally, I'm in the boy's finished attic, circa 1953–57, Alan Freed—I claim those days. I remember the cowboys—the plastic ones with bowlegged riders on them, twelve in a set for a dollar at Moe's Stationery store, where I also bought Esterbrook pens, looseleaf notebooks (I can still smell them), and pencils. Moe was fat and Jewish and would block the door of his store with his belly and down expression.

Our family—Dad, a low-down *New York Daily News* fireman, and Mom, Mom, what can I say? She told us that as a kid in Yorkville (Irish immigrant), she ran into the Metropolitan Museum of Art and spat at the statues on a dare. Not *really* bad kids, but naughty. Mickey Mouse. Those things aren't really in my heart.

As I was writing just now, water suddenly dripped from the skylight. A leak? This van isn't as sound as I'd like it to be.

Adagio ma non troppo—Allegro

I prefer *adagios* to *allegros*. They give you more time to think while they play out, to remember that you're not this body, that you are an eternal associate of playful Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the all-powerful Lord of all incarnations. I can't really take Beethoven too seriously despite his genius musical expression because I know he has no connection to even the most basic knowledge in the *Gītā*. I think of him more like a demigod, empowered with his "complex and contradictory nature" to create beauty in this material world.

(The kids are awake in the campground.)

We are servants, we members of ISKCON. I learned the philosophy early enough in my life, at least a certain

amount of it, but I don't seem to go further with it, except that I desire to learn "mystical" love of God.

Madhu said that the waterfall was caused by condensation. That means water from my body went into the air and onto the van walls. I had better drink more water. All I know is that the water splashed and smeared the peacock-blue ink on this page.

Questions that arise: "If you can't remember Kṛṣṇa during the struggle for life, how will you ever remember Him at death?"

"If you can't find Kṛṣṇa in fun, culture, and exploration, how will you be fully a person?" People want to know.

The problem with beauty in this world is that it gets boring and hackneyed because it doesn't awaken the whole spiritual apparatus of the self. We *say* that the famous Western composers were touched by God in their abilities, but few of them used it to His glory.

"Topics about Kṛṣṇa are like waves of nectar. If such nectar does not enter one's ear, the ear is no better than the hole of a damaged conchshell. Such an ear is created for no purpose." (Cc. *Madhya* 2.31)

"Men who are like dogs, hogs, camels and asses praise those men who never listen to the transcendental pastimes of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the deliverer from evils. One who has not listened to the messages about the prowess and marvelous acts of the Personality of Godhead and has not sung or chanted loudly the worthy songs about the Lord is to be considered to possess earholes like the holes of snakes and a tongue like the tongue of a frog." (*Bhāg.* 2.3.19–20)

"Certainly that heart is steel-framed which, in spite of one's chanting the holy name of the Lord with concentration, does not change when ecstasy takes place, tears fill the eyes and the hairs stand on end." (*Bhāg.* 2.3.24)

3:56 P.M.

We are at the herbalist, Madhu, Nanda, and I. Madhu wrote me a note that I have been more irritable this year. Anger, he says, is due to liver malfunction. I was surprised to receive this note and told him, "I feel very mellow." He will have to explain more what he means.

We are traveling on the strength of my allopathic pills? We're getting by.

Someone wrote me a letter. This was in it:

"A psychic said a few things about your writing that you might like to hear. She said that you were taking ancient knowledge and spiritual understanding and writing it into the modern idiom. She also said that you had written only a third to a half of what you would write, and that you would increase your writing time out of the sense of urgency to get it all out."

"Kerouac explains in his Introduction to *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, he wrote a series of novels that were really one big novel."

Writing, writing.

"Where is Aṣṭaratha Prabhu's place in the mountains?" (I am overhearing this conversation between M. and N. in the waiting room.)

"It's between Umbria and Tuscany" (this in English while a middle-aged woman, also waiting, listens.)

"Some twenty people are living near the area where Aṣṭaratha lives."

More from that letter:

"... [a writer] has to face his own risks. No one can face them for him, and no other human being can measure his risks against another's. In your writing, you face the danger of the blank page, of yourself, and of your fear that Prabhupāda does not accept what you are doing, and you reach out (steer) to Kṛṣṇa.

“To say that some books may be more important than others may be true in terms of audience acceptance, but that arbitrary judgment may have nothing to do with the author’s very real experience either of art or surrender to the process. Writing with all your stars out has to do with what you feel and what you offer, not with the product.

“You mentioned your limits—your headache syndrome and how your interests as a reader help determine what kind of prose you want to write. There is another ‘limit’ that you didn’t mention, but I think it has more effect on your prose than the ones you mentioned. That is (as Twain put it), ‘You can’t pray a lie.’”

Write and don’t worry how it comes out? Hare Kṛṣṇa. Work only half done? Spend more time to get it out? What *is* it?

We finally met the doctor. He wore a white coat and looked into my eyes with his iridology machine. He said I have many flecks in them. A sailor from New Jersey, Bill Doran or something, once stood with me in the long chow line on the Saratoga. Beams of sunlight went clearly into my eyes and he said, “You have flecks in your eyes.” He said it as if he were happy, sardonic, to find fault in me, if only physical, just in case I thought I had beautiful eyes or that I felt superior in any way.

It’s true, I’m afraid I may not please my spiritual master. Even the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana were sometimes afraid that they were not pleasing Lord Caitanya. It was a sign of their humility and their great desire to satisfy Him. I write in a daring way despite the fear. I depend on Prabhupāda’s mercy and leniency. And I listen to intuition. It feels right to do what I am doing, to write in this idiom although no previous Vaiṣṇava (of Bengal or Orissa) wrote as I do.

By idiom I mean pushing honesty and confession and admittance so that it appears that you are indulging in splayed attention rather than single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The risk of making those admittances is great. I could miss the eternal spiritual world. Still, I know I can't attain it by playing safe either. You have to give what you are to earn Goloka, not what you would be if you were ideal. Giving what you are means giving your love. Giving love is risky, and risk shakes your confidence.

The *śāstras* give guidelines on how to ride the razor's edge: *yayātmā suprasīdati*. I feel satisfaction when I write honestly and then *stumble* upon genuine Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even while candidly writing my imperfect thoughts. When candid feelings of attachment to Kṛṣṇa come out, they are gems because they are real. Good writing and good living is not how it looks to others, but how it feels, how deep the actual surrender is.

October 11

I'll tell you briefly what happened in the doctor's office. He was a good-looking man with a sensitive face, about forty years old, and bald up to the middle of his head (he compensated for his hair loss by growing the rest of his hair down to his shoulders). He wore a white doctor's smock and a white shirt and tie. Of course, right from the beginning he asked why I didn't speak Italian. I told him that everything would have to be done through Nanda as translator. Madhu and I sat in two chairs in front of his doctor's desk, and Nanda sat on the examination table behind us.

It was a pleasant experience talking to that doctor. It reminded me of an Italian or Swedish film, something produced by Ingmar Bergman, with European voices and subtitles. In those movies, you hear people's gentleness or humanness coming through their verbal expression, but you can't understand the language. You hear only raw sound. It leaves you in the position of an observer and gives you time to be more thoughtful on a deeper level about the characters.

I immediately fell into the line of again accepting the more natural health treatment. The doctor said I was in bad shape, that I have a temperament for headaches, so I have to calm down in order to bring the heat down from my head and into the rest of my body. He said it wasn't

enough to take care only of the mind; I have to also care for the body. He looked into my eyes and said I had weak kidneys, liver, and my digestive system was a complete mess. He also said that my spine had become weak from taking allopathic medicines and that there were various contaminations in my body due to the allopathic medicine.

I found it ironic how I didn't need to argue to make the change from one medical regime to another. The ambiance in the room was right, and I became willing to try his prescription.

I asked the doctor if I could start his herbal medicines while still taking my pills. He said I could mix them for the first few months, but later I should take them only if I had severe pain. Of course, that's the catch because the pills work best when you take them before the pain develops.

Anyway, I don't want to make this too newsy, but we have decided to try to again change my diet. Changing the diet usually means giving up sweets, and I'm prepared to do that again, at least in the rich form the devotees usually cook for me. I'll eat as simply as possible, a more natural diet, take herbal medicines, and tail off from the pills. In order to make this change, I am proposing that after a week at Prabhupāda-deśa, we stop my travel obligations and find a place where we can stay for a month on a health retreat.

“Even though I do not see the moonlike face of Kṛṣṇa playing on His flute and although there is no possibility of My meeting Him, still I take care of My own body. That is the way of lust. In this way, I maintain My flylike life.” (Cc. *Madhya* 2.47, spoken by Lord Caitanya in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī).

In his purport, Prabhupāda quotes Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura: “That the object cannot see the moonlike face of Kṛṣṇa and has no eagerness to see Him is the

sign of being without *ālambana*. Externally imagining such a thing simply satisfies one's lusty desires, and thus one lives without purpose."

After examining my eyes and pronouncing all my physical weaknesses, the doctor said, "The body is very weak, but the soul can be strong within." When he said that, I added, "But it's better if the body is also strong."

I wondered why he said it. Perhaps he thought that his diagnosis sounded insulting because I am a religious person, and especially because he was speaking in the presence of my disciples.

The other day when I saw Dīna-dayārdra with the left side of his body paralyzed, he told me that his body was weak but his consciousness was good. That was his cheerful and positive way to look at his situation, and I'm sure it was an honest assessment of his own feeling toward his problem. I have to admit, however, that both body and soul are ailing.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Unalloyed love of Kṛṣṇa is just like a big sheet of white cloth. Absence of attachment is compared to a black spot on that white cloth. Just as the black spot is prominent, so the absence of love of Godhead is prominent on the platform of pure love of Godhead." (Cc. *Madhya* 2.48, purport)

In intense love, the devotee sees "black spots" within himself. I am not on the platform of either feeling intense love or lamenting over the black spots. "That is the way of lust. In this way, I maintain my fly-like life."

Allegro

Allegro to get me going this head-groggy morning. I want to open the gates so that I can "express experience as far as a man can go" (Rilke's definition of art). At least as far as I can go this morning.

Note: Western stuff (jeans and jukeboxes?) can be used in Kṛṣṇa's service. First generation ISKCON devotees, she says, had only the safety net of their own Kṛṣṇa consciousness to keep them from falling. They completely rejected Western culture, and Śrīla Prabhupāda seemed to order us to do so. Yet he did teach *yukta-vairāgya* vigorously. You had to prove to him you were using "it" in service, that it wasn't *bhoga*. But, they say, the next generation will have elders whom they can respect, so we can expect the next generation to incorporate more Western culture into the Lord's service. They won't be so afraid to do it. The first generation cannot give their children all the Vedic *samskāras* because the first generation doesn't have them themselves. Why not, therefore, blaze a trail in Western idioms (claim them back from the *asuras*)? "Why should the Māyāvādīs have all the fun," one devotee wrote me, regarding my use of free-writing, "and the Vaiṣṇavas be restricted to writing only formal essays—and confined, straight-jacketed, by some vow never to know or tell who they are in their human poverty and to recoil even from the idea that our founder-*ācārya*'s life-story was a 'human story'?"

Okay, Johann, strike a chord.

Western culture? Look, I used to listen with four ears—two of my own and two of my sister's or some other interested friend. "Listen to this. Ain't it nice?" But in those days, I was listening to MJQ or Bob Dylan. I was in awe of Dylan, but Madeline quipped (1965), "He sounds like an old man." Couldn't expect her to dig it as I did. We listen first for ourselves.

The classical composers were long ago—seventeenth century—and that's when their music was popular, the spirit of it.

Western culture? The spirit, man, the *ensemble*. Now you're talkin'.

My mouse recorder got ate
up during an outdoor *kīrtana* in
Santo Domingo. I was brave then
and got credits—O Lord, please
put me in the catbird seat
(Red Barber, B. Dodgers)—I
got to spell it out for you?

Largo—1:36 minutes

Sweet, languishing, a lover and beloved, or a lone old man recalling his life. Muse, inspire me. Give me the quintessence—minus the garbage. Last night coming back from the doctor's, Nanda missed our exit on the *autostrada*. He slapped his face. It meant a big delay for all of us. In this *Largo* I admit that I have arrived at a place of peace by humbly playing.

Oh? To whom? Where are you?

Can I tell of my prized
haunts?

Murray, you dead yet?

Everyone, please come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Give up your guru and Lucky Strikes and come with us to *ārati*. Or come to beads, *japa*.

Which brings me back to the point: "Do I come to *ārati*, to *japa*, and like it?" The love is underneath.

Adagio

Slow. O Lord, I bow down in measured performance. O Lord, the pennants fly and I am rehearsing. The *kṣatriyas* protect us. Please guide me. This boy's got to write sixty percent more literature in his one big book.

I heard that eighty years ago, the Tuscarora was a lake covering the back fields. It could happen again. And I was going to say, we all get pushed around.

More literature? No literature, but sincerest offering.

I apologized to Madhu for the irritability I flung at him all year, or so he claims, and I must accept his pain as credible. He says it's my liver, but am I my liver? I thought I was mellow, but sometimes I cut him off.

Might do nightly *examen* again.

Allegro

Sonatas,
play your violin gracefully.

Be to bed on time,
get your work done,
and don't be angry.

Lord, I'll go to India without pills. *Oh yeah?* I'm accustomed now to quick route pain-fixers, but that means I'll have to lay abed.

J. S. Bach, you're a friend. You made music, but I can give Kṛṣṇa consciousness in music.

Dance transmigration.

Dear folks, your life should be used to find Brahman and Parabrahman and to serve Him while cutting the cycle of birth and death. Any work not done for Him gives only reaction.

12:29 P.M.

Calm down and get ready for lunch. I play my tape recorder against the tenters' rock. They are about fifteen feet away from the van. I've got Prabhupāda's relaxing *bhajan*s and Aindra's tunes. Drown them out, or at least balance them.

Aristotle, Plato, Geneva, so many words—Mann, “Death in Venice.” Love your littleness. Play the harmonium. Disperse the rebels. Fight the autocracy. Stop this and tell us how you plan to give six lectures in three days at Prabhu-pāda-deśa. Tell them what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught: Kṛṣṇa is the object of devotion. Whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda says, that’s what we accept. And whatever I can dredge up from recent hearing and readings, I’ll grope and pause and breathe and squeeze out into the ether. Even if it comes out as rote—what we are supposed to say—say it anyway. And if you get inspiration to speak something you really care about, something that is also substantial, then good, good. But I won’t speak “psychology” for one group or another. I’ll stick to Prabhupāda and say nothing new. I don’t have to be afraid.

4:30 P.M.

Mark Twain said, “You can’t pray a lie.” So this is a limit in my writing, that I can’t lie, can’t make up fiction. I *could* do it as service to Kṛṣṇa, but I don’t. There are other writers like me who feel that they can’t tell something that they didn’t directly experience, and we all grind out our daily affairs as if we were newspaper men of the universe.

Remember how in Belfast I gave a class on the topic that this material world is *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam*, temporary and miserable, so we should try to go back to Godhead? That is the purpose of life. That’s also the point behind the guru-disciple relationship; we have to help each other achieve this goal. Then one devotee raised her hand and said that she’s not motivated to go back to Godhead because she has little faith in the spiritual world or the eternal soul. It was such a blunt, candid remark. She spoke for each of us to some degree. I responded.

But that's what I mean about lecturing. I am expected to give the Vedic answers, but how much do I actually believe and realize in my own life? If I have any doubt, then why don't I admit it in the lecture, "I don't fully believe what I'm saying." I can't say that, but what then?

Then I am not qualified to lecture. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that if we're not convinced that Kṛṣṇa is God, then we can't help him. He said he was convinced on the strength of *śāstra*. Okay, I *am* convinced too. But there is an occasional leak, just as there are a few leaks in this otherwise serviceable van. There is a chink. I tend to think there are chinks in all of us, but maybe not. Maybe some of us are cent percent fixed in *śraddhā*, and so learned or simple that there are no chinks. Maybe there are some who are impervious to ignorance and doubt.

Okay, *śraddhā* is valuable but it also needs *utsāha*, enthusiasm. You want to say to a Sunday feast crowd, "Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, study *Bhagavad-gītā*, become devotees of Kṛṣṇa, and save yourselves. It is *very* important, although we can't force you. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not sectarian. ISKCON is a wonderful movement, and associating with the devotees is blissful." Well, here in the privacy of the back of this van, I'll admit that it ain't all that easy, and it is not a hundred percent with me.

I read a little section of *Bhagavad-gītā*, the opening verses and purports of the Ninth Chapter. The Lord has inferior energies and He is all-pervading in them, but He is not personally present in them. He is aloof from the material world. He is like the king who is present throughout his kingdom, but not personally. He is like the judge who hangs one man and awards another money while remaining neutral to both. These examples help to clarify Kṛṣṇa's position.

Kṛṣṇa Himself gives some examples: "Understand that as the mighty wind, blowing everywhere, rests always in

the sky, all created beings rest in Me.” (Bg. 9.6) “When there is a fragrant flower before someone, the fragrance is touched by the smelling power of the person, yet the smelling and the flower are detached from one another.” (Bg. 9.10, purport)

I could relate all these examples, but anyone who has read *Bhagavad-gītā* would probably get bored and sigh within, “I’ve heard this so many times.” We all want novelty and we equate that with life. I have nothing to give, neither life nor newness nor a hundred percent conviction nor love. I have only human poverty, but who wants to show the holes in his sleeves? So I sit up straight and bat it out. Even great baseball players don’t make more than one-third success when they are at bat, and those are the great ones.

I sometimes ask myself, as I am doing here, whether or not I can expose some of this while I speak in public. Should I make a disclaimer, “The person speaking doesn’t know what he is talking about and he isn’t pure”? I can do it as a token gesture, but even more I want to evoke the triumph of the Kṛṣṇa conscious spirit. It eludes me, but I still want to proclaim it. Maybe I can rise to the occasion and do it in the twenty minutes or hour in which I speak. I can outdo myself on the *vyāsāsana*, then get off the elevated seat and return to being a littler man. We speak on behalf of Vyāsadeva. (That would be nice, oh.)

4:54 P.M., *Presto*

Ludwig, did you
make mistakes?

You gave your best, and others preserved
your music without mistakes.

You humble virtuosos who try to interpret you, they say.
Finis.

Andante

Moving along gracefully, my last night in this campground. They may or may not come and make noise, our nearby tenters who have strewn the ground with banana peels and cereal boxes. Could be worse. I'll endure it. Try not to be irritable these days. Give thanks to God in sleeping bag.

I wish I could at least chant mantras with meaning and sense that they are God's names, and at least pronounce their shapes:

Hare

Kṛṣṇa

and Rāma.

But I chant "Cherub, Cherub," "Ruby, Ruby," "Borscht," "Belt," "Humma, Humma," "Beauty, Beauty"—any damn thing comes out of me *andante con moto*, and not even *troppo* (too much).

I repeat old stuff that was never good in the first place.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, I could remember gem-like ISKCON moments,

could absolve all wrongs,

could again go door-to-door with Hṛdayānanda with our *daṇḍas*, knocking, "Please take a book." "No thanks." But we're far from those days, he and I both. He's a college prof and I'm in a

Krazy Kat uniform, a Saroyan artist.

I'm pure spirit soul

gliding, gliding,

without words. Kṛṣṇa is God. I want

tears and ecstasy for Kṛṣṇa, not something else,

so I'll see you on the lectern

where I'll dance my mouse steps

and surrender and die in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I'd like to go and learn my *rasa*, but will probably be back, chagrined and suffering as my dreams indicate. But I wanted to write you this.

October 12

We're already in the teens of October. Today we leave this campground, drive two and a half hours to the dentist in Brescia, sit in his chair for about an hour, then drive one and a half hours to Vicenza. That's a lot for me, and I can expect to need three pills, if not four. But this is my last week of dependence on the allopathic medicine. After this week we will move to a health retreat where we will eat a natural diet, and I'll attempt to ease off the pills. I'm not sure how it will go. It seems simple in theory: whenever I feel pain, I will have to stop reaching for a pill.

This book, then, will stop being a travel book on October 20. That's a technical point in terms of my writing, but I mention it here because I like to live and write under a true title. The book will have to switch to something like, "My purpose while at the health retreat." For example, I will probably question, "Do I really think the drug is so evil to my body that I should give it up at all costs? Will I have to stop traveling and lecturing to do that? Is it better to just gulp pills and stay active in ISKCON?" (No, I don't think that it is better.)

Kammermusik

Writing in limited time. Shut up and listen, pilot. Put in your earplugs, release the clutch, and push down the accelerator (take off the emergency brake). Written in rear pit of van while M. chants his holy *japa*. May this be the equivalent of *japa* as I seek holy names and the divine purpose of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava way even now. I'm a soul released from the bondage of being a Guarino, although the doctor called me Stephen. Play on, JSB, and I will too, always recalling my master and dovetailing the essence of my good spirit in that way.

I won't close my eyes and imagine being in church or in a forest where twigs crunch underfoot. I'll imagine the *gopīs* singing for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Music should be sweet enough for that. I can't imagine what kind of music Kṛṣṇa would like to hear, but I know He hears the best music. The *gopīs* entertain the Divine Couple in the interludes between Their other pastimes, but I don't know how it is because it is not of this world.

We are not of this world, but we live here.

Take me, M., to the dentist,

take me beads, to *hari-nāma*. I wish to return to the lotus feet of Rādhā and Govinda at Inis Rath, and to surrender to Them. Please bring me to Their pinewood-lined temple room, quiet on the island haven.

Adagio

Slower. Rest awhile. The Lord is sweet. There are peaceful times even in His play, although often He's frolicsome.

O peace

Kṛṣṇa

You keep us moving, the soul.

In Vicenza, stocky Gaura-Nitāi,

Inis Rath's Rādhā-Govinda,
 my Prabhupāda, who lets me care for him.
 Sweet longing to be at Inis Rath at desk with book
 and writing.

Allegro

But we're here, our bodies, with the Lord in the heart.
 It's not just us and a temple Deity, but us with Kṛṣṇa, danc-
 ing our way down the *autostrada*. *Śāstra* is the rule. It's
 not circular to say that only Kṛṣṇa can reveal Himself by
 His own sweet will. There is no other way to know Him. So
 says Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Sandarbha*. I accept it, damn it! I
 accept it! Close the case. Bring us to Vaikuṇṭha Goloka.

To *sannyāsa* room, bring me with flowers and coffee
 no more.

I'm on herbs and the adventure of kicking the caffeine
 (in my allopathic medicine) habit.

T. says soon, very soon, the life thread will be cut and
 we'll enter eternal vision. O Vṛndāvana, O Purī, give me the
 heroic mind to endure my cross and give me a few hours
 with which to complete the fifty percent of my work or
 more. More greed, more devotion.

Worship.

Please accept my *tapasya*, sacrifice, my love of God
 offered through Śrīla Prabhupāda, my master.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

5:07 P.M., *Prabhupāda-deśa (Vicenza)*

Arrived. Have to go back to dentist Tuesday—and since
 on Monday someone will take my teeth into him, I'll be
 toothless. I decided not to lecture on that day.

Here's the news: Upon arrival, Nanda told us that the
 temple president asked us to take our one-month health
 retreat here in the temple. "Why waste Kṛṣṇa's *lakṣmī*?"

M. and I thought it over and decided, "Okay, we'll try it." I know it will compromise my solitude, but we'll have the advantage of living in the temple's shelter, of saving money, etc.

I asked myself what we were actually trying to accomplish. The emphasis is on health repair. Yoga exercises every day, major changes in the diet, and most significant and challenging of all, to stop the dependence on the pills.

October 13

While attending *maṅgala-ārati* and *tulasī-pūjā* this morning I realized that it would be difficult for us to do a health retreat at the temple. We're back to asking devotees to help us find a place to go after this week is up. I will probably wait until we move before I stop taking the pills.

I want to state my gratitude to Lord Kṛṣṇa for allowing me to speak on His behalf in the *Bhāgavatam* class. This morning I spoke on Prahāda Mahārāja's prayers to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva. I said that we have to hear his statements with real *śraddhā*, not official *śraddhā*. Then I gave a straight *paramparā* version about the meaning of *bhaktavatsala*. During the question and answer period, my headache increased and I took a pill while sitting on the *vyāsāsana*. The pills are friendly in that sense, but it's deceptive. It would be better to not give lectures, I suppose, than to take pills. Anyway, I'm going to try to adjust this in the coming weeks.

After the lecture I rushed off to bed and put a wet rag on my head. Madhu closed the shutters to darken the room. After an hour, the headache went down, but it left me feeling dispirited. I spoke with Madhu and hinted that maybe I wouldn't give the Sunday feast lecture, but he thought it

best I do. Partly, I wasn't inclined to speak because I couldn't think of a good topic.

Then Kṛṣṇa gave me an idea. I'll start with Prabhupāda's statement that the *Bhagavad-gītā* has everything that is in other scriptures, but it also contains things that are not in other scriptures. I'll give as an example the *dehino 'smin* verse and verses that point specifically to Kṛṣṇa worship. As devotees, we should feel allegiance for the specifics of our own path. For example, *patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam*—the offering of food—is unique to our movement. Then I'll choose another verse about thinking of Kṛṣṇa at the time of death, and I'll link it to the *harer nāma* verse. By citing *harer nāma*, I'll say that we also go beyond the *Bhagavad-gītā* to learn from Lord Caitanya how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

6:45 P.M., *After the lecture*

Good, old-time feelings of doing my best to deliver a lecture to a Kṛṣṇa conscious congregation. Kṛṣṇa gave me a good angle. I started as I said I would, with Prabhupāda's statement that the *Bhagavad-gītā* contains teachings not found in any other scripture, and I went from there. The audience seemed attentive despite having to hear the lecture through a translator. When I lecture, it makes me feel like a good servant. It's the old Hare Kṛṣṇa preacher-servant mood.

Oh, the words I spoke were such gems. If I could only live up to them! I asked the audience to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and to chant. I also asked them to be loyal to and to appreciate the *Bhagavad-gītā's* teachings, and I said that we can appreciate the *bhakti* in other religions while focusing on the specifics of worshiping Kṛṣṇa. All gems. As I said, if I could only live up to it.

October 14

1:30 A.M.

By reading Anne Charters' introduction to *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, I realized better that I am not attempting to write my memoirs in a storytelling kind of way. I rarely retain a memory long enough to describe it at length partly because I have so little physical energy and partly because I have so little time to write. Perhaps it also has something to do with the fact that I have been trained (in ISKCON) to be a preacher, to study and repeat only the Vedic *śāstras*. Our own life is not considered important enough to remember. Only Kṛṣṇa's message matters. I tell as much as I dare, but then I prefer to drift into preaching or prayer. After all, my identity in this life as Satsvarūpa dāsa and especially Stephen is ephemeral, a bubble in the midst of the ocean. Why spend my whole life trying to write the story of my adventures in this body? It can't be preserved even in literary form. Better I use myself as an instrument to repeat Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I cannot deny my experience as a conditioned soul, so I don't leave that out of the telling.

Lost my rhythm of rising at midnight since we left Geaglum two weeks ago. It seems much longer since we left there, now living this life in the van. I miss the regulation of rising at midnight and writing and reading all morn-

ing, then chanting twelve rounds at a stretch. The travel culminates in occasions like last night, speaking to a hall full of Sunday feast guests. They were all sitting on chairs. As I spoke, dusk approached and they didn't turn the lights on in the hall until the end of my talk. We were all one in speaking and hearing. When I saw two young men not listening but talking to one another, it diverted me. I wanted everyone's full attention. It gave me a glimpse of how Prabhupāda lectured tirelessly and considered it an important part of his mission—to speak to live audiences about Kṛṣṇa. He spoke to his own disciples and to uninitiated audiences, in room conversations, on morning walks. I think my doing that is less vital, although I have done it for many years. I am simply trying to find my place in the vast mosaic of Prabhupāda's Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I am not Prabhupāda, but one of his followers. I don't have to do everything he did, but do everything in his service.

This morning I'll put my upper and lower dentures into a small plastic soap box and give them to a devotee to carry to Brescia for repair. Therefore, I'll stay out of sight and toothless all day. Can't eat (chew). Tomorrow we will go to Brescia and be reunited with my teeth.

What if something happens and they get lost? Could I exist without the illusion of false teeth? Hundreds of old people do it; we have seen them in holy places like Vṛndāvana. They don't care how they look, and they don't bother fitting teeth or gluing them in. In the West people laugh at toothless people; it's not socially acceptable.

Last night I told a questioner who was objecting to the idea of surrendering to Kṛṣṇa: God is the one person to whom surrender is actually due, but He wants us to surrender in the mood of a lover falling in love with his beloved.

5:08 P.M.

Sassafras had a difficult day, much of it in bed with a wet rag on his forehead and three pills. It cleared in time to hear from M. that he had fixed the exhaust pipe and changed the oil, and in time to answer a fax from GNP asserting that books should be published. Then he read (vanity, vanity) the *Bhāgavatam* to prepare for the next class he had to give, a verse about Lord Viṣṇu's *yoga-nidrā* after the universal destruction. "We also may do *yoga-nidrā* in yoga practice," Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "but don't snore and fall asleep or think that you are God."

No teeth, and if I take my eyeglasses off, people look younger, further away, fuzzy. What next? M. kindly offered to make me and Śrīla Prabhupāda a mashed apple, for which I'm now awaiting. Read about Kerouac's spontaneous prose method and do agree that I should write my own.

"Jazz the spirit," JK says of the spontaneous writer. Use that?

Tomorrow I request you to write, "Nevermind two lines, three lines, but write." Don't be dull. You read, but you must write your realizations—sometime during the arduous journey by car to Brescia and back. Okay, I'll try, I'll try.

Promise.

The first essay I ever wrote in ISKCON was called "Controlling Sleep." It was for insiders, inmates of our storefront, and it told how to shake your head and spray yourself with water if you get sleepy, how to get up at midnight and blow.

I would pick up my new red beads and stay awake. Hayagrīva was impressed that I was able to get up so early, and I was glad he was impressed as I chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa in my navy black, crew-neck sweater.

I'm older now and my red beads have faded
but I still hang on to them.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is with us, even in his name, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. I don't have to say his whole name, and when I go before the big *mūrti* in the temple, I don't have to think *my* Śrīla Prabhupāda is entirely there in the public statue as I bow in front of others. But he *is* there too. I don't deny it.

October 15

7:30 A.M., *Brescia*

Parked outside “Giardino del Gelato” and the *tabacchi* store, next to John Franco’s office. It’s raining, and we’ve been here since 6 A.M. Took a pill to prop myself up. Getting anxious now, “When will he come? Is there some problem? Will I get my teeth back?”

Kṛṣṇa should be in the center and He is. I have to awaken to that. Thinking ahead—meeting with temple president this afternoon (he wants to talk with me about my disciples), then tomorrow morning *Bhāgavatam* class on *yoga-nidrā*, then tomorrow afternoon a meeting with disciples. I think I’ll ask them to ask me questions. Improvise. Can I respond? How can I guide you, dear ones, whom I see only once a year and who rarely write to me? You struggle. We all do because we are all trying to improve our lives. It seems slow, this process of surrendering to Kṛṣṇa.

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, if we could know You . . . How can we prove our love?

Read that JK saw his earthly vanity as a writer.

M. told me how he gave up his musical career and instruments when he joined the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

The body, the body
 the corpus, the skin
 the sin of forgetting—
 even to sing can be a wrong
 if you sing with vanity.
 Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa . . . M. went alone on Rādhāṣṭamī and sang
 in the van, making up tunes to *Rādhāṣṭaka*.
 Car pulling up. Is it John Franco? No.
 Fifteen minutes late now.

Update: John Franco came twenty minutes late. After that, everything went okay. My teeth are firmly back in my head. Madhu and I preached to him, trying to offer encouragement. He has no illusions about his difficulties in practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness because of family and professional obligations. He's a nice man, a devotee at heart.

4:40 P.M.

The temple is empty and quiet.

Ain't writing about me, my life, I say. I'm writing a Kṛṣṇa conscious prose history of a soul. My soul? Yes, but beyond it too. Post-its in books for lectures I will give or have already given—references to Arjuna as Guḍākeśa and other notes on sleep. I assume my durable dirigible will rise tomorrow, heart beating.

Nanda found us a place for the health retreat somewhere quiet. Prabhupāda was skeptical of attempts to achieve material well-being. Spiritual well-being is the only guaranteed permanent state. Still, we have to keep the body functional. Mine is too broken down to continue as I've been going. It requires fixing. It will be outwardly slow. Don't get bored, but write.

Been telling people who want to meet with me, “No, sorry.”

“A man who translates your books wants to meet with you for five minutes.”

“Sorry, no.” Whoever heard of a five-minute meeting? Whatever energy I have between headaches goes for the essentials, *Bhāgavatam* lecture, disciples’ meeting. It’s obvious we could not try for a no-obligation health retreat while living in the temple. People say they understand, but they don’t. They have their mission and I’m to the side of it with my poor health. The temple is a family community. You either belong or you’re out. John Franco says he feels out even when he goes for the Sunday feast. Too bad temples don’t make people feel more welcome, even when they’re not inmates, but I know it’s difficult. Anyway, I should talk. I won’t welcome anyone for even five minutes.

Sonata

There is no way out of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa wants full surrender. I told her she couldn’t play her cello and say it’s for Kṛṣṇa unless she plays a Hare Kṛṣṇa tune, but if she likes, she can do it as therapy.

How sweet that we can’t indulge in nondevotional pursuits. Matter is converted to spirit by the specific act of offering something to God—something authorized.

Don’t offer marijuana.

Bach chamber music?

Isn’t it already divine

peccadillo,

seventeenth century?

Be careful.

Prabhupāda smiles at me, ironic sometimes.

Allegro and Presto

I am a devotee, but I want to know, is Bengali *bhajana* the only way (or the coarse Western version of it—smacking Balarāma resin drums and singing in hoarse voices)?

Allegro

Lord, I will accept the pain you send me
during these days.

One minute filled with Your music—

Kṛṣṇa blows His horn,

gopīs take it as poison and nectar at the same time,

and the boys are called to sports,

the animals entranced.

Presto

Quick exit. I said my piece.

October 16

1:38 A.M.

The man who would speak on the *yoga-nidrā* of Lord Viṣṇu and pure devotees, was himself still sleeping after six hours and reluctant to get up at 1:30 A.M., telling himself, “It’s a big day ahead and I might need extra rest. Prabhupāda allowed devotees with weak health to sleep more than six hours if needed.” I’ll speak like that in the *Bhāgavatam* class. The main thing is to be awake, not sunk in *tamo-guṇa*. Ordinary sleep, in excess, is *tamo-guṇa*. Now try to chant the holy names without a sense of failure. As with this writing in human poverty, I can’t reject my mantras—not the act of chanting them, anyway.

It’s all right to deny people who want to meet privately with me. I wrote some of them letters yesterday explaining why I couldn’t meet with them, explaining how I canceled visits to the other Italian temples, explaining what I can and cannot give. Anyway, people will keep asking no matter what I say.

O pain,
you get your way.
I tried to make you smaller
by tricks—
a tiny
ball, a token, or to
dissolve you like magic.
O pain.

October 17

Today is the last day of our temple visit and of this book. Last night after the disciples' meeting, Madhu and I realized that that meeting was the occasion that fulfilled the purpose of our travel to Italy. We had come here because we wanted to personally reciprocate with the devotees in Italy. We thought we would visit many temples, but it turned out we could visit only one. Fortunately, almost all my disciples came here to be with me for that meeting. Now it's over.

During the night I had a long dream (nightmare) of civilization completely breaking down in America. I was stranded with no friends. Gradually my clothes grew moldy and more and more potential violence and starvation was ahead for me and everybody else. There was no place to live or sleep except for those who were fortunate enough to find shelter. Most of us weren't. The dream was not made up of facts of how such a thing would take place. Unfortunately, I was not a devotee in the dream, although I was in my own identity. I mean, I wasn't chanting, preaching, or praying.

When I awoke, I thought about the contrast between the dream and the genteel meeting we had last night where we were at leisure to discuss metaphysical topics and how to improve our spiritual lives. We tend to take the basic material amenities, friendship, and even the security of material

law and order for granted. We also take for granted the choice we think we have to remain in the association of devotees or to leave that association. In the dream I was thrust into an entirely lawless, devotee-less situation. I pray that it never happens that way.

I have to lecture this morning on chanting. I have this much of an outline prepared:

1. Begin by quoting the Sanskrit verse about offensive chanting:

*bahu janma kare yadi śravaṇa, kīrtana
tabu ta' nā pāya kṛṣṇa-pade prema-dhana*

If one is infested with the ten offenses in the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, despite his endeavor to chant the holy name for many births, he will not get the love of Godhead that is the ultimate goal of this chanting.

—Cc. Ādi 8.16

2. Then recite the ten offenses, both in their negative and positive aspects (one should not blaspheme the devotees, but should glorify saintly Vaiṣṇavas, etc.).

3. Speak about the offense of being inattentive while chanting. Read selections from *Harināma Cintāmaṇi* that describe the subdivisions of inattentive chanting as apathetic devotional service, laziness, and distraction.

At the meeting, which was a public occasion, I told devotees that I have become habituated to taking allopathic medicine and that I plan to give it up. In this way, I have committed myself to stop. I seem now to have no choice but to go ahead and do it.

5:53 P.M.

I said that last night's meeting fulfilled the purpose of our travel to Italy, but tonight's meeting was even better. I spoke my old memories of coming to Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1966. I worried beforehand that it would be too much the same old thing and that I wouldn't be able to speak from my heart. But I did. Having to pause for the translator helped. The audience laughed at the humor of the stories. As I told each story—the time I gave 300 dollars and then Prabhupāda looked at me as if to say, “You haven't surrendered yet,” the time I didn't get initiated and Swamijī said, “If you love me, then I'll love you”—I recreated them and lived in them as I spoke them. Although the devotees may have had fun tonight, I was the one who benefited the most because I was able to feel those happy days again and my simple love for and surrender to Prabhupāda. And to be able to joke about my own foolish self and to tell how he dragged me to his lotus feet was relishable.

Afterwards, someone asked, “What is it that brings out the love of the disciple for the spiritual master?” It is the loving force of the guru pulling the disciple forward.

I had a bit of a headache at the beginning of the meeting, but I sailed through and the headache left during the ecstasy of talking. Now I'm back on the ground with less than an hour before I have to take rest. We leave in the morning. This is the reason to travel: to find new audiences and to tell the same old stories of Prabhupāda's saving me and my coming to love him in 1966.

A TRIP TO SPAIN

INTRODUCTION

In *The Summer Marathon*, we had Svevo's first cameo appearance. He was a fictional character. I had hoped he would develop into a real character, but he soon disappeared in favor of the authorial "I". In *A Trip To Spain*, however, I more successfully sustained two fictional characters: the Visiting Sannyāsī and his secretary, Narahari dāsa.

I wrote *A Trip To Spain* just after completing another story, *A Week Before Gaura-Pūrṇimā*, in which the Visiting Sannyāsī and Narahari were also the main characters. That story had some fantastic elements—it was an attempt to include the thrills of spy fantasy in an ISKCON setting played out amid the simple routine of a Kṛṣṇa conscious life. I had fun with it, but I didn't feel grounded while writing it, so I decided to go back to my writing sessions. Surprisingly, the Visiting Sannyāsī and his secretary appeared in this next piece, and the fictional element continued, if more subdued. The trip to Spain was real; the fictional characters and their struggles were not. I find it hard to take fiction seriously, and I often end up dropping the persona or picking it up again later. I certainly played with the persona of the Visiting Sannyāsī in this small book.

I also discovered by writing *A Trip To Spain* that travel writing takes place not only when you're on the road, but when you're preparing to go. The preparations give

rise to all kinds of moods, and when I capture that in writing, I feel it is as much part of the travel as when I actually set out. At the same time, there's nothing that compares with the ability to roll along through various landscapes, capturing brief impressions or words that fly off—the sights from the road.

I like to capture such things. Otherwise, the trip itself would be completely forgotten—was completely forgotten. There would be nothing so special about it, no threat to life or intense spiritual experience that would set it apart from the thousands of miles I have traveled since 1972.

Over time, too, even significant moments can become lost. Therefore, to have been able to capture the impressions as they formed in my mind brings me satisfaction and gives my experiences a life of their own.

Why would I want these experiences to live on? Because Kṛṣṇa consciousness is such a valuable thing, even when practiced by a *sādhaka*. It has enduring value, and within the general experience of practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one's travel on behalf of preaching has enduring value. It's a way of life that will be lost unless it is preserved. That is certainly true of anyone's experience in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but I think it is especially true of the experiences we have when we travel. Travel experiences or impressions are often fleeting. Their weight is sometimes more in the telling of the whole journey, of how we saw Kṛṣṇa along the way, than in the moment by moment observation. Later, we may barely remember anything about our trip. In this case, I was able to claim the details.

We can say that travel is an allegory for the journey through time that each of us must make in our attempt to return to the spiritual world. Therefore, it is the intention behind our traveling that gives it its intrinsic value. If Kṛṣṇa is pleased with our tiny travels in His service within

this world, then He may move us forward on our seemingly, infinitely long journey back to Godhead, where we will finally be free of our restlessness and travel with Him through the fields of Vṛndāvana.

SETTING

Who will go? The Visiting Sannyāsī and Narahari, who will drive fast.

Why are they going? To preach the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa as ordered by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Will this take place on a high level? That depends on how much the Supreme Lord is willing to appear in my words. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes this phenomenon in a purport to the section about Dhruva Mahārāja in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*: “Devotees are always interested in hearing about the Lord’s transcendental qualities, and they are always eager to glorify these qualities, but sometimes they feel inconvenienced by humbleness. The Personality of Godhead, being situated in everyone’s heart, specifically gives a devotee intelligence to describe Him. It is therefore understood that when a devotee writes or speaks about the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his words are dictated by the Lord from within.” (*Bhāg.* 4.9.4, purport)

Am I feeling inconvenienced by humbleness? Unfortunately, I’m inconvenienced by *anarthas*. Therefore, I admit that this story is going to be more about what happened to two conditioned souls trying to practice *vaidhi-bhakti* and *sannyāsa-* or *brahmacarya-dharma* in ISKCON as it was in 1994 than a story full of glorification of the Supreme Lord (although that will be there too).

The Visiting Sannyāsi and his assistant, Narahari, are scheduled to leave Brescia on April 20 at 5 A.M., which happens to be Lord Rāmacandra's appearance day this year. If Lord Rāmacandra desires, and with His blessings, they will head south on Autostrade 21, which connects to A-7 to A-26 and then onto A-10. This will carry them through the small city of Alessandria and on into Torino. In Torino, which they hope to reach by 8 A.M., they plan to stop (but not take breakfast—it's a fast day). After a short rest and some time for *japa*, they will try to make another 200 kilometers by lunch. They will bypass Genova, drive down the Riviera coast, cross the border of Monaco, and drive into Nice, France. Then they will continue driving along the Cote d'Azur and hope to reach Aix-en-Provence by 3 P.M. There they will set up for the night, probably parked at a gas station beside other cars and trucks.

On the second day of travel, they will chant early-morning *japa* and again leave by 5 A.M. They will pick up Route A-8 and travel until it turns into A-7, then N-119, then A-9. Then they will stop at 7:30 A.M. for breakfast. By 9:30 they will leave again, drive until lunch, then take another break. They will drive the final stretch and reach the Spanish border by 4 P.M., if all goes well. There they will again set up for the night.

On the third day they will again leave at 5 A.M. They hope to drive 250 kilometers along A-2, stop for breakfast and rest, then continue for another 200 kilometers and break for lunch. They hope to reach the Spanish farm, New Vraja-maṇḍala, by 5:30 P.M.

Narahari tried to join the European Automobile Club, but they wouldn't have him because he is an Irish citizen with a car registered in Italy. He had hoped to obtain this membership because on their two previous visits to Spain, the van broke down on the highway and it took a long time

before they could be rescued and have the van repaired. The Spanish devotees think their country is jinxed. Narahari also complained that this Renault Master van has an unusually small gas tank; he tried to get a bigger one, but couldn't. The van only runs for three hours before needing gas. On this trip, the van appears to be in good shape and it has been recently serviced. They'll have to see.

The van is chock-full of cooking supplies, Prabhupāda's books, and other paraphernalia. It's a self-sufficient, traveling "*bhajana-kutir*." Narahari has been looking into all the different supplies and filling the cubbyholes with everything from rice to pots to screwdrivers to light bulbs, votive candles—literally hundreds of items, about which only he knows the full extent of their whereabouts or necessity.

The van is legally owned and registered. The only problem is that it is overdue for a road test. Narahari said that such a lapse wouldn't cause a problem while traveling in other countries, and that he would get it done as soon as they return to Italy.

In these last days before travel, the Visiting Sannyāsī and Narahari have been frequenting a local store that operates a facsimile machine. With the luxury of having their "own" fax number, they have been engaged in rapid communications with an Āyurvedic doctor in Canada (to locate a source of anti-constipation medicine in Europe), a devotee in New York (who wants to join them in Spain, and whom they are asking to bring more supplies), a devotee who promises to forward the Visiting Sannyāsī's mail—and the details go back and forth sometimes four or five times a day. Seeing the benefit of this kind of rapid exchange, Narahari included in one of his faxes to New York a request for information about computers with fax capacity. When the Visiting Sannyāsī heard this, he said, "Forget it. I don't want it. If we get a fax, we'll have a fax number."

"No one has to know what it is," said Narahari.

"They'll find out, and the next thing you know they'll want us to be on COM and LINK and we'll never have any peace."

The story:

The Visiting Sannyāsī took part in an informal symposium of devotees arranged by the editor of *Back to Godhead*. The editor wanted them to discuss "Community," and hoped he could use the points of their discussion in his magazine. During that meeting, the Visiting *Sannyāsī* mentioned that he sometimes wrote poetry. Another member remarked, "I think a *sannyāsī* has to do a lot more than write poetry if we are going to develop true community in our movement." This remark drew several assents: "Yeah." "Right." All this was later published in the magazine, and it made our *sannyāsī* feel ashamed and guilty. And chagrined. In a separate incident, he heard third- or fourth-hand that during the annual meeting of the ultimate directors of the movement, someone said in passing, "We've got so much work to do for Śrīla Prabhupāda in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but it's not going to happen if our *sannyāsīs* are sitting around writing poetry and the householders are completely bewildered with family duties." That also helped to kill his joyful spirit.

As a result, the *sannyāsī* stopped writing poetry for awhile. It had been an occasional practice over the years but had recently flared up into a post middle-age steady fire. He didn't agree that poetry writing was idle, but felt too emotional about it to articulate his feelings. Besides, others made him feel guilty about it. He decided to again write poems, but to keep them to himself. It was a secret. He also tried to keep his profile of one tangibly engaged in the acceptable duty of *sannyāsa* preaching.

The Visiting Sannyāsī had several problems connected with the poetry writing. First, he was frustrated because he had so little time to write—or even think—in that way.

Another problem was that whenever he expressed himself, he found he was filled with worldly allusions and images, whereas a Vaiṣṇava poet ought to write directly about Kṛṣṇa.

As for not being appreciated, the Visiting Sannyāsī didn't so much mind that, except when others implied that he was not pleasing Śrīla Prabhupāda. Therefore, when he found statements in Prabhupāda's writings supporting his poem writing, he found it solacing. He found such support not only in direct references encouraging disciples to write and pray, but in many other places. For example, he took courage from a letter Śrīla Prabhupāda had written in 1967 encouraging Murāri dāsa to go on playing his guitar in the *kīrtana* and that there was no need to learn sitar: "The best part of valor is to utilize properly whatever talents and qualifications we have got for the service of the Lord."

The Visiting Sannyāsī confided all this to his companion and *brahmacārī* assistant, Narahari dāsa. Narahari sympathized deeply and encouraged his friend to go on writing poems if it inspired him in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He agreed that the *sannyāsī* shouldn't advertise this practice. Together they plotted how they would take time so that the *sannyāsī* could write. The trip to Spain would not be so conducive for writing, but maybe after . . .

Chapter One

A disappointing fax arrived from Spain, sent by Jhaḍu Ṭhākura dāsa, the temple president: “It seems that Paraṁdhāma and Deva dāsa are not yet ready to make their vows. Paraṁdhāma is having problems chanting sixteen rounds, and Deva dāsa fell down three months ago.”

One of the main reasons that the Visiting Sannyāsī was *going* to Spain was to initiate three Spanish devotees. Now two of them were ineligible. “Only *mātāji* Caraṇāravinda is ready.”

The Visiting Sannyāsī considered changing his plans and not going to Spain at all. It was such a long drive, and now one of the main reasons to go had been removed. As he discussed it with Narahari, however, they realized better their remaining reasons to go. The Visiting Sannyāsī admitted that he had been gearing himself up to keep a travel diary (with poems) written from a devotee’s life on the road. He also wanted to write about his visit to the temple. Narahari thought it important that they do recognizable duties, and the visit to Spain served that purpose. They decided to go despite the disappointing news.

April 14

I spoke this morning with the Visiting Sannyāsī about interspersing this story with samples of his poetry, and he gave his permission.

We're Going to Spain

It's a pain—long hours rattling in the back
of the Renault, sunshine of Côte d'Azur—
and I'm helpless.
Write what words come. They
don't come from the pure place.
What to speak of words from Kṛṣṇaloka,
mine don't even come
from a clear water place on earth.
You know those water bottle people?
I've tasted their water in a dozen countries; they
all say the same thing: "Our water filters
through volcanic ash" . . . "comes from the
Atlantic Ocean skies" . . . "deep in the
unspoiled wilderness" . . . "a Coral island," etc.
Well, my words come down through
stacks of 45 RPM records
dropping one after another on the phonograph,
Alan Freed's top hits, Fats Domino,
Cardinals, Drifters, rhythm and blues . . .
My layers include Eisenhower as President
(we didn't own a TV but watched him
through the display window of the TV store . . .)
Korean War, Dad and the firehouse . . .
Wadded tissues, peed-on snow, girls,
and drank liquor and beer on Staten Island . . .
"Holy moly!" said Captain Marvel.
"Shazaam" and nitroglycerin to you.
"Hey Stevie, the Dole Company is looking for you.
They want to put fruit in a can."

Down it filters, but
 there is a way to scrape it all and just
 throw it out. I am not a follower
 of Prabhupāda for nothing.
 That was all *māyā*, a dream.
 Do you remember your dreams of forty years ago?
 Of course not. Then why remember
 waking dreams? Let them go.

But will Kṛṣṇa sustain me?
 The life of *Bhāgavatam*?
 Yes. Great sages walk on
 this ground, bathe in these rivers.
 You can enter one river and
 come up in another two thousand miles away.
 You can have a lot of fun and satisfy
 your senses in the service of the Lord.
 But don't expect to bring with you your
 old record collection, beds of childhood
 and adolescence,
 father's smelly cigar butts, pictures of a naked woman
 you found in his drawer and the ones
 in your drawer, mother's statue of
 Christ the Little King, your dog or
 sister (yeah, good-bye to her cynical wit
 always cutting me down . . .)

You can enter this solid ground where
 you met Śrīla Prabhupāda and became his *śiṣya*.
 It's not Indian or even New Yorkese,
 but Lord Caitanya's *sankīrtana*
 true and transcendental.
 Come to me pure, go to Spain,
 and allow your pure words to filter down.

They're better than volcanic ash, layers of pure sky
and pure winds. Vaikuṇṭha words.
Through broken speech,
babyish repetition—
Kṛṣṇa is God,
Rādhā is God's,
mahā-mantra is God,
guru is Prabhupāda, is God's
servant, and I am his.

How Many Poems?

How many poems is it okay to write?
 Is it like eating, that it shouldn't be overdone?
 After all, you have to brush down your *śikhā* to begin.
 Whaddya mean
 you can't tie it in a knot? What's it made
 of, fine gossamer gold? Are you
 Rapunzel?
 Really now,
 your master didn't josh like this,
 why do you?
 Oh, he had fun too, but when he
 looked at us he thought, "What a sad lot
 these Americans speculating," and on a street
 he saw them kissing . . .
 "Get married," he said.

Poems ought to be brought in like lilacs
 from the front yard. It's early enough
 in the morning—I don't have to ask—
 no one's awake anyway and I won't take many.
 Dew all over them—I couldn't resist, happened
 to have scissors, then
 brought them home, my poems, in my mind
 and arranged them in a vase before the *mūrti*
 of Prabhupāda.

April 15

An unsolicited fax arrived from Delhi: "What are you doing for the 1996 Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial? Consider joining us in the International Office in Delhi and do liaison with centers around the world to engage them to do something big. You can edit a magazine."

When he read this, the Visiting Sannyāsī reprimanded Narahari for sending a fax to Vṛndāvana which contained a return fax number.

"We don't have to answer this," said Narahari. "We can pretend that it arrived after we had moved on."

"No, we *do* have to answer it."

The Visiting Sannyāsī devised this answer: "Committed to working in Europe and America. For the Centennial will be giving seminars on Śrīla Prabhupāda's life and teachings and writing a memoir about him."

Later in the day, a Fed-Ex pack arrived with three weeks worth of forwarded mail.

Well, the day has gone, I had to
answer letters instead of reading the
Bhāgavatam. Yes,
their guru cares for his disciples and
thinks of them while they're away,
just as much as the disciples care for him. It
depends on the persons, right?
But most letters I rolled out
stock lines from false teeth,
like "I will be teaching a seminar
in Europe in August, be in the holy *dhāma*
by Kārttika time." The same thing
in each letter. Slowly the stack diminished and by
nighttime I had answered them all except
a few—one twenty-pager from a
Russian woman and a fanzine
I could not quickly digest.

Who am I writing for?
Why am I posing, dressing up? I don't
get it. I don't see why you're not
able to write the truth. But I
do know why you can't write
the *absolute* truth.
'Cuz you still have material desires.
That's what the *Bhāgavatam* says.

There's No Excuse

Kṛṣṇa, you see, it's sad I forget Him,
 so sad I don't even recognize it.
 Why do I forget? Because I heard from
 Dr. Pessen when I was a college freshman
 that primitive people invented the gods.
 I read too many books by Edith Hamilton
 and Robert Graves on Greek myths.
 And Bertrand Russell with his pipe,
 is it his fault that I'm part atheist?

I can't read so well. My brain is dis-
 turbed like someone returned from a war with
 pieces missing. The LSD war, the
 falling apart of my Catholic faith before priests who
 couldn't answer my impassioned plea for love.
 Riddles and puzzles and my speculation while riding
 on the Staten Island ferry, "What kind of a man
 was Jesus,
 actually?" Dr. Pessen said maybe Jesus never
 existed. My mother couldn't say, and dad wouldn't
 talk about it, not a bit. I didn't dare ask him.

There's no excuse.
 Hear of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna, His
 taking the reins in His hand,
 His boyhood of stealing butter in Vṛndāvana
 with friends, wrestling and loving them
 in boyish forest sports,
 His trysts with the *gopīs*,
 whom He teases and loves with purest love.

There's no excuse.

Kṛṣṇa comes as Pṛśnigarbha, a four-armed
Viṣṇu to accept the prayers of Dhruva Mahārāja,
prayers I can get close to because
Dhruva ends, "I regret I'm such a
poor-hearted servant. You wanted to give me
a fabulous treasure but I asked only
for a few grains of rice. Please protect
me, Supreme Lord, as a cow protects
her calf from wandering away, and
from attacks by wolves and foxes."

I have no excuse, just my
plan to read, good quality time reading
with the book on the desk and me awake,
praying, with the *Bhāgavatam*.

April 16

The day after his letter-answering marathon, the Visiting Sannyāsī continued to hear the voices and feel the lives of the people whose letters he had read. He had written, "I am shocked to hear"—that a man's wife had left him with their baby. The man said that they had been acting like Superman and Superwoman, not recognizing each other's humanness. A congregational member from one country had written asking the Visiting Sannyāsī to please write his wife, someone completely unknown to the *sannyāsī*, and ask her not to sue him. The Visiting Sannyāsī felt that he was overbrimming with the personal news of his correspondents, but of course none of it was the kind of news he would want to share.

He had tried to give thoughtful and sincerely felt replies, but he couldn't always, and he thought, "I wish they would read my poems instead." Then he realized that "I tell it there too nakedly." The poems were meant to be a secret not only from the general devotees, and certainly from the senior men, the leaders, but even from those persons who looked to our Visiting Sannyāsī as a guide. Then he wondered, "Then why write so nakedly? What's the point?" The Visiting Sannyāsī did not usually doubt the value of his poetry writing, and if he did doubt, that very confusion became grist for the mill, material for another kind of poem.

I Want You

“Today no poem” says a little
 Chinese laundry man inside
 my brain. Who is he to shut down
 on me like that?
 I want in.
 I knock on the door some more.

Maya Angelou, sixty-year-old
 black lady poet of whom James Baldwin said,
 “Sister Maya has been there and back”—I looked at
 her poems for a warm-up and a Kerouac page but he
 had written an ambitious portrait of a Sunday
 on MacDougal
 Street in Greenwich Village. I wanted something
 quiet and indoors
 because that’s where I am—and Kṛṣṇa conscious.
 Well you’re not gonna find it in
 Māyā Kerouac.
 If you find the opposite, will it drive
 you running to the *Bhāgavatam*?

Just find yourself, what you want, and
 the words will come. I want you—
 I want you, freedom. I want
 love of God as my reality, at least the way you
 can look up at the moon. You can’t
 possess it but at least you see it and
 you’re enchanted. Or now the blue dawn
 of late April full of Italian birds in
 this neighborhood. I’m sorry I don’t know them
 the way I knew the birds in Pennsylvania,
 but I’m glad I’m here out of reach.

Out of reach of the long arm
of the law
the institution,
the botheration.

Tell it man, go ahead.

I just want you—solitude, love of
being alone on a schedule of my own,
busy all day and precious lines coming out
arriving at Kṛṣṇa consciousness by the quiet method,
desperate for it, asking quietly . . .

Then giving up that pose and
just reading and writing.

When the Yakṣas tried to scare
Dhruva Mahārāja, the sages assembled and said,
“Don’t fear these tigers and lions running
at you and trunks of bodies falling from
the sky. The ocean’s roar is an illusion—
chant the holy names and you’ll be free.”

Dhruva did it.

Hear it and apply. I want that.

Nice Things

There's a new edition of Prabhupāda's book,
The Path of Perfection, with Bharadvāja's painting
 on the cover, Kṛṣṇa speaking to Uddhava.
 I wonder who Kṛṣṇa is looking at
 as He turns His face to the side,
 not at Uddhava who is on one knee
 with folded palms before the Lord.
 I'm looking to enter this "chronicle
 of an historic series of talks by Śrīla Prabhupāda"
 about yoga, *bhakti-yoga*.

Another nice thing—plan to go to Māyāpur.
 The blue sky lightening.
 Anticipation of breakfast, which I take
 in a restrained amount. Chyavan Prash and bananas,
 hot milk, a little cereal.
 The red pen and all colors of pens.
 To know I have been up early
 and wrote and read with rest ahead.
 For Kṛṣṇa there's no anxiety. We
 make trouble for ourselves. He can
 get us out if we only turn to Him.
 Stop being envious and avaricious.
 Work against the void and Māyāvādī doctrines
 that make people believe there's no God.
 You live with God and that's
 the proof.
 First prove it to yourself.

In four days we'll travel
 to Mexico in our blue Olds,
 to Puerto Rico in our hat . . .

No really, in our really white
 Renault Master van, our truly
 hidden purpose bulging out,
 all day Monday Nara will pack and
 Tuesday cook for three days on the road—
 I can't chew tough bread crusts but
 if you dip 'em into hot tea I do
 okay. Two hours daily I enter *Vaikuṇṭha*
 in reading. Tepid *japa*. No matter, the
 holy name is kind even to offenders.

Say the truth—we want to get away.
 Days like this, even if I'm shy and
 too uptight to express it, are very nice and
 liberating in their own way. It's the best
 I can be Kṛṣṇa conscious right now
 so I'm not knocking it. I'll read
 what the *Bhagavad-gītā* says
 and what Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke on *āyur*
harati vai puṁsām, any *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*
 lecture he
 gave ending, "Thank you very much." I'll
 pray to be with him knowing I'm
 always a fool before my spiritual master—
 and before you too.

Chapter Two

April 17

A devotee told Narahari that there would be a national gas station strike starting Monday and lasting through Tuesday night. They were scheduled to drive out from Brescia early Wednesday morning, heading southwest toward France. The Visiting Sannyāsī overheard Narahari talking to the devotee while he read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in the next room. He had just found this line in a purport: “A person should act in such a way that the Lord is satisfied by the activity; it is not that he himself is to be satisfied. Of course, when the Lord is satisfied, the devotee automatically becomes satisfied.” (*Bhāg.* 4.11.14, purport). The Visiting Sannyāsī pondered this. He considered it a crucial passage and wanted to know how it applied to himself. For example, was his writing poetry selfish or service? And if you wanted to serve Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Kṛṣṇa, should you just go up to your Godbrothers like a spaced-out child and say, “What should I do? Please direct me”?

Later, the Visiting Sannyāsī asked Narahari, “What’s up?”

“I’ll look at the map and see if we can get to the border with a full tank.”

“But ours only lasts for three hours.”

"If we need to, we can take an extra container in the van, but it will bring the odor of diesel into the back where you are writing."

Narahari started packing the van. He said, "Just consider, we are planning a 1,700-kilometer journey. We are hoping to do all this by traveling over paved roads in a metal machine with rubber tires and diesel fuel. Is the van going to hold up?" The Visiting Sannyāsī was surprised that Narahari should talk like that. He didn't like to even think about the possibility of the van breaking down because he didn't want to activate the jinx. He figured that Narahari had full faith in the van and that was only proper. Now Narahari was meditating on how many things could go wrong.

Narahari also said that they found an office in Vicenza willing to sell them a membership in the European Auto Club. He wanted to go to Vicenza to sign up, if someone could give him a ride. To the Visiting Sannyāsī this was good news, but yet another indication that the van might, in fact, break down. Narahari even reminded him of how their previous van had broken down in Spain and what good fortune it was that they were members of the auto club at the time, because the auto club towed that old van at their own expense all the way from Spain to Belgium.

Naked Poems

Said he wanted a naked poem,
 not taking off clothes from
 this skinny frame, what you do
 in the bathroom, but naked feelings.
 Don't ask why I write these
 poems when I travel,
 what they are for.
 I just do them. As best I can see they
 are offerable to the Supreme Lord,
 who wants devotion.

He asks for *bhakti* through water
 or a leaf and a fruit. *Bhakti*—
 put it in a poem.
 “Oh, where do I *get* that *bhakti*?”
 It's in you, man.
 It's your love which you've been
 giving to unworthy objects.
 Now refine it and offer it to God.

Where is God? He's in the *Bhāgavatam*,
 in the doubter's heart, the ferry boat
 making waves and crunching against the wooden pier.
 He's the sound in ether, the
 gulls and Mickey Mouse and Beethoven,
 on street corners—
 God is everywhere.
 But there's a science to know
 how He comes in person, what He
 does, how He disappears. Learn that
 science and go to Him.

This is not for ordinary folks
but for those with devotion or
whomever will hear.

We're not this body—tell the people
so they'll know a poet's vocation
is valid work when he does it
for guru and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

What Did You Read?

Dhruva Mahārāja, now grown up and strong-armed was avenging his dead brother in a place like Tibet, shooting arrows into the ghostly hoards, they were dying in admiration of his prowess—“That guy shoots thirty arrows at once and none of ours hurt him in the least!”

They had to admit he was terrific as he mowed them down. They came back too with scary illusions and mighty arrows and bludgeons, but Dhruva Mahārāja had received

a special weapon and he chanted *hari-nāma* and fought.

We too have that weapon, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, in Lord Caitanya’s gift of chanting, so use it well.

Strong-armed Dhruva Mahārāja was getting out of hand killing everyone in sight. Svāyambhuva Manu calmed him and said, “Please stop this anger, set the right example for a *prabhu*.”

Manu was preaching comprehensively that the Supreme is aloof from matter yet everything emanates from Him.

By free will the *jīvas* mess each other up and then complain, “It’s God’s fault.”

This is what I’ve heard so far, listening with Dhruva.

What am I going to do with the knowledge? I’ll take it in, consider how to live.

I'll simply think of it, just understand,
and that's a big gain. I'll let it temper
my anger, increase my tolerance . . .
I want to be like him
and take up the weapon of chanting.

It's Just As Good Here

These days waiting for travel
 are just as important and exciting and don't you
 forget it. This dawn sky like yesterday's.
 Any attempt to speak past your own
 cleverness and lies. Don't think it will
 be any easier on the *autostrada*.
 It's like the time of death—
 harder to pray because of the mucus
 and the “gar-gar” rattle in the throat.
 Going through the tunnels in mountainsides
 then entering those terraced hills
 then the French border
 probably in sunshine—I don't want to write of it
 in advance or to put it down but note
 that this house is fine.
 My shoes without me in them
 sitting by the door are fine,
 and the forty-minute reading session
 in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books at this desk.
 I ought to move my body more and
 take in fresh air, crick my neck
 and see the birds I only hear . . . but
 I know why I stay indoors and
 I approve. Yeah, sure, get in as many
 hours at this desk as you can,
 reading or writing on a quiet schedule.
 That's heaven enough
 until we leave it
 and move on
 to preach in Spain
 (if we get there).

April 18

While the Visiting Sannyāsī was massaging his Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*, he heard Prabhupāda lecturing from a 1969 talk on *karma-yoga*. Śrīla Prabhupāda defined action and inaction. In the language of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “action” is what we do on our own account and the reaction that incurs. There is no reaction when we act on Kṛṣṇa’s behalf—inaction in action. It sounded so perfectly clear—theoretically. Then the Visiting Sannyāsī questioned his practice of writing poems: “Are my poems action or inaction?” (The Visiting Sannyāsī tends to apply whatever philosophy he has heard as a measure by which to test or support his writing of poems.)

He decided that the poems are inaction to the degree that they are service accepted by guru and Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda also spoke about “retirement.” Arjuna wanted to retire from action, but Lord Kṛṣṇa forbade him. Is writing poetry a kind of retirement? No! It takes work, dedication, and Kṛṣṇa conscious life.

Śrīla Prabhupāda asked the devotees if they had any questions. One of them asked, “Please explain again what is action in inaction and inaction in action.” Śrīla Prabhupāda gave a practical example. He said his disciples were acting for Kṛṣṇa, so there was no reaction for them. The Visiting Sannyāsī thought, “It was so simple in those days because Śrīla Prabhupāda directly endorsed our activities. Now we wonder more, but I can’t give up trying.”

The Visiting Sannyāsī looked out the window. He was a poet and he knew it.

Narahari was so busy that he could not keep his appointment to sit and talk with the Visiting Sannyāsī. Actually, Narahari was behind schedule in packing the van. V.S. said, “Let’s meet at 4 P.M. as usual,” but when 4 o’clock came,

Narahari was out packing the van and didn't come in. When he finally did come in, he spent time sorting through his secretarial papers, which were strewn all over the room. The Visiting Sannyāsī was also busy with his own strict schedule, although the schedule would be lost once he started traveling. Instead of two hours a day reading in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, he would have no hours, at least no unmotivated reading—reading done purely as prayer, alone and quiet, reading to be with Śrīla Prabhupāda instead of to form a lecture.

Writing poems would become more difficult too.

The Visiting Sannyāsī keeps a diary of sorts. Sooner or later I will have to mention that in this story. I don't know the full extent of his writing at present, or how relevant it is to our story, but at least I can tell you that he doesn't only write poems. He uses his diary to think things out on the page, and if you live nearby, you would know that it's not unusual for him to write on any scrap of paper. For example, he wrote this on a piece of newspaper we found in his trash: "One thing is certain—chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is important, as is direct reading in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I have yet to conclude whether my own writing, which is so dear to me, is actually *śravaṇam kīrtanam*. I'm still trying to understand its place in my spiritual life, whether it's an absolute requirement on the level of *śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ-smaraṇam*, a solid irrefutable item of *bhakti*."

Sneaky Thief Writes His Poems On The Sly

Why, you're just staging an opera.
 No one is accusing you of
 stealing time or misleading the Hare
 Kṛṣṇa movement. Oh, a few maybe,
 but they accuse you of other things too,
 like pretending to be guru.
 (We'll consider that another time, Sneaky.)
 As for poems, you might as well
 be up front.
 No one cares one way or another.
 The *āratīs* will go on whether you write
 or not, the bills will come in the mail,
 someone will get a book on *sankīrtana* and seriously
 consider that Prabhupāda has spoken the truth.
 And someone, drunk on wine or high on
 a drug that promotes confidence and false ego,
 will attack the members of the *harināma*
 party, arms flailing—and you
 can't stop him with your poem.

Nevertheless Lord Kṛṣṇa wants to know
 what I am doing.

I am praying to approach those books one
 after another over a long time.
 I'll cruise through them slowly. The Lord
 will reveal Himself to me.
 I will know Him just as you see the sun
 in its own time when night is over,
 and before.
 I am praying even if I can't stay awake
 the prayer continues half asleep,
 staggering on my feet. I've been up
 since midnight, what do you expect?

I'm praying to be a better person,
 so I spend this dawn at least
 seeking a breakthrough.
 I follow the rules.
 Obedient son.
 My father won't forget me
 or turn me away.

They've got the wrong idea
 about my poems. And I've got
 the wrong idea about "them."
 Maybe they think a poem is a flowery
 thing, like a lampshade in poor taste,
 or all-abstract so no one can understand it.
 They call poets Commies and fags and words we
 used to use like sissies, fruits, or eggheads—
 poems are made by fools like these
 dreamers and jerks who don't know where
 the action's at.
 One brother said poetry is a sign of a
 decadent society. He thought it comes when *bhaktas*
 are idle. It should be stopped. Writing must
 serve a more practical purpose, like in debates
 or for propaganda.
 Others have the opposite idea and want to see
 a poem that blooms in perfume and rhyme
 where Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā meet each other
 and meet you
 and if you can't write that, then why bother?
 But mostly the people are silent and no one cares;
 no one is home, no one is minding the store,
 the prairie is empty. So go ahead and
 say what you like.

Kṛṣṇa is dancing in the leaves. He is the bluish dawn.
He is not here. He is in the spiritual abode, which
is so far away you couldn't get there by a
week of continual bus travel or hopping jets around
the globe until you're staggering with fatigue and
say, "I give up. Where is He?"
He's in Vṛndāvana-dhāma and He never leaves.
Kṛṣṇa is dancing in the leaves, in the breezes of dawn.

Sneaky Pete's Lament (Song)

There's no need to remind me as he does,
 coming up in a half-whisper, "You're falling asleep
 on your feet again. How about a cup of tea?"
 I already know that. But what you don't
 know is that I was meditating in daydream flashes
 and accepting that my rounds are slow and yeah,
 admitting sometimes it's ignorant sleep, but nothing
 remarkable that needs pointing out
 as if I should worry what people will think, as if I'm
 a naughty boy caught,
 or as if I can't help myself. Let it be.
 It's like my old sweatshirt—you
 notice the stain and the rip but are
 you going to buy me a new one?
 No? Well, live with it then.

The Lord is dancing in the trees of
 dawn—material nature. To a
 spiritual electrician it's pure
 energy of God. When He comes to this
 world He is all spiritual and He is
 present in all things equally.
 Never think God is impersonal spirit.
 He's the best person and the source of all—
 personal and impersonal.
 How He is that all-powerful person
 and yet so lovable and livable, only the
 pure devotees of Vṛndāvana know.
 All this is told in books and lectures
 and if you will kindly spare time
 to hear you too can become
 a realized devotee of the Lord.
 It's as easy as that.

Sneaky Pete is going to get ready now for breakfast and rest after a long vigil. He's a servant and doesn't need much attention or food. One banana a day, a fourth of a cup of rice (although he does eat quite a few *capātīs* if they're made right). He's ready to spread ink on our behalf, but since in former days, those who hand-copied *śāstras* were not celebrated, he does not expect a place in the Hall of Fame just because he hit a home run five hundred feet. Did you hear? Sixty-two-year-old Mickey Mantle is finding life much tougher than when curve balls were thrown to him when he was young. His knees cause him such pain he's been taking drugs to relieve it, got addicted to them and his son Billy just died. That's the material world. It's all under the supreme control and leaves no excuse to kill others or to get angry. We should set a good example, said Svāyambhuva Manu to Dhruva Mahārāja. Stop killing the *yakṣas*, and their father, Kuvera, will be pleased with you.

Lord Jagannātha, You appear as Śrīla Prabhupāda desired in many ISKCON temples. Don't ask, "Why this particular jolly and primitive form of God?" Just accept Him. Lord Jagannātha is appearing and often in the gentle, tall forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa dressed and swathed in near-transparent morning silks on a morning like this one,

Kṛṣṇa black, playing His flute.
 I don't concoct—it's the truth
 He's the source of all. The demigods are
 mere traffic policemen who stop your car,
 but Kṛṣṇa is the God of all
 under whose power all suns start and stop.

The Visiting Sannyāsī had to keep most of his poetic thoughts and theories to himself. Questions about his writing were limited to one-liners: "Are you still writing?" or "What are you writing now?" He knew that those who asked didn't really want to hear an outpouring in response, but something quick to digest, such as, "I'm writing a book to help devotees remember festival days," or "a book describing Prabhupāda's twenty-six qualities." If he did stumble on someone who wanted to learn more about prosody and the poet's soul, the Visiting Sannyāsī became embarrassed and would attempt to divert the questioner. He didn't want to talk about himself or literature. Oh sure, we can all indulge in talking about our own private interests, but he knew it would be safer not to. Besides, would it help his writing to talk about it? Probably not. Unless he could meet someone who was wise about writing . . . Besides, Narahari had just said to him the previous evening, "This book of meditations for writers is for writers, but you're a devotee, not a writer."

Anyway, he did worry about things like this: the way he mixed the mundane with the sublime. He might mention, for example, that he was constipated, then two lines later praise the Lord in Vaikuṇṭha. In the absolute sense, there is nothing blasphemous in that. In fact, it is part of a tradition called "metaphysical poetry," whereby religious writers like John Donne deliberately juxtapose the mundane with the infinite Godhead. If he did this kind of mixing in a

cavalier way, however, with less than total, desperate sincerity, it could become blasphemy. Readers practicing religion would be prone to see it as negative. The Visiting Sannyāsī worried about it because he knew it definitely could be overdone.

April 19

The Visiting Sannyāsī went down to the van to the rear quarter, which is his domicile. He brought from the apartment room various books and papers and began returning them to the bins and shelves in the van. *Karmī* books (or call them *jñānī* books, poetry, how to write, etc.) go in the middle compartment under the bunk; Śrīla Prabhupāda's books on the main shelves; stopwatch here, earplugs there, notebook at foot of bunk under bin . . . Where do the eyeglass wipers go? Every item has a place and every place has a fastener, a metal clip or strap or lid to keep it from spilling out while speeding down the highway.

Next he began to consider what items he would need while writing and to put them in his book bag. He would keep this bag by him at all times, whether in the front seat or in the back of the van during the three days of travel. He decided to start a new notebook and he selected one from his blank ones: a wide-lined, stiff-backed model with wire binding on the side. Then he put his tape recorder and earphones in the bag along with some Prabhupāda lecture tapes, pens, something to read (although it's difficult to read in the van). Then he thought, "Poetry? Secrets? All letters answered?"

At the same time, Narahari worked in the front of the van. The middle portion was the kitchen and Narahari's living quarters, the front was the engine and the driver's seat. Getting ready—a thousand things to do.

On the morning of their last full day in Italy, the Visiting Sannyāsi rose early as usual. Part of him suggested that he stay in his sleeping bag a little longer and conserve his energy. There was nothing so important that he had to do this morning that he had to get up so early for. But another part of him calculated that it would be a great loss if he didn't get up at once and put the light on and at least report for work, for study and writing at the desk.

He sat with the desk lamp shining onto the page. It was perfectly quiet and he was alert. He surveyed the stack of books on the desk. He could only read from them a little at a time, but that was all right, and he started with the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

The author and the Visiting Sannyāsi are close friends. They don't keep secrets from each other. They share the interest of working to move this story along and to deepen it and quicken it. They decided together that it would be better if the *sannyāsi* described his own experiences during the three-day road travel. To do this, he should write in the first person. Then on arrival at the temple in Spain, the author could again take up the narration.

One might ask what was so special about the travel that the author and *sannyāsi* want to make an all-out attempt to capture? On the one hand, the road days are less suitable for writing. That is, they don't follow William Wordsworth's ideal for poetry writing, "emotion recollected in tranquility." Rather, writing on the road is more like emotion recorded during a jounce and a bounce and the threat of a headache, and speeding 80 miles per hour while breathing in vapors from the diesel stored in the back and while eyes are bombarded with Esso tigers, Agip dragons, and ordinary people, moving, cars, trucks, land. It's outer, not inner, whereas the *Bhagavad-gītā* considers the inner more important. One who sees within is the true *yogī*.

Still, it's a chance to catch a few perceptions in a time of stress and strain, catch them unaware, less literary. There is something to be said for being away from a quiet desk and being shaken about. Also, travel for preaching is a direct fulfillment of *sannyāsa-dharma*, and in that sense, it's worth recording. And it's interesting. The reader will be able to experience a quick car journey just by sitting in his chair and reading these chapters. If the *sannyāsī* finds Kṛṣṇa and yearns for His presence everywhere, so much the better. It will prove that we can all pray at five-minute pit stops while feeling the risk of physical danger. One doesn't like to dare just for the sake of daring, but if he can use travel in Kṛṣṇa's service, and there is a thrill to it, it's worth recording.

A devotee came from Vicenza and took Narahari with him to the office of the European Auto Club. They agreed to accept his money and issue him a member's card. The Vicenza devotee had just returned from the annual meeting of the society's leaders in India, and he said that the leaders were in a cooperative, peaceful mood, gearing up for the 1996 Prabhupāda Centennial campaign. They took on new members for top leadership positions, and responsibilities were assigned for unattended areas of the world and new projects. For example, they commissioned a committee to write a paper on the development of rural communities. A devotee was put in charge of gaining world recognition for Prabhupāda. They made a management change in the leadership of the Caribbean Islands, and a new person was assigned to coordinate worldwide book distribution.

When the Visiting Sannyāsī heard all this he thought that it was right that his service to Prabhupāda did not come down in exactly that way. His service was, of course, within the society's jurisdiction and subject to the approval of

the world leaders, but they did not attempt to assign him his work. *Sannyāsīs* were allowed and expected to be self-motivated and to choose their own fields of travel. The main thing for a *sannyāsī* was, as stated in *Bhagavad-gītā* 16.1 purport, that he be fearless, pure (especially avoiding sex life), learned, and that he should preach constantly.

Therefore, when the Visiting *Sannyāsī* heard about some of the new assignments handed out by the world leaders, by which they lifted others to leadership positions and blessed them with authorized posts, he thought, "Don't expect or desire in the slightest that they assign you to be the official Poet." What would happen if they said, "Travel from Italy to Spain in April and write poems and perceptions along the way. Develop your ability to express yourself. Shower our society with transcendental poems describing the experience of an ordinary *sādhaka*. We think this is very important, because for the first time in the West, Vedic religion is being practiced by Westerners and being expressed in their native tongues, especially in the American idiom"?

"No," he thought, "better they don't say that. Better I keep my own inner flame ablaze."

In his early morning reading session, the Visiting *Sannyāsī* came upon this: "He sees everything others see, but instead of seeing merely the trees, the mountains, the cities or the sky, he sees only his worshipable Supreme Personality of Godhead in everything because everything is resting in Him only." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.11, purport) Of course, this is the vision of the *mahā-bhāgavata*: "... only those who have smeared their eyes with the ointment of love of Godhead can see everywhere the Supreme Lord face to face; it is not possible by imagination or so-called meditation."

When the Visiting Sannyāsī read this passage, he knew he couldn't attain it but at least he could keep it in mind. That would be better than being swallowed by the prettiness of the European highway in spring. If he couldn't see Kṛṣṇa directly, at least he could stop himself from accepting the phantasmagoria as real. "Since he has realization of the supreme truth [the spiritual world], a devotee is not interested in the temporary shadow of truth." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.15, purport)

Slowly Waking Up

Who's writin' this and what
 does he want?
 Does he look at the cloudy sky
 for a good reason or
 to cheat? That's what I want to know.

When he reads a sacred text,
 does he know how to pay attention?
 What is the meaning of submission and
 loving service to Kṛṣṇa? Does he know?
 Why is he jealous, envious of
 the good fortune of others in spiritual life?
 Does he know it's envy and *aparādhā*
 that prevent him from a good
 poetic flow?

One toothless old bastard sits
 on the floor and asks these questions,
 some new pressure in his colon on
 the left side. Where is the liver?
 The soul? Instead
 of questions, here is a declaration:
 the sky at dawn is covered
 by clouds and all is blue-gray lighting.

And chirps of birds.
 I think it's gonna be all right.

I say (repeating scripture) any person
 who has heard submissively from Kṛṣṇa
 is going to be all right.
 I've heard (from Śrīla Prabhupāda) that non-
 devotees have no good qualities.

I don't want to stick around
in this material world but am attached
to weird things, rest and food and praise
of me. Want an easy birth,
I admit it.

Years going by so fast I can't tell
1993 from 1994.
Where was I?
I wanted to remember Kṛṣṇa
and then I forgot. He helps those who turn to Him
for proof they really want Him.
He said there's nothing else
but Kṛṣṇa and His energies. I'm trying to remember
what I read and keep it with me
something Kṛṣṇa conscious always.
Now you know.

Forget? Then Remember

"There's nothing I can repeat," he said,
looking inward.

"Better look again," said the sergeant.
Expecting some Titanic-bound iceberg?
Look again. I see petty concerns and
also the fortune of a good connection.

Remember: don't depend even slightly on
your own powers but entirely on God's.
"Oh, where is God?" said the atheist
king. And the gremlin within me repeats today
that atheistic cry. For too many days you ruined
your God-given intellect to defy Him with
your petty games, you thought God (Kṛṣṇa) wouldn't
take you seriously at your word.
Now He's dead to you and you're as good as
dead, twitching and drowsing off,
like an insect with a big head.
Where do you go next life, do you know,
plover?

I'm glad to report evidence that unless
you write constantly you will lose touch.
In my case, that means self
and exploration into feelings and
flow. I open the book of my
master, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and he welcomes me
and that's my good fortune.
When Kuvera (ah, at last) asked
Dhruva to take a benediction, what did
that pure devotee choose? Did he say,
"I don't take favors from demigods"?

He was gentle and accepted the god's
offer: "Just give me ability to
remember Lord Kṛṣṇa in whatever state I'm in."

"It will be done," Kuvera blessed.

Part II

Keep that in your bean, boy. You've
got a friend, and I don't mean this allusion-producing
wiseguy who has read so many books and seen

Hollywood and TV
films which inspire him to hang out at Great Kills
train station
spitting with worthless louts.

I mean your friend the Swami on 2nd Avenue,
your friend the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Oh yeah, this was supposed to be a persona poem.
I forgot. I'm the Visiting Sannyāsī.

I just shot off his head. I just pulled the trigger
and blasted a clay pigeon. I forgot. I ate meat
thirty years ago,

I forgot who I was many lives ago, forgot the suffering,
and who I am now. Claim, "It's okay to forget; just
get ghee and enjoy" (wish I could).

But I forgot. Well, remember. We are going to Spain
tomorrow. Plan to write along the way how to see
Kṛṣṇa in all things and maybe get past this wise aleck
Humphrey Bogart detective slouch. Want pure devotee,
bright clear face, a devotee and a *kṣatriya's* right arm
to crash down demon doubts and ghost smirks
and banish all the *yakṣas*. But be kind. I want
that strength and seek it on the road,
in writing.

Now on the last afternoon before leaving for Spain, the Visiting Sannyāsī tends not to feel expressive. It's almost as if he has a choking feeling in his chest, around the area where words usually come forth freely. Is it a kind of grief? He shifts over to practical and busy little acts, making sure he has moved all his articles into the van and into their right places. The *neti* pot goes in the bathroom in the upper, right-hand bin. The Kleenex go above the desk in the left-hand bin. The bag to carry the sleeping bag, right-side bin over desk. He doesn't think much about it, not deeply in words. Narahari again asks him about the morning schedule and what to expect. He reminds him that they have to fast until 4 or 5 P.M. tomorrow for Rāmacandra's appearance day and that Narahari wants to get a big jump on the driving this first day. There will be water for a shower the first day out, but maybe not after that. It's unsure whether the gas stations will be open, but they have their container filled with diesel fuel secured in the rear of the van.

By 4 P.M. there's still much to do. This is not so much the Visiting Sannyāsī's show but that of his *brahmacārī* assistant, Narahari. Narahari calls the shots. It's he who is chanting a few *japa* rounds and it's he who will have to move all the food, kitchen items, and secretarial items out of the apartment where they still clutter the room. The *sannyāsī* has learned not to worry about this or to try to push Narahari. It will all happen—maybe in the last hour—but it will happen. The rest is up to Lord Kṛṣṇa. As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura used to say when asked about his plans, "Yes, we will leave tomorrow, if Kṛṣṇa desires."

Now the author will turn over the writing to the Visiting Sannyāsī himself, who will tell you what happens with him and Narahari on the road. We will hear again from the narrator when the Visiting Sannyāsī arrives in Spain three days from now.

Chapter Three

April 20, 1:15 A.M.

If I am traveling, it's for Him. If I'm writing a poem or story, it's for Him. I must question myself, "Is this loving service to Kṛṣṇa?" We are not going on a picnic to some park to play softball and drink soda. We're not innocents abroad roaming Europe for fun. I'll assume we're rightly situated. We were lecturing in Italy, and we will lecture in Spain. We are not going to attend bullfights or visit Barcelona's bars, or like Catholics, go to Avila. We are going to the Kṛṣṇa conscious temple there to hold an initiation. If I use my time to write what I see and hear, and if that gives me undeniable joy, I shouldn't feel guilty or dejected. It's not deviant to be a poet, even if the poems are wild and hairy or toothless and bent over. Despite appearances, it's my jolly and tiny and prayerful literary offering to the Lord.

4:50 A.M.

Traveling gives me time to discover more who I am. Narahari is in his own world, making the last preparations for departure, like an airplane pilot checking the landing gear and all the gauges (except he's not only the pilot but the mechanic, cook, steward, friend, and more). I'm in my own world too, daydreaming, cogitating, waiting to write. (Like a hawk, I fly low over the field looking for opportu-

nity). Narahari and I won't talk much today because we are both too much inhabiting our separate but close worlds. (This trip is not exactly like any other we have taken, because on this trip we are taking the reader along too. That's all right, as long as he has his own bedding.)

I just received a new book, *Travels with His Divine Grace*, Hari Śauri Prabhu's *Transcendental Diary*. I thought I could read it en route. Did you know that in 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda traveled for twenty-two hours, arrived in Melbourne, held a press conference, delivered a short arrival lecture to the devotees, gave the evening lecture, then after only an hour's rest, was up again composing his *Bhāgavatam* purports?

5:00 A.M.

We're on the road, me drowsing a little while riding up front. Narahari passes everything in front of us. There is no shortage of trucks today, and the gas stations *are* open. We can see the fire-belching mouth of the six-legged Agip beast. We are driving through a mist, but the roadside fields are green, and in general, it's a good day for driving, although cold and gray. My Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras are mechanical but so much a part of me that they feel intimate. "Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa"—so what if I can't pay attention? At least I am drowsing with the mantra.

Rāmādi mūrtiṣu . . . Lord Rāmacandra appeared in Tretā-yuga in Ayodhyā, now five hundred miles northeast of New Delhi. Rāma-navamī is the ninth day of the moon. (I'm listening to Prabhupāda while rolling along in this gray world of black roads.) "The history of Rāmacandra is . . ." His father, King Daśaratha, wanted to install Him as emperor. "So everything was settled," but his younger

queen “turned the whole thing into different way.” *Kṣatriyas* kept their promises, gave charity, were ready to fight and to rule. (Now the tunnels have started.)

Prabhupāda is talking of *kṣatriyas* in modern India, the Gurkhas of Nepal and the Sikhs. India has no trouble recruiting men into the Army because of this tradition of fighters. The British lost their whole Eastern Empire once they lost India because the whole British Empire was maintained on the strength of the Sikh and Gurkha soldiers. In America, they have difficulty recruiting soldiers because they train their men as *sūdras*. (Now it’s one tunnel after another. Enjoy it. Hear Śrīla Prabhupāda. See within. Pay attention through the earphones.) Kṛṣṇa consciousness is meant for *brāhmaṇas*.

7:30 A.M.

The Agip beast has six legs, and we are at an Agip gas station. Narahari asked if I wanted him to pause for five minutes before he drove on, or could I write while driving? We had agreed yesterday that we would stop at each gas station for a five-minute writing break, but now he’s testing to see whether I really want it. I do. We’ll make it a discipline. I could also use the time to get out and stretch.

While driving, we’ll listen to Prabhupāda’s description of Lord Rāmacandra until the end. We’re keeping our bellies empty in His honor and trying to dedicate clear thinking to the Lord.

Five minutes up. Ocean in view. Bridges for cars. Tunnels, tunnels. Narahari tailgates, drives hard.

Rāmacandra said, “Yes, Father,” when His father asked Him to go to the forest. Just see. God has six opulences to

a degree that no one else can possess. Rāmacandra displayed His renunciation.

(I can't write in the dark when we drive through the tunnels, only in between.)

Lakṣmaṇa: "My dear brother, You also take Me."

Then Sītā, the young wife, said, "I'll go with You."

Rāmacandra said, "Oh no, you cannot go and take the trouble of living in the forest."

She insisted as an ideal wife. Rāmacandra appeared to display the ideal example of a king. Someone came to Rāmacandra and accused, "My son has died. . . . There must be something wrong in Your government." Another *brāhmaṇa* fasted a fortnight when Lord Rāmacandra was away from Ayodhyā. Lord Rāma gave that man the family *mūrti* of Himself and told him that now when He was away, he could offer his respects to the *mūrti*. Then the *brāhmaṇa* wouldn't have to fast.

Fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. To fight with Rāvaṇa, an organized materialist, Rāmacandra organized an army of monkeys and constructed a bridge to Laṅkā. The stones were floating. "So there are so many historical incidents . . . We should remember . . . why we are observing fasting today for Rāmacandra." *Rāmādi mūrtiṣu*.

Rāmacandra's life, God's pastimes—to hear them means we are associating with Rāma. The sound vibration is absolute. Either we chant Rāma's holy name "or see the statue of Rāma . . . or talk of His pastimes . . . that means . . . we take advantage of these days . . . try to associate with Him . . . become purified."

First Morning Stop

I have earplugs in but cars
whiz by. Doesn't make a difference
on this little SOS roadside strand.
Doesn't . . .
This is where I wanted to be—
a pit stop.
Narahari's napping or chanting
his minimum quota.
He sure drives mean. I've stopped
worrying that he tailgates, just like
I don't worry about head-on traffic
in India.

I see a ray of sun flash through
back window van curtains. I
won't fear it's *polizia* and when
in France, the *gendarmes* knocking
on our door while we sleep.
We're innocent in our baggy sweatpants
and old grins. I have a U.S. passport and
nothing's wrong.

But what's right?
Where is Kṛṣṇa's holy service? In traveling?
Yes, in traveling and in fasting while hearing *rāma-līlā*
just like we would at a temple assembly or
a *paṇḍāl* in India. We are traveling to meet up with
devotees in Spain to chant and hear.
We won't complain—this road is a place
where we can think and serve.

Now it's almost time to start, drive
 on to France. I can't dislodge the road prose
 for the poem. It doesn't matter. Sing and
 ride, don't hide. Be small and tall and remember
 Kṛṣṇa is all. Read of Prabhupāda and
 don't let an hour pass without writing *something*.
 Pump of blood . . . don't
 be mundane, "Another tunnel of a hundred
 kilometers."
 Praise God.
 You don't know how?
 Then remember someone who did. Remember
 something he told you.
 Hold still your mind. Pray.
 Don't let the hour pass
 without remembering Him,
 assuring yourself that your purpose is
 to serve.

Now the terrace gardening appears fully, and the green-
 houses open to the sun. The ocean is often visible. We are
 less than fifty kilometers from the French border. I'm
 chanting extra rounds because there is "nothing else to
 do," and it feels good. If I could only turn my attention and
 consideration to the names instead of running on and on
 about what I've done, what I've read, what I imagine in my
 flickering loop-de-loop mind.

Head-on traffic while they fix a lane on the bridge. "Lux-
 ury" buses pouring down from the North.

France, 19 kilometers before Nice

Narahari is inside changing money. Van is parked facing
 the window of a gift shop. They have earthen pots called
 "Herbes de Provence" that look like the sweet-rice pots

offered to Rādhā-Ramaṇa in Vṛndāvana. Brass Eiffel Towers, stuffed animal dolls . . .

Narahari comes back after two minutes and asks, “Do you want time to write or . . . ?”

“Yes, I do.” I have to speak up for my five minutes. When we are eating, we might prefer that the servers approach us Indian style, “forcing” us to take more, or at least bringing seconds out to us rather than showing up empty-handed and asking, “Would you like anything else?” But I’m hungry enough to write that I am willing to speak up boldly for my five minutes.

White-haired gents in stylish sweaters standing around, taking a break. Narahari is eager to get going. He promises that if we push on without a break, we can stop for the day by 1 P.M. Then I can bathe Śrīla Prabhupāda while Narahari cooks. I’ll try to read also. Don’t hold him up by writing now. Besides, I’m too spaced out to say much. Hills and mist and tourist shop. It’s really behind us. Côte d’Azur, signs in French, brighter insides to the tunnels. As we pass Monaco, I go into a whole reverie about Grace Kelly and then Jackie Onassis. The mind never gives us relief. Śrīla Prabhupāda says we’ve got to change the quality of our thoughts, that’s all. Think of Kṛṣṇa’s heroic activities—how He kidnapped Rukmiṇī, anything! Think of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s heroic activities—what did he do when he left Melbourne? Driving is tedious, but at least we can chant.

I’m drowsy again. Nodding, and now we are pulling off for another stop. It’s an Esso station. Men and women, I’m sorry I’m so drowsy. Can’t seem to do anything about it. It’s like being hypnotized, mesmerized. Oh, let me chant! Maybe I’ll improve. But I don’t. It’s just an Esso shop and everything’s the same.

Narahari serves himself from the diesel pump and then goes in to pay. One day it will all be over and I'll have only memories of these temple visits and of the friendly devotees, admiration for the confederation of temples, the books I've read, the paintings I've seen of *Bhāgavatam* heroes, Lord Viṣṇu on Garuḍa, Lord Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. That's old age. But how deep, how dear, what will it mean to me, my devotional life, as I review it and relive it in flashes?

Again Narahari asked me if I want to pause these five minutes for writing. Again I say yes. The van is parked facing a billboard advertising what you can buy in the store: Nestle's KitKat candy bars at 10 F, a little apple tart wrapped in tin foil, 10 F. What's the price on my tongue? What can I give up? How much can I love the transcendental realm?

I see myself as a good fellow, or let's say a person with a good disposition toward spiritual life, and certainly I've heard and received good training. Still, I'm so limited and cut off by those limits. Limited desire for attaining devotional service; limited drive for austerity; limited willingness to give up my own interests in favor of Lord Kṛṣṇa's—this seems to be exposed as I sit in the front of the van in springtime and doze while we drive through the monotonous land of highway.

An "Oasis" tropical drink in a can costs 5 F, and my five minutes is up. We're fasting. Now we have about an hour before stopping for the day and I'll try to salvage what's left of this drive.

*Parked for the night in rest stop just west
of Aix-en-Provence.*

Dear folks who care about such things, we had a Rāmācandra feast. Narahari cooked couscous and served it with

a sauce made of carrots and beets and steamed slices of zucchini, and a sensational dessert of sweet rice and *halavā*. Rāma's *bhaktas* eat well, even on the road!

The water system leaks, so I bathed in cold water from a bottle. We took a "little" rest after lunch, which lasted one and a half hours. Now maybe I will be able to read with attention. While traveling, you tend to be grateful for even the most basic amenities. Sometimes this makes you more eligible to read well and to write interesting prose—prompted by new insights and cold toes.

Reading. Dhruva Mahārāja lived the ideal life of a Kṛṣṇa conscious emperor for thousands of years. He never became bewildered by the Lord's illusory energy. In the end, he renounced his royal duties and went to Badarikāśrama. There he engaged in *bhakti-yoga*, concentrating his mind upon the form of the Supreme Lord. He experienced the *aṣṭa-sāttvika* ecstasies, which indicates that he had attained the *mahā-bhāgavata* stage. He was now liberated from both physical and subtle connections, and a Vaikuṇṭha airplane descended to take him back to Godhead. When he saw the Lord's associates, he was temporarily confused about how to receive them, so "he simply offered obeisances with folded hands and chanted and glorified the holy names of the Lord." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.21)

"The example of Dhruva Mahārāja is very fitting. Simply by becoming agreeable to the orders of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and by developing love of Godhead, Dhruva got the chance to personally meet the confidential servants of Lord Viṣṇu face to face. What was possible for Dhruva Mahārāja is possible for everyone. Anyone who very seriously engages in devotional service can obtain, in due course of time, the same perfection of the human form of life." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.22, purport)

A Warm-up Walk

Prabhupāda accepted what we could
 offer him, if only we offered it with
 devotion. I'm writing this after walking
 a half hour around and around this
 rest stop, thinking of things to talk about with
 Narahari, thinking how I hardly walk,
 and thinking of Śrīla Prabhupāda, how the example
 of his life shows
 dedication to nonstop preaching even though
 he was eighty-one years old. When he had only
 a year to go, he was traveling and preaching
 spontaneously to many or few . . . "I am not
 Prabhupāda," I say, and that's true, and
 I walk another lap, and another, and think,
 "But don't make that an excuse not
 to preach as he did." See people,
 go to communities of devotees, meet
 guests. It means spending your time with
 people's material problems, time I
 could use developing my writing and
 reading of Prabhupāda's books. I'm preparing myself, I
 say to myself, but for what?
 It's a bit mysterious. Maybe I'll have a
 late burst of outgoing life. It just seems
 right that now I sneak as much time
 as I can for writing, loving it, not
 being ashamed, to walk alone
 around another lap and think,
 "This is a warm-up for a poem."
 The first lap I was an old man moving slowly,
 then I began to swing my arms, striding,
 moving quicker. This is a warm-up, but
 I'm not sure for what.

Chapter Four

April 21, 3:40 A.M.

A pleasant night with earplugs in, which make the highway sounds distant and our van undisturbed by the comings and goings of cars and trucks in the night. I bypassed my usual midnight rising; stayed in the sleeping bag until 1:14 A.M. Got out (cool) and began to chant *japa* with two votive candles on either side of Prabhupāda, and Prabhupāda chanting *japa* in my ears on tape. I have decided not to criticize or judge my *japa* here. (Imagine an artist or musician having to read a review of his work the way I punish my *japa*: “You’re no good! You stink!”)

Then cold water shower from two quart bottles. I have no complaints.

It promises to be a progressive day. Another departure at 5 A.M. and a stop by 1 P.M. on the other side of the Spanish border. I hope our operation holds up—the van and all its parts and Narahari and me. Small functioning in this vast material world, yet this whole world is just like a dust mote floating in the totality of space within the *brahmajyoti* effulgence. We want our van to move safely to Spain. Everyone else wants their car or van or truck or plane to move safely too. But can *everyone* be protected? Inevitably, some of us will perish today. Some of us will even appear to cause the perishing of others, or so we think.

The *Bhāgavatam* assures us that everything is being carried out by the law of karma, and karma operates under the jurisdiction of the material energy, who metes out reward and punishment and new bodies next life, and arranges for more reactions tomorrow.

The Supreme Lord is aloof from all this, yet in His compassion, He comes to the material world and invites the *jīvas* to come back to Him. Śrīla Prabhupāda constantly spoke against the ignorance by which people in this world ignore the message of Godhead. They say they prefer to stay here and to enjoy their apple tarts and Oasis cocktails and more. As for suffering, they will overcome it.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was the most compassionate worker on behalf of the Supreme Lord. The Lord gave Śrīla Prabhupāda the *śakti* to convince people to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness against so many objections and difficulties. He made it seem easy. I'm very glad he did!

He wants us to be preachers like him. “. . . the real life of Caitanya Mahāprabhu's movement is preaching,” said Śrīla Prabhupāda. (*Transcendental Diary*, Volume Two, p. 67). He also said that a neophyte cannot preach. “First of all you really become preacher. Then go to preach.” He said a big following is not the sign of success. “The real thing . . . is quality, not quantity. . . . My Guru Mahārāja used to say like that. ‘If I get at least one quality disciple, then all my labor will be successful.’”

These statements seem to speak two different messages to me. They're not contradictory but different. One says I should go and preach at once, as much as possible, in a recognizable way. Preach as Śrīla Prabhupāda did by traveling to temples, regularly meeting people, lecturing frequently, and being thrust into the managerial, controversial life of ISKCON's growth, setbacks, politics, and struggle. Anything short of this and you are “just like those Gaudiya

Math devotees who do *harināma* and eat and sleep only.” That’s the message I pick up when Śrīla Prabhupāda stresses the urgency of remaining active in spreading the word.

When he speaks of quality, however, I think my emphasis on reading and writing cannot be wrong. I need to strive for quality so that when I do show up in Italy or Spain or wherever, I have a stock of fresh references and impressions from reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and I feel confident that I am fulfilling myself as a person—I know something about myself because I have spent time alone and pondered and wrote it out.

In his Foreword to *Transcendental Diary*, Professor Thomas Hopkins writes that Śrīla Prabhupāda had gathered mostly young followers and given them “enormous responsibilities to convey a message and live by standards that they themselves had not yet fully comprehended or internalized.” It is also a fact that since Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disappearance, many have reconsidered those responsibilities and have decided it is too much for them. As I read the *Diary’s* description of 1976, I see that many of the top role players, the *sannyāsīs* and GBC secretaries closest to Prabhupāda have now given up their most basic vows and service to ISKCON. In some cases, they have begun to return.

What does it mean, then, to internalize and comprehend duties that we have already been given? We could say that simply by maintaining the outer activities that Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us, all realization and satisfaction will come. I don’t fully accept that. I think it’s important, at least to me, to know who I am, what I want, to listen to myself, my body, and yes, my mind (my rascal mind), to find my surrender. The problem is that all my mind seems to care about is “My foot hurts!” Still, I have to consider that pain (or whatever). Listening to the mind doesn’t mean obeying

its every whim; it means making at least some semblance of peace. If the mind and senses are screaming in rebellion while you try to practice devotional life, your life of all-out active preaching, why is that? How can we go on?

My plan is to always follow Śrīla Prabhupāda and to not suddenly fall down and leave, another casualty with a sad story. Therefore, I have to look to my own upkeep. The upkeep of a devotee is not achieved by supplying him food and assignments. It means caring for his mental life, his overall well-being. Assessing these needs is a daily affair.

One Hare Kṛṣṇa Gypsy

Just one happy Hare Kṛṣṇa gypsy
 you can say. His pal and
 sidekick cooking porridge in the van
 and he tracking a page with a
 crayon searching for a happy poem.
 Just one inconsequential soldier
 who avoids main duty,
 got himself outfitted
 as a lone scout,
 you can say—he's not important.

But what's important? The piggyback trailer trucks
 whining all night? The big movements of
 Democrats and Communists? And the religions (even
 our own)? Wait, stop this revving up
 to another self-defense.
 You are important to yourself. You are singing
 a happy song. Isn't that enough?
 Don't you trust that your master accepts you?
 Didn't he call you in at 10 P.M. when he
 stopped in Detroit where you were nominally
 in charge as GBC? And when he called you
 in didn't he tell you to write another book?
 Well, don't forget it! Write those books!
 And on that same visit didn't he approve of
 your mobile home? Yeah he visited (so
 what if it was only three minutes) he said it
 was first-class and Kṛṣṇa's devotees should have
 everything first-class. He made full prostrated
 obeisances to Gaura-Nitāi, those same
 Gaura-Nitāi that are now in Gītā-nāgarī. Nitāi
 looking drunk with pleasure of *harināma*,

arms upraised. And now I'm out here
 wandering. I make it sound as if my
 song is happy, like a simple folk song.
 The truth is more complicated. But I
 do like this life better than any other.
 As I write Prabhupāda is with me in *mūrti* form,
 his books and tapes all around me. Śrīla Prabhupāda,
 please accept this offering. I am trying to
 become a preacher and writing is one way.

I wanted to say, before we leave, soon—
 it was a nice night because I kept
 waking and feeling a bit nervous and chanted
 and chanted
 the *mahā-mantras* streaming through my sleep
 and wakefulness. That's good.
 Then red glow of candles in cups.
 The pictures on the wall, Rūpa Gosvāmī,
 Śrīla Prabhupāda's charge to us to be devotees
 and preachers.
 Our course is set for spring. Maybe I'll be less
 sleepy today and when we stop for
 breakfast I'll try my luck at another
 poem. Maybe I'll be able to do one
 that's like a story and folk song, like early
 poems of Yevtushenko singing for his country
 and people, or like so many sincere (and angry)
 blacks singing of their people and race. I'll
 do it for all, as spirit soul. As
 devotee of Prabhupāda. Celebrate his
 Centennial with a hundred poems,
 good ones. A hundred . . .

6:45 A.M.

First light of day for writing while riding the *autoroute*. I'm sleepy again. I have already chanted my sixteen rounds. Sometimes I sit up straight and resolve that I'll think something out, but then I go blank. Dreams—many, but not worth tracing. Windshield wipers working steadily. Wet, black road and gray sky, red tail lights on cars ahead are like?—like a jeweled necklace for Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Headlights from the stream of cars in the approaching lane are like?—butter on a muffin. “FERIA”—the silhouette board of the bull of Spain stands on a highway hillside. Barcelona, 300 kilometers ahead.

7:30 A.M.

Stopping at a Shell station. I'm like a kid noticing what gas stations we use. This is the first Shell on this trip. They always have blond girls wearing blue jeans stepping out of cars with men in jeans in the passenger seats. This is the world I want to avoid. Shell is giving out seven million balls and balloons. You too can win one if you have a card or something.

When I saw that I couldn't do anything but sleep, I asked Narahari if he wanted to talk. We discussed whether my activities are agreeable to the devotees in our society. He said that most people see me as an acceptable, loyal, and at least harmless devotee. As for doing something of which others might not approve, well, everyone is subject to that scrutiny. Even the most successful devotees are criticized by some. I write poems. That's not scandalous. Although I don't advertise my poetry-writing, I don't have to be paranoid that someone is out to stop me.

Narahari and I also spoke about women. He had read a purport in Śrīla Prabhupāda's book that a woman is often thinking of something that is not obvious in her dealings

with a man. In other words, she has a hidden agenda—a desire for marriage, and within marriage, children. Of course, the man also has an agenda—sex wherever he can get it. These drives have to be controlled. The way for a *sannyāsi* to control them is to abstain from feminine association altogether.

As we spoke, it stopped raining, although the roads remained wet. I felt relaxed and let Narahari speak, more alert now. Narahari said that Lord Caitanya said even the sight of a mannequin can agitate a *sannyāsi*'s senses. I mentioned my own dealings with women and how I have to be careful. Someone noticed that women disciples were washing my clothes and hanging them to dry on a stairway banister in the Brooklyn temple and criticized me for it, so I stopped that practice. Women want to cook for me. I used to have traveling female typists with me. I don't do any of that anymore.

My five minutes are up. I wrote this while Narahari sat beside me, parked at the Shell station. I've said what I wanted to say on this subject, almost. Conclusion: keep your nose clean and go on writing poems as long as you want. And take time to assess your behavior and activities and keep them pure.

A Devotee's Search For Truth: Say Kṛṣṇa

I live in the world of devotees.
You mean the little insular ISKCON?
I mean the universes are governed
by devotees headed by Brahmā, and
in Kṛṣṇaloka every boy and girl and even
grass and water . . . And ISKCON too.
In this world ISKCON is all we know.

What about that old man wiping so
tenderly his old car at the rest stop—
is he a devotee? Maybe. Why don't
you go up to him and see if he'll take
a book?

Not me. I don't want to disturb
his reverie or his outing with the car.
Don't want to get rejected, you mean,
seen as a cult book-pusher.

These thoughts incriminate me. I can't
cop the Fifth Amendment. Be true at least
to conscience.

Narahari is almost awake (or should be) from
his post-breakfast snooze in the driver's seat. It's
time to go again if we are going to cover those
miles. My job: to break through to the truth.
Someone said, "I don't believe there is
such a thing as honesty." Prabhupāda never said that.
He said that the Earth said she can bear any burden
but a liar. Especially don't lie to guru
or yourself.

Kṛṣṇa. Say "Kṛṣṇa,"
say "Kṛṣṇa," say "*Jaya* Prabhupāda."

Chapter Five

April 21, 10:30 A.M., at Spanish border

While Narahari was changing money, I forgot to write. There's a fantastic man-made landscape that goes way up like an Egyptian pyramid. Whoever built it made steps leading up to it that start broad at the bottom and become narrower at the top. On the summit is a roofless "temple" with four vertical objects standing in it. It's a perverted reflection of a place for God worship. I say "perverted" because all personality and religion has been removed and there is only grandeur—the stairs and the four futuristic, geometric shapes. An homage to what? To architecture? To the labor of those who shaped it? Something to think about for travelers? A German man munches a sandwich and takes a photograph.

Now we'll cross over to where faces are a little darker and Castillian (dangerous)? Are the Spanish warm? I don't know. I am only interested in the devotees. They're not "Spanish," but followers of Prabhupāda.

11:25 A.M.

Costa Bravo. Old stone buildings on hillsides. The Alihambra. Mr. Mattei teaching us Spanish in high school (we thought Spanish was from Spain, not South America). "Sant Celoni"—roadside sign reminds us of Sant Colony in

Vṛndāvana. I also saw Jeanne de la Vedis in France, and towns like Surta remind me of *sūtra*. Les Villes Orientale. Sunshine; blue sky; massive, white clouds; the van runs on in Renault heaven as if everything were fine and could never be jinxed in Spain.

Tell the author when we meet that I don't need a plot. Either the wind rises and fills that red and yellow striped balloon bag (to tell you that it's a heavy wind, so drive slow), or if there's no wind, then I can tell you that the wind bag was limp. I mean, all I have to do is write what happens and that's the plot. I *could* add a twist of lemon, but I don't think it's necessary or wanted: "James Bond Visits Spain." Even satirical treatments of thrillers (the Visiting Sannyāsī sends Narahari to Venezuela to engage in hand-to-hand combat with anti-poets, or Bhakta Bob meets Maria in a cave near the farm . . .)—I prefer to think about reality, even small reality, like the smile of Yadu, the temple president at New Vraja-maṇḍala.

A trailer truck is passing a trailer truck. Trucks in a row to Barcelona and we are passing them all. No one within our reach goes unpassed by Madhu. We pass a truck bearing water bottles, and one with live pigs and *vinspadro* (wine carried in a truck like an oil truck), trucks from Den Haag and Germany, and lots of caravans, a trailer carrying Saab autos, interstate trucking from Lopen, from Destair, and if we want to stop at Hotel Alfa, we have only thirteen kilometers to go.

The hills are light green this time of year (late April). I am not invested with the power to describe it like Antonio Machado. I am just passing through, strapped in, looking forward to our stop for the day and at least an hour with the books in the back of the van at my desk. One day at a time. Back to my poor chanting, but there is something special about cruising *japa* over sixteen rounds.

12:30 P.M.

Planning to stop in about half an hour. Hare Kṛṣṇa talk. Chant. Chant. Talk. Be silent. Think ahead of going to India. I see tiny olive trees peeping above the earth. They already look old—knobby and gnarled—but with bright green sprigs. Rows and rows of them in the brown fields. Towers carrying cables through the valley look light and mystical, like a dream, although they're made of steel and wire. Maybe it's the mist that lends them that air. Or the miles of writing. I'm tired. The motion and the engine is as steady as a living presence, although everything rattles. Solemn, ancient mountains, far away from the Vedic culture. We seek Bhārata-bhūmi in the books. O sages, we have been justly questioned by you. Your questions are apt because they are about Kṛṣṇa, and the answers to those questions deliver the highest welfare to humanity.

Narahari has let the tank gauge read empty, so he has slowed down for the last twenty minutes until we reach our stop for the day.

"Don't gamble," I say.

"I'm not gambling," he responds. "We have a portable tank in the back." I call that gambling, that he has to slow down like this. I could have used the extra stop for a five-minute writing session.

Up the incline we go, into the mountains. Gray rock outcroppings. Ah, there's one of those old Spanish towns in a valley, buildings tightly grouped around the stone church and all of the same earthen color. If I could look closer, I might see the stork's nest on the steeple.

La Concha del Barbera. Valleys. Any little patch of land and someone's growing olives. Bright, silver towers carry the cables. Now we're coasting down a long hill (good for saving diesel, of which we have little). The red-white wind bag is limp. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. No frankfurters for lunch like the rest of Spain. Thou shalt not kill.

Lunch today was the same as yesterday, couscous with red sauce, zucchini, *halavā*, and sweet rice—and all just as delicious as yesterday. While honoring the *prasādam* under Prabhupāda's gaze, I heard him speak to devotees in New Vrindaban in 1969: "For the Vaiṣṇava there is one qualification, poetic. . . . Everyone should be poetic. . . . But that poetry, that poetry language, should be simply to glorify the Lord."

Read tonight in *Transcendental Diary*, Śrīla Prabhupāda correcting a disciple who objected to the forceful methods of book distribution. Don't be a better moralist than your spiritual master. "My order is to distribute books," Prabhupāda asserted, and those who carry out that order are faithful. Those who become big moralists and don't do book distribution are not in a better position.

Attempting A Poem On Difficult Themes

Don't be envious.

Don't pretend you've never failed, don't
pretend you don't need forgiveness for
your mistakes. But don't think Śrīla Prabhupāda
rejects you.

Do what you can.

Don't reject the power of the pen.

But if he asks you, would you go
back to just typing for him? Yes.

Would you take the library party out again if
he came to you and said unequivocally, "Do it"?
Yes. If he told you to go out and
distribute books . . .

All right,

all right, I won't imagine such easy victories,
placing myself in a good light so I can
sleep peacefully tonight, alone at a
gas station in Spain.

I'll have to let it go.

I'm committed on this road. I don't
have to call it poetry. Poetry's just
an excuse for being alone. And what
I claim as my "separation from Śrīla Prabhupāda,"
what is it?

I dare to explore this in an unclear poem,
dare to write it although it's a temporary mood
because it's what I am right now and

I'm connected to him—

that forceful leader who engaged full-time
editors and *pūjārīs* and cooks and Ratha cart builders
and restaurant operators and his own servant, Hari Śauri,

and “Pradyumna will join me to edit the Sanskrit,” and
an American *sannyāsi* in charge of twenty men
selling books in U.S. colleges . . .
Good memories and tough ones . . .

Tonight I’m subdued, not feeling I have a special secret.
I’m just another faulty, aspiring devotee.

Oh, I read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He said whoever
reads again
and again the pastime of Dhruva Mahārāja
will gain pure
devotional service. All we have to do is hear the
transcendental pastimes of the Lord. Hearing of His
pure devotees is just as good. (As I read it, I thought,
“What
about me? Am I a devotee? Are my struggles worth
hearing? Are they within this realm?”)
He said nondevotees
may think, “How can people devote so much
time simply to
talks of God?” But devotees are never satiated.
“The more they hear and talk, the more they become
enthusiastic to hear. The chanting of the
Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is simply
the repetition of three words Hare, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma,
but still
devotees can go on chanting this Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra
24 hours a day . . . ”
Hear this and speak it and write it. That’s service too.

New earplugs tonight. Tomorrow another day of travel.
Thinking all this over tonight. Serving Śrīla Prabhupāda
is not easy.

It's easy to be somewhat connected within his
vast empire
of forgiveness and mercy and encouragement,
but to really measure
up is hard. And to admit your envy.
"I can't forget there's somewhere a boy
who will achieve far more than I."

Chapter Six

April 22, 2:10 A.M.

I dreamt that I fell down with a woman. I think I dreamt it because I had just read in *A Transcendental Diary* about a GBC *sannyāsī* who had fallen down. In my dream I did not have sensations of lust, but it was like watching a history unfold. I can't even remember who the woman was, but the real story was what happened the morning after. One of the male devotees who saw me the next morning said, "You look like you've been with a woman." I told him that it was true. He said, "You'll have to suffer for this." He then went off, I suppose to tell others about it. Then I woke up and realized how innocently I took the falldown, how I didn't consider the severe reactions. Actually, such an event would be extremely calamitous to myself and to others. This makes me think now that if I can remain pure and not allow anything like this to happen, it will be a major achievement. There have been so many preachers who did so much and yet lost almost everything by some serious indiscretion.

After waking from that dream, I fell back asleep and dreamt a sequel. I was holding a meeting to explain the falldown and to claim that I was still the spiritual master of my disciples. I was concerned about what clothes to wear for this meeting. I had a suit jacket and tried it on. When it was

time for the meeting, only female disciples attended. Why? Were the men protesting? Didn't they care for me anymore?

Then I awoke and rose at 12:45. When I took out my earplugs, I heard the steady idle of a big truck engine. It somehow reassured me. Thieves would not likely attack a busy truck stop. Now as I write, I hear the highway traffic and a truck pulling in, stopping, and the air brakes sighing as if tired. Other sounds, even louder, that I can't place—a rapid thumping. How does Narahari sleep through all this?

Today is Ekādaśī. We'll stop twice to honor fruit. Narahari is confident that we will reach the temple in Guadalajara by 5 P.M.

Early Morning Poem

While I was writing, Narahari was talking with the police. I heard only voices and wasn't alarmed. He told me, "It's nice" that they stopped to check. He took it as a sign of concern. They asked for his van's documents and his personal documents and asked him to open the side door—looked at our kitchen. "Is there someone else here?" they asked, but didn't bother to see me. "Thank you. Good night."

I am shivering. The cold shower left me this way. Hope I don't get a reaction—a headache or catch cold. It will be good up front with heater and engine, that cozy warmth in my limbs and chest.

Eleven rounds done. Maybe we can leave early. Prabhupāda *mūrti* looks nice. I'm sorry I have to be so familiar with him, undressing not far from him and not getting down to make full prostrations. But he looks nice and I appreciate his agreeing to be with me on all our travels, in every room, in this van. *Śāstra* says the *mūrti* is the same as the Lord, same as the pure devotee. No need to speculate whether a poem and a poet is serving him—he's right here smiling approvingly. He said, "Be a poet, but praise Kṛṣṇa."

All glories to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality
of Godhead,
who appears in His holy name. Please take us to
Vṛndāvana; let us see Vṛndāvana everywhere.
I worship His Divine Grace. Dear Lord, please
let me write well, let me remember
You in poetry and prose. I am Your
part and parcel and son, a tiny light of the Supreme.
Please let me love You.

6:45 A.M.

I waited for light of day. Even now I can't see well to write. Road sign: "Madrid." Narahari and I spoke intensely. He explained what he meant by honesty. He said it's not enough for a writer in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be honest; he must also be responsible to give his readers exemplary Kṛṣṇa consciousness as he has heard it in *paramparā*. You may churn up a poison when you go to write, but don't distribute it to the readers. We also spoke of why we won't go to Vṛndāvana this year.

We are high up on top of the mountains. The invincible van has climbed them. It's barely dawn and I see barren, powdery hills, dirt and rock face. No trees. Some patches of land growing olives. They cut a highway through here. This barrenness reminds me of desert India. The road rolls on, the moronic white stripe feeds into the front of your head and you get sleepy. It's not compatible with chanting, at least not for me. The gentle rocking, the rhythm, the warmth of the van . . . it's good for hypnotic dreaming, but not for seeing and feeling *hari-nāma* in the mind's eye.

"Madrid." Red taillights of trucks are perfect jewels. The air seems dirty, as if from cow dung fires, and so barren and brown before the day. The road cuts through it. Narahari sits erect and alert. What does he hear in his mind, his *Bhagavad-gītā* verses? Jalon—a viaduct.

Who cut the earth this way? The big highway makers? Yes, but nature did the rest. She left it barren, rocky Spain. Dried out riverbed, brown stone. Trees like evergreens rooted in rock soil. If this land is the bones of the universal form, then He's lying down, but He's so vast we can't even make out which part of the body is here. Highway sign: "Beware for falling rocks. Madrid, 210." Now we are starting our descent, coasting with brakes.

Monegrillas viaduct. Lighter colored rock. Where is Don Quixote? There's a massive hill of rock like the most

gorgeous building or Sphinx, but not symmetrical. Where is Teresa of Avila and her donkey? Where is the life of prayer and meditation—no attachments, not even to self? A vast outspread like the land Satan referred to Christ. “Get lost!” said Christ, “I’ll never worship you. This land is barren and neither can you give it to me. It’s already my Father’s.” A service zone is coming up. South of Zaragoza we are going.

Zona de servicios, and we pull in for diesel.

Dirty old diesel tanks. The station is an outpost, only a few inches off the highway. I glance into the office and see a rack of paperback books with pornographic covers. Narahari gets out and I hear the clock ticking on the van dashboard. Still no sunlight, only general lightness and a bluish, dusty mist. It reminds me of India except for that woman in tight jeans and messed-up blond hair. Believe it or not, she strides out of the gas station office, gets into the driver seat of a full-sized trailer, starts it up, and drives away. I thought only men . . .

We are far from the civilized genteel gardens of south France’s *bonne route*.

Cetina Garaba. That gas station was a heavy place. Narahari also noticed the porno books and videos on display and the women hanging around (for what?). We are back on the road. Get diesel and flee. Flee from Satan. Boot him out.

Where is St. John of the Cross? Remember, he was imprisoned by a branch of his own church. In solitary confinement he prayed and composed his poetry, which is now adored all over the world, “Dark Night of the Soul.” He finally escaped when the guards were sleeping, lowered himself out the window by his monk’s belt, climbed

the walls, sought and found asylum with the Carmelite nuns. Got free to write his tomes.

Ariza. Bordilba. Madrid. Someone has cut a way through these dry rocks. There are some adobes up here. Wherever they live in the world, those people who pray to God are fortunate. Otherwise, human life is wasted. We can't make sense out of rocks and sky. Oh—there's the billboard silhouette of the black bull. Uphill we go in our snappy, all-weather van, passing a blue trailer truck, passing the white dash marks down the middle of the road. The humans crawl through this road like insects in their cars and trucks. But where is the sunshine?

Could the Vedic message reach this faraway place? Is there anyone here who would receive it? Cistilla y Leno. It's not like Barcelona where people roam the streets and sometimes take a book from a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee and watch and hear the *harināma* party go by. That's why the cities are better for preaching. We are just passing through here en route to New Vraja-maṇḍala.

Right now, we're higher than ever and it's even more barren. Santa Maria de Juarta. I see an old fort or castle in the distance on a rim of hill. Nature's profiles on rocks, better than Mt. Rushmore's presidents' faces. More mystery. Montuengo. Madrid. I don't think Italy has got anything like this. But why should I be interested? I'm just noting all this to pass the time—and it commands me to do so. It's God's power and His material energy. It comes from Him.

We stop to break fast with fruit. We're close to the highway next to a hotel and restaurant, which appear to be closed. Narahari says that we're only one or two hours from New Vraja-maṇḍala, so if we like, instead of waiting, we can take a little rest and then go in. I agree that we should try for it and if we happen to see an idyllic spot along the way, we could stop. Otherwise, why stay out here in the barrenness?

Let's Go

Trucks zoom by. They are emptying
 the dumpster just outside the window
 of this van. I think it's time we went
 straight to New Vraja-maṇḍala. Why not?
 I have no more road tales,
 the rocks of Zaragoza are behind us
 and this barren truck stop is filled with
 Spanish guttural from the bar and the restaurant.
 I want to write,
 but it's best where it's quiet,
 and to read, and Śrīla Prabhupāda is being subjected
 to all this noise. He sits wrapped
 warm in a tweed blanket, and he's
 not smiling. I think he'd like to move
 on to where devotees will appreciate him.

I don't understand this Spanish but
 it's just as well. It doesn't sound good. Too many
 slamming doors
 air brakes whooshing, backing up and
 pulling out. Big deal. Śrīla Prabhupāda asked,
 "Where are they going this way and that,
 whoosh whoosh?"
 Big labor all day and night for
 nothing because Kṛṣṇa allows food and life by
 karma. Man thinks it's required he work so hard.
 Better to work for self-realization.

Now it's quiet for a moment, but then something else.
 Whatever we have observed in these three travel days is
 enough. Go into the quiet routine of a temple
 where *brahmacārīs* live together
 and householders nearby.

The talk is of Kṛṣṇa, and even if some fail to come up to the mark, they know what is worth striving for in life. A beautiful pair of Deities of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are dressed twice a day. *Karmīs* have no idea of such delicacy and purity. Even if the temple inmates are ordinary and in some ways act like nondevotees, there is special etiquette and deep knowledge underneath.

“We believe,” said Śrīla Prabhupāda, “in the theory, not theory but fact”—that bodies change, we take next lives and humans shouldn’t waste the chance, but follow *mahātmās* and do good for all. Yes, I’m willing to visit a temple and become the Visiting Sannyāsī again. I’ll lecture as best I can on any śāstric verse translated with purports by our spiritual master. I want to give up reluctance and self-absorption and enter that world where I can improve my consciousness and become eligible for Goloka. The place I mean is just an hour or so from here, New Vraja-maṇḍala, and we are welcome.

11:30 A.M., *New Vraja-maṇḍala dhāma*

We arrived safely. They didn't expect us until later in the afternoon, so the room was locked and still unheated, but here we are. I'll meet with Yadu at 4 P.M. I know the author wants to take over and narrate this story with me speaking in the third person, but I'm no longer interested in pretending. Narahari and I were discussing it. He'd read the last story, *A Week Before Gaura-Pūrṇimā*, and although he didn't say it outright, I think he didn't care for the fantastic plot maneuvers of his going to New Delhi and Maria's abduction, etc. He liked the seven days of lectures and the actual day-to-day happenings. He said he would like to hear a devotee's day even if the devotee relates things like, "I wanted to take a shower, but the bathroom floor was soaked by D. dāsa, who used it but didn't clean up after himself." We'll have to see what the author says, but I'm sure he can take a hint. This is a road journal, and this is the end of the road. The main thing for me is to keep the poems coming—at least one a day. It was a treat to write them several times on the road, but that may not be possible while in the temple. I've got initiations lined up, personal meetings—probably no time to write anyway.

It's not just a matter of time but attitude. I knew I could write poems and not be judgmental about them. "I'm a poet, so I'll write poems" was my attitude. "I can do a poem in half an hour, if you'll just give me the time." Same with any kind of writing. Just now I'm in this guest room alone, waiting for them to bring my things up. Five minutes have gone by and I am still sitting here waiting. Then it occurred to me, "You jerk, why don't you write?" You just have to think of it.

Same goes for reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Ideally, I want at least half an hour, but even in five minutes I

can sneak something in. Now someone is coming I think, but I'll keep writing until they open the door.

Cold weather, peacock calling, gas heater—a few impressions. Prabhupāda has a nice, large marble-topped altar and he and I are waiting for the paraphernalia so I can begin his massage.

The author has just arrived. He wants to continue the story and send me back into the third person. I tell him I'm not up to it. He isn't happy, but he leaves me alone. Now where was I? Oh yes, I was going to write a poem.

Actually, what I thought was a peacock is actually an infant crying somewhere in this building, a distressed, suffering infant. I'd forgotten that world. I may have to return to it. All right, if I have to I will, but I pray to remain a devotee and to appreciate devotional service in my next life. As for this life, I'll just keep reading and reading it down.

Glossary

A

Ācārya—a spiritual master who teaches by his personal behavior.

Acintya—inconceivable.

Adhokṣaja—a name of Lord Viṣṇu, meaning “He who is beyond the reach of the material senses.”

Anartha—unwanted things; material desire.

Aparādhā—offense.

Apsarā—a celestial dancer.

Ārati—a ceremony of worshiping the Lord by the offering of various auspicious articles, such as incense, flowers, water, fans, ghee lamp, etc.

Arcā-vigraha—Deity.

Arjuna—one of the five Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā* to him on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra.

Āsana—a yogic posture; a seat.

Āśrama—a spiritual order: *brahmacārī* (celibate student), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retired), *sannyāsī* (renunciate); living quarters for those engaged in spiritual practices.

Aṣṭa-sāttvika—the eight-fold bodily transformations of ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa.

Aśvatthāmā—the son of the Pāṇḍavas’ guru, Droṇācārya, who fought against them in the Battle of Kurukṣetra.

Ātma-tattva—knowledge of the self.

B

Balarāma—Kṛṣṇa's elder brother and His first plenary expansion.

BBT—The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust; the publishing house solely and exclusively authorized to publish Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

Bhagavad-gītā—lit., "song of God." The discourse between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna, expounding devotional service as both the principal means and the ultimate end of spiritual perfection.

Bhāgavata—anything related to Bhagavān, especially the Lord's devotee and the scripture, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Bhajana—devotional activities.

Bhajana-kuṭīr—a hermitage-like residence for the practice of devotional activities.

Bhakta—a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakta-vatsala—a description of Kṛṣṇa's quality of loving kindness shown toward His devotees.

Bhakti—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura—the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda; a great *ācārya* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāya*.

Bhārata-bhūmi—ancient India.

Bharata Mahārāja—an ancient devotee-king, who, due to affection for a deer, had to take birth as one.

Bhauma Vṛndāvana—the earthly replica of Lord Kṛṣṇa's personal abode in the spiritual world.

Bhīṣma—the most powerful and oldest warrior in the Battle of Kurukṣetra and one of the chief authorities on devotional service to the Lord.

Brahmā—the first created living being and the secondary creator of the material universe.

Brahmacārī—a celibate student living under the care of a bona fide spiritual master.

Brahma-jyoti—the bodily effulgence of the Supreme Lord which constitutes the brilliant illumination of the spiritual sky.

Brāhma-muhūrta—a period spanning one and a half hours before sunrise to one and a half hours after sunrise, considered the most auspicious time for spiritual practices.

Brahman—the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth; spirit.

Brāhmaṇa—those wise in the Vedas who can guide society; the first Vedic social order.

Brahma-saṁhitā—Lord Brahmā's prayers glorifying the Supreme Lord.

Bṛhad-mṛdaṅga—lit., “the great drum.” A phrase coined by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura; refers to the power of publishing books as an instrument for preaching.

C

Cādar—a shawl.

Caitanya (Mahāprabhu)—lit. “Living force.” An incarnation of Kṛṣṇa who appeared in the form of a devotee to teach love of God through the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Śrī—the biography and philosophy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, written by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

Capātī—a whole-wheat, griddle-baked flatbread.

Celā—disciple.

Chyavan Prash—an Āyurvedic herbal tonic paste.

D

Dakṣa—a son of Brahmā and chief forefather of the universal population.

Daṇḍa—a staff composed of three long sticks tied together, carried by Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs*.

Darśana—vision; audience.

Devakī—Kṛṣṇa's mother in Mathurā.

Dhāma—abode; the Lord's place of residence.

Dhanvantari—an incarnation of Viṣṇu who appeared from the churning of the milk ocean, carrying the nectar of immortality.

Dharma—the duties prescribed by one's nature and social position; ultimately, dharma means devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

Dhotī—Vedic men's dress.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra—the uncle of the Pāṇḍavas. His attempt to usurp their kingdom resulted in the Kurukṣetra war.

Dhruva (Mahārāja)—a great devotee, who at five years old, performed severe austerities and realized the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

E

Ekādaśī—a day on which Vaiṣṇavas fast from grains and beans and increase their remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. It falls on the eleventh day of both the waxing and waning moons.

G

Gajendra—an elephant-king who, by remembering his devotional service from a previous human life, prayed to the Lord and was saved by Him from death.

Gandharva—a celestial musician.

Garuḍa—Lord Viṣṇu's eternal carrier, a great devotee in a bird-like form.

Gauḍa-deśa—West Bengal.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava—a follower of Lord Caitanya.

Gaura-Nitāi—Lord Caitanya (Gaura) and Lord Nityānanda (Nitāi).

- Gaura-pūrṇimā**—the appearance day of Lord Caitanya
- Gāyatrī**—a prayer chanted silently by *brāhmaṇas* at sunrise, noon, and sunset.
- GBC**—Governing Body Commission, ISKCON's board of directors.
- Gītā-nāgarī**—a spiritual farm community established by Śrīla Prabhupāda in central Pennsylvania.
- Goloka**—Kṛṣṇaloka, the eternal abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- Gopī**—a cowherd girl; one of Kṛṣṇa's most confidential servitors.
- Gośālā**—cowshed
- Gṛhastha**—a married person living according to the Vedic social system.
- Gurukula**—a school headed by the spiritual master.

H

- Halavā**—a sweet dish made from roasted grains, butter, sugar, and water or milk.
- Hare**—the vocative form of Harā, another name of Rādhārāṇī; refers specifically to the internal spiritual energy of the Lord.
- Hari-nāma**—lit., “the name of the Lord.”
- Harināma**—public chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.

I

- ISKCON**—acronym of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

J

- Jagannātha**—lit., “the Lord of the universe”; may refer specifically to the Deity of Lord Jagannātha in His temple at Purī.
- Japa**—individual chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra while counting on beads.

Jīva—the individual eternal soul or living entity; part and parcel of the Supreme Lord.

Jīva Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Jñānī—one who approaches the Supreme by cultivation of knowledge.

K

Kali-yuga—the present age, which is characterized by quarrel and hypocrisy.

Kaṁsa—a demoniac king who tried to kill Kṛṣṇa during His childhood pastimes.

Karma-yoga—the process of God realization by dedicating the fruits of one's work to God.

Karmī—one engaged in karma (fruitive activity); a materialist.

Kārttika—the Vedic month corresponding to October–November in which Lord Dāmodara is worshiped.

Kīrtana—chanting of the Lord's holy names.

Kṛṣṇa—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī—the author of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

Kṛṣṇa-kathā—topics spoken by or about Kṛṣṇa.

Kṣatriya—administrative or warrior class. The second Vedic social order.

Kurtā—a tunic-like men's shirt, commonly worn in India.

Kuvera—the treasurer of the demigods.

L

Lakṣmī—the goddess of fortune; money.

Līlā—pastimes.

M

Madhya-līlā—the pastimes Lord Caitanya performed during the middle part of His manifest presence, while He was traveling throughout India; the portion of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* recounting those pastimes.

Mahā-bhāgavata—a devotee in the highest stage of devotional life.

Mahābhārata—the history of ancient India, compiled by Śrīla Vyāsadeva and including the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Mahājanas—refers to the twelve authorized agents of the Lord whose duty is to preach the path of devotional service to the people in general.

Mahā-mantra—the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Mahārāja—great king. Also used as a title of respect for a *sannyāsī*.

Mahātmā—great soul.

Maṅgala-ārati—the first Deity worship of the day, performed an hour and a half before sunrise.

Mantra—sound vibration that can deliver the mind from illusion.

Māyā—the external, illusory energy of the Lord, comprising this material world; forgetfulness of one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

Māyāpur—a town in West Bengal, India, where Lord Caitanya appeared.

Māyāvādī—an impersonalist or voidist who believes that God is ultimately formless and without personality.

Mṛdaṅga—a two-headed clay drum, traditionally used in *kīrtana*.

Mṛgāri—a cruel hunter and torturer of animals who, by the influence of Nārada Muni, became a pure devotee.

Mūḍha—fool, rascal.

Mūrti—a form, usually referring to a Deity.

N

Nanda—Kṛṣṇa's father in Vṛndāvana.

Nārada Muni—a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa who travels throughout the spiritual and material worlds singing the Lord's glories and preaching the path of devotional service.

Nārāyaṇa—the four-handed expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura—a Vaiṣṇava spiritual master in the disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya and writer of many standard Vaiṣṇava hymns.

The Nectar of Devotion—Śrīla Prabhupāda's summary study of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

Nityānanda—the incarnation of Lord Balarāma who is a principal associate of Lord Caitanya.

Nṛsiṃha(deva)—the half-man, half-lion incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who appeared to save Prahlāda Mahārāja from Hiranyakaśipu.

P

Pāñcarātrikī—the rules and regulations of Deity worship, as set down by Nārada Muni in his *Nārada-pañcarātra*.

Pāṇḍavas—the five warrior-brothers, sons of King Pāṇḍu, and intimate friends of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Parabrahman—the supreme spirit.

Paramparā—the disciplic succession of bona fide spiritual masters.

Parāśara Muni—a great sage and the father of Śrīla Vyāsadeva.

Parikrama—a walking pilgrimage.

Pāriṣad—a liberated associate of Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhu-datta deśa—the geographical location assigned by the spiritual master to the disciple for service to his mission.

Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami—Founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and foremost preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Western world.

Prahlāda Mahārāja—a great devotee who was persecuted by his demoniac father, but who was protected and saved by Lord Nṛsiṃha.

Prajāpati—universal progenitor.

Prāṇa—the life air of the body; vital energy.

Prasādam—lit., “mercy.” Food which is spiritualized by being offered to Kṛṣṇa and which helps purify the living entity; also referred to as *prasāda*.

Pūjā—worship.

Pūjārī—a priest, specifically one engaged in temple Deity worship.

Purāṇa—Vedic histories of the universe in relation to the Supreme Lord and His devotees. The “spotless” *Purāṇa* refers to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

R

Rādhārāṇī (Rādhā)—the eternal consort and spiritual potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Rādhāṣṭamī—the festival celebrating Rādhārāṇī’s birth.

Rāgānugā-bhakti—devotional service following the spontaneous loving service of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Rāma—as part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, refers to the highest eternal pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa; also refers to Lord Balarāma, the first plenary expansion of the Lord.

Rāmacandra, Lord—the *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa who appeared as the perfect king, whose full history can be found in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Rasa—the spiritual essence of a personal relationship with the Supreme Lord.

Ratha-yātrā—an annual chariot festival celebrating Kṛṣṇa's return to Vṛndāvana in which the Deity of Lord Jagannātha is pulled in procession on a *ratha* (chariot).

Rūpa Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

S

Sac-cid-ānanda—the qualities of eternality (*sat*), perfect knowledge (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*), possessed in totality by the Supreme Lord and in minute quantity by the living entity.

Sādhaka—one who practices regulated devotional service.

Sādhana—regulated spiritual activities meant to increase one's attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

Sādhū—saintly person.

Śakti—potency.

Samādhi—trance or absorption in the service of the Lord.

Samosā—a savory, stuffed, deep-fried pastry.

Sampradāya—a chain of disciplic succession through which spiritual knowledge is transmitted.

Samsāra—cycle of repeated birth and death.

Sanātana Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Saṅga—association.

San̄kīrtana—the congregational chanting of the holy name, fame, and pastimes of the Lord.

Sannyāsī—one in the renounced order of life.

Sārī—Vedic women's dress.

Śāstra—revealed scripture.

Shenai—a woodwind instrument, similar to an oboe.

Siddhānta—the perfect conclusion according to Vedic scriptures.

Śikhā—lit. “flag.” A tuft of hair grown at the crown of the head of male Vaiṣṇavas.

Śiṣya—disciple or student.

Śiva—the personality in charge of the mode of ignorance.

Śloka—a stanza of Sanskrit verse.

Śraddhā—firm faith and confidence.

Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta—the biography of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, written by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam—the *Purāṇa*, written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which specifically points to the path of devotional love of God.

Suddha-sattva—the transcendental state of pure goodness, uncontaminated by the modes of material nature.

Sūdra—a laborer; one of the four Vedic social orders.

Śukadeva Gosvāmī—the sage who originally spoke the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to King Parīkṣit just prior to the king’s death.

Sundara-ārati—evening worship of the Deity in the temple.

Sūtra—a Vedic aphorism.

Swami—one who controls his senses, a title of one in the renounced order of life.

Swamiji—lit. “great master.” A common term of respect addressed to *sannyāsīs*.

T

Tamboura—a stringed instrument played in classical Indian music.

Tamo-guṇa—the mode of ignorance.

Tapasya—austerity.

Tilaka—auspicious clay markings that sanctify a devotee’s body as a temple of the Lord.

Tridaṇḍi-bhikṣu swami—a Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsī* who lives by begging.

Tulasī—a great devotee in the form of a plant; her leaves are always offered to the lotus feet of the Lord.

U

Uddhava—a confidential friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā.

Upaniṣads—108 philosophical treatises that appear within the Vedas.

Utsāha—enthusiasm.

V

Vaidhi-bhakti—the process of following the regulative principles of devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master, in accordance with revealed scriptures.

Vaikunṭha—the spiritual world.

Vaiṣṇava—one who is a devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

Vāṇī—the instruction of the spiritual master.

Varnāśrama—the Vedic social system of four social and four spiritual orders.

Vedas—the original revealed scriptures.

Vidura—a Vaiṣṇava uncle of the Pāṇḍavas; the incarnation of Yamarāja during Kṛṣṇa's manifest pastimes on Earth.

Vīṇā—a stringed instrument.

Viṣṇu—a fully empowered expansion of Kṛṣṇa.

Vraja—Vṛndāvana.

Vrajavāsī—a resident of Vṛndāvana.

Vṛndāvana—Kṛṣṇa's personal abode, where He fully manifests His personal qualities.

Vyāsāsana—a special, elevated seat, reserved for the speaker of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following disciples and friends who helped produce and print this book:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa dāsa
Bhakta William Webb
Caitanya-dayā-devī dāsī
Guru-sevā-devī dāsī
Kaiśorī-devī dāsī
Kṛṣṇa-kṛpā dāsa
Keśīhanta dāsa
Lalitāmṛta-devī dāsī
Mādhava dāsa
Madhumaṅgala dāsa
Nārāyaṇa-kavaca dāsa
Prāṇadā-devī dāsī
Tulasī-priyā-devī dāsī
Varuṇa dāsa

Special thanks to Mahā-mantra dāsa, Śāntā-devī dāsī, Rūpa-Raghunātha dāsa and Prāṇadā-devī dāsī for their kind donations to print this book.

Y

Yajña—sacrifice.

Yakṣa—ghostly follower of Kuvera.

Yamunā—a sacred river in India, which Lord Kṛṣṇa made famous by performing pastimes there.

Yogamāyā—the internal spiritual potency of the Lord.

Yoga-nidrā—the mystic slumber of Lord Viṣṇu.

Yogī—one who practices sense control with the aim of spiritual realization.

Yukta-vairāgya—real renunciation by utilizing everything in the service of God.

