

# Lessons from the Road

*Volume Six*

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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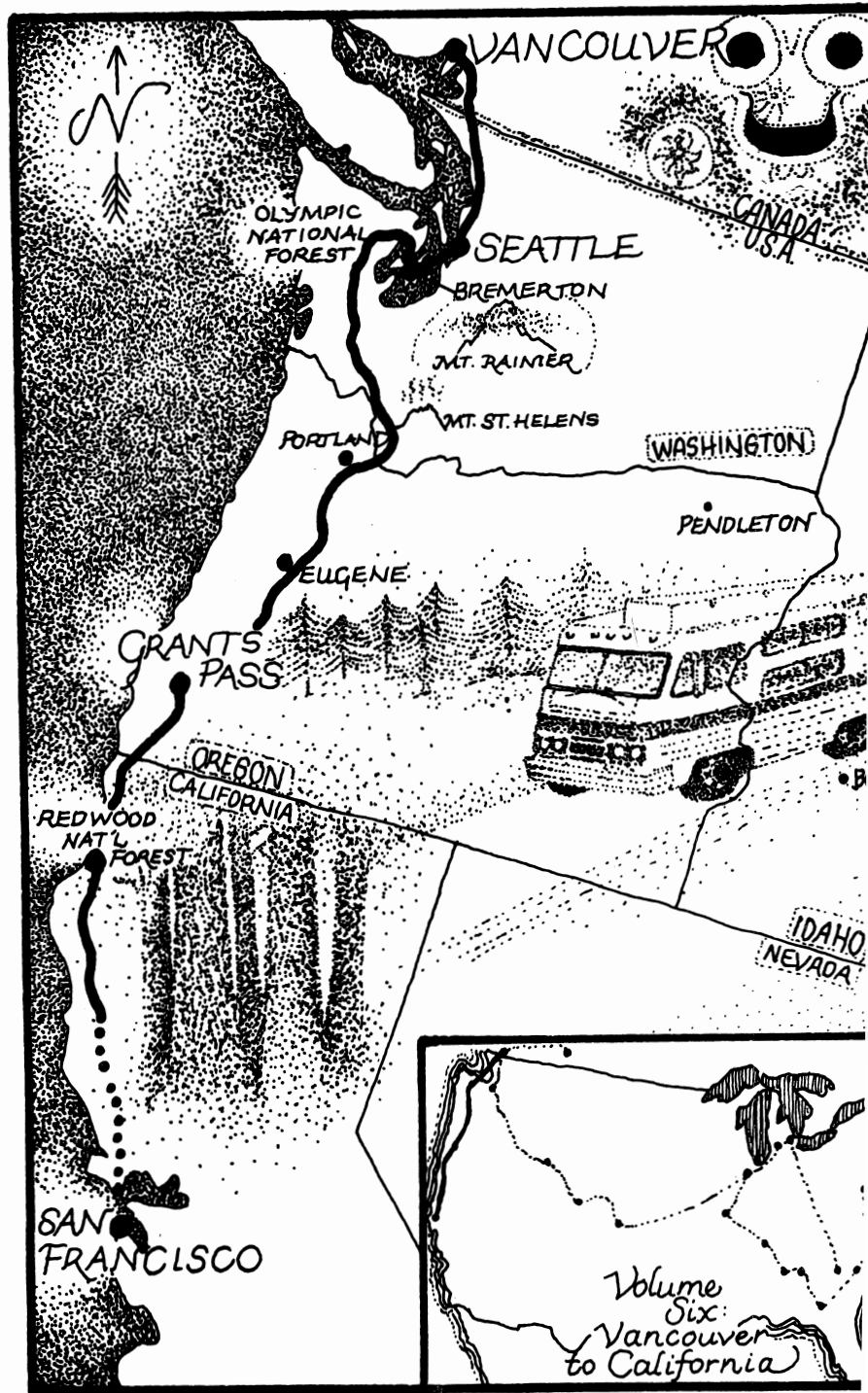
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VANCOUVER

CANADA  
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GRANTS  
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NAT'L  
FOREST

SAN  
FRANCISCO

IDAHO  
NEVADA

Volume  
Six:  
Vancouver  
to California

# Chapter Twelve

## VANCOUVER

### *Janmāṣṭamī 1987 and the Harmonic Convergence*

Several devotees have informed us about the Harmonic Convergence which occurs August 16 and 17, 1987. It is a time in which eight planets of the solar system will be "in a profoundly harmonious alignment, a grand triune in the fire signs." According to the Mayan calendar, this marks the end of a twenty-six-thousand-year cycle of evolution and begins a golden age. Their conclusion is similar to the prediction given in the Vedic calendar, a golden age within the degraded age of Kali. Followers of the Harmonic Convergence have attempted to inform people of the auspiciousness of this time and to use it for prayer. They believe that "a prayer at this time is critical to planetary evolution and can be an extraordinary catalyst to our individual spiritual advancement as well."

A few Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees have picked up on the fact that the convergence takes place on the same days as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī and the appearance day of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. A devotee named Nimāi-Caitanya dāsa circulated a letter applying the Harmonic Convergence theme to the time-and-place situation of ISKCON. He writes, "Śrīla Prabhupāda had unflinching faith that

Kṛṣṇa consciousness would spread all over the world and grow continuously, his books being the lawbooks for mankind. Sometimes, with all our apparent setbacks, it may seem hard to imagine this being the case." Nimāi-Caitanya dāsa suggested four goals for devotees to pray for during the auspicious days. The Harmonic Convergence sounds rather strange to most of us, but the suggestion to spend these two holidays praying for purification and rejuvenation is appealing.

One prayer is to ask forgiveness from others. Of course, we have to perform acts of retribution in addition to pleas for forgiveness. For example, you cannot pray to a creditor to please write off a debt. You have to take action and try to pay him back. If we cannot immediately pay him, we ask him to forgive us, until we can satisfy him. Aside from money-lenders, someone may be angry with us and demand a certain rectification, to which we do not agree. Perhaps we can find a compromise. But we should not remain entrenched in opposition to those we have offended. If it's not possible to meet as friends, then we should pray to God and to the devotees for forgiveness, and for some solution to our disagreement.

There is also a prayer in which we forgive others. "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." Even if we do not immediately take an appropriate action, *to think forgiveness* is a start. What we were doing wrong will occur to us, once we become willing to not harbor resentment.

We may also offer a pray for rejuvenation of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and for Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the world. This is like Advaita Ācārya's calling on the Lord to please appear in the world and deliver Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I may doubt, "Who am I to

pray? I am insignificant and Kṛṣṇa knows what to do." But this is a pure prayer—"Please help the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, help the suffering living entities by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Since others are praying, I can join. I can add my voice to the *kīrtana*. I don't have much energy, but especially during this auspicious time, let me pray, "Dear Lord, please help the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. None of us can solve the personal differences, the deep quarrels, splits, and resentments. Only You can do it. Śrīla Prabhupāda could do it, but now we are feeling his absence, despite his *vāṇī*."

We also pray that the vision of Śrīla Prabhupāda can enter the hearts of all his followers. Pure devotees ask the Lord for pure benedictions—to always remember Him, to be in the association of His devotees. So this specific request is good. Although I have misbehaved and Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision has become dim within me, and although I don't deserve it, please allow me to have another chance. Make me plain and simple and submissive to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Since this means that I will have to work with his followers in a give-and-take relationship, and since this is difficult, please give me the strength to go on with it.

In the rain, at a pay phone between the farm and the city, I spoke with a Godbrother from coast to coast. He told me that at a recent devotees' meeting some of the members expressed "nervousness" about the activities of my traveling party. Someone said we are a large group that raises lots of money by sticker sales. Someone heard that we are distributing my own books rather than Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and not donating any money to the BBT. There are other fears that we are in a

marauding spirit toward other temples' *sankīrtana* territories, and that I even know about these things or indirectly condone them. These criticisms made me think, "If to preach means to always be criticized, maybe it would be better to become as inoffensive as possible, such as I might do by staying at Śaraṇāgati." But that would also be an act open to criticism. Someone cautions, "Don't ignore the opinion of the Vaiṣṇavas." But how to please them all? Best to keep trying and avoid being depressed when you receive some criticism which may or may not be deserved. Are you so attached to carrying the highest popular reputation? I should take it as a test, whether I actually have any humility. To continue despite my own flaws and the flaws of misinformation.

In such situations, Śrīla Prabhupāda advises us to be forbearing. In one purport he writes that a person chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, in advanced spiritual consciousness, need not practice forbearance separately. The purport to this verse is:

A devotee engaged in chanting the holy name of the Lord should practice forbearance like that of a tree. Even if he is rebuked or chastised, he should not say anything to others to retaliate. For even if one cuts a tree, it never protests, nor even if it is drying up and dying does it ask anyone for water.

—Cc. *Ādi* 17.27–28

After *maṅgala-ārati*, Kṛatu dāsa made announcements for ten minutes, assigning duties to the devotees for the Janmāṣṭamī festival. He is one of the best ISKCON Indian preachers, and I was impressed to hear their ambitious plans for a grand festival which will emphasize preaching to guests and dignitaries,

including a minister of parliament and the chief of the Indian consulate. I began to feel a bit guilty that I was preparing to speak in this morning's class in an introspective way. I thought, "They won't have time for inner prayers today, they'll all be busy cooking or speaking or working to bring people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and that's better than inner meditation." But then I took solace in the fact that my message on prayer and inner life is also a valid contribution. It's another program for the Janmāṣṭamī festival, and an appropriate one for a *sannyāsī*. If I can help to set a mood of praying for forgiveness and guidance, and if I can help us to remember the auspicious power of prayer, that's good. But if I also don't have much time or capacity for intense prayer today, then I shouldn't expect it of others.

August 17, 1987

The appearance day of  
His Divine Grace A. C.

Bhaktivedanta Swami  
Prabhupāda

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to your lotus feet.

On your Vyāsa-pūjā day I wish to immediately say, "I surrender to your lotus feet." And I do. But you also described my state in a letter you wrote to me in February 1969: "Unhappiness experienced by a devotee feeling himself inferior is not unusual, rather such mentality is impetus to further development of devotional service." I am hopeful on this day, and I feel your protective presence. But I'm also dissatisfied.

I lack appreciation, I lack willingness to sacrifice all

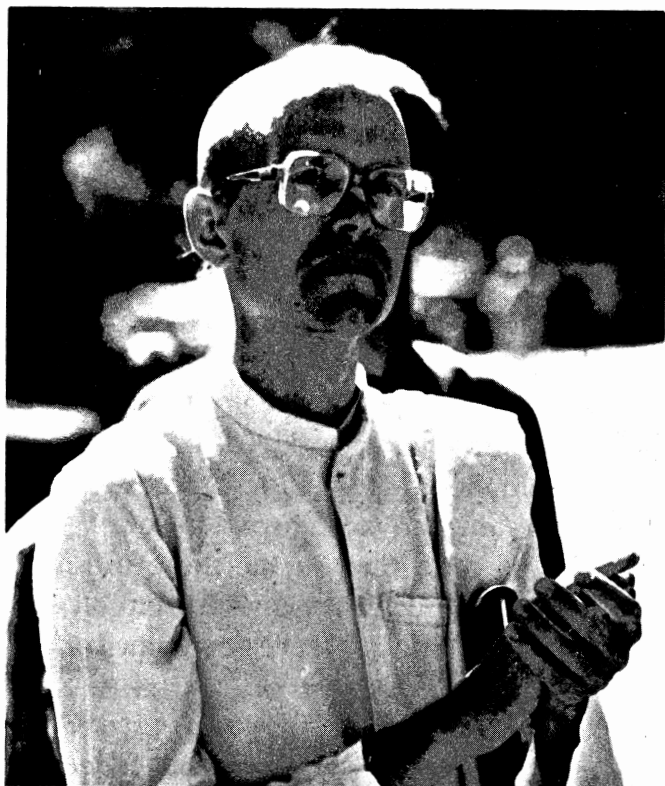
convenience for your service, and I lack the certainty of knowing when to be patient or when to seek change for improvement. I hope I can improve, though time is running out, and my poor habits have become part of my nature. Faced with this situation I repeat a prayer which you yourself composed: "I am unwilling to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, so You can force me to become so. You put me under circumstances so that I may be forced to accept Kṛṣṇa consciousness" (November 13 1968).

On your Vyāsa-pūjā day I will speak and hear Prabhupāda-kathā, Prabhupāda-sevā in the company of your followers. It has been conclusively established in ISKCON that all devotees are your followers, now and in the future, and each one is entitled to approach you intimately, according to his surrender. We old students have the responsibility to encourage everyone to take shelter of you. We should not become overwhelmed by our own guruship.

The Vyāsa-pūjā book is filled with right directions and earnest convictions. We become inspired to read them, but also it is something like reading a menu, and we remain hungry until we ourselves can take part by realizing our own convictions for you. Each devotee's conviction is his precious devotional creeper, to be nourished by service to you. And that can be done by each of us performing our *guru-sevā* in a humble way. Sometimes we become bewildered hearing the different ways to serve you—distribute books, live on the farm, approach you mostly by preaching to the nondevotees, please you by living with the devotees in peace—I am also ashamed to admit that I become envious of your enthusiastic servants when I see them pass the hard tests. I try to control such bad tendencies.

I know you will accept my service, and so I should not spoil what little offering I can make to you by being envious or constantly berating myself for not doing more. I have to accept my own chosen duties, my own lot . . .

This letter, a combination of aspiration to serve you and complaint of my misgivings, is not ideal, but it reflects my actual state. I also wanted to place before you my intention to serve you now, as *parivrājakācārya*. That means I will travel without a fixed base, but I will be steady in helping out wherever I can go. My plan is to please you by visiting your many ISKCON centers and preaching the Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy as best I



Kalakantha Prabhu, President of Vancouver ISKCON



can wherever the opportunity arises.

You already know my *sādhana* schedule, my determination to read from several of your books each day. Even if in some ways I take to reading because I cannot do bolder tasks, I know that I am safe by studying your books and worshiping them with my intelligence.

As for guruship, I know it is risky, but it is a field for serving you if I do it rightly. If I serve without attachment for the results, my success will be to bring my disciples closer to you.

As for writing books, it seems to be my *dharma*. So I had better see to it that my works are right in the Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta*. I often look for and discover in your letters and lectures, encouragement to write, provided it is glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Caitanya, and devotional service. So I'll work with my pen, just as another works with his paint brush or hammer.

The principle to be applied here is expressed by Nārada Muni: "O good soul, does not a thing, applied therapeutically, cure the disease which was caused by that very same thing? Thus when all a man's activities are dedicated to the service of the Lord, those very activities which caused his perpetual bondage become a destroyer of the tree of work" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.33-34).

By writing to you today I feel more certain of my purpose and I am ready to take part in your Vyāsa-pūjā ceremonies. Beyond that, in the more difficult tests which are ahead, I will save myself from all dangers. Please allow me to always serve you in the company of your devotees.

Your fallen servant,  
Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

*Vyāsa-pūjā Readings in the Temple*

I read my offering, thought it poor. Looked at a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda smiling. How could I dare to read such a poor offering?

Sometimes I apply this same criticism to others. As if I were the literary critic for the *New York Times*, I pick at a devotee's mixed metaphors. First he describes Śrīla Prabhupāda as the captain of a ship at sea, "waves of desperation as we near the shores of Kṛṣṇaloka." Then the metaphor shifts too quickly to Prabhupāda as a mountain peak, an airplane, a boat, and then comes a string of idiomatic ISKCON-isms: ("fried," "the general mass of people in the clutches of matter"). But why quibble? What matters is his sincerity.

Prabhupāda said, in commenting on a booklet written by one of his scholarly brothers, "It contains some ideal discussions only, and I know that this man has personally deviated from all these ideas." So academic perfection is not what matters, but rather devotion, obedience.

A devotee from Denver read the offering of that temple: "Distribute books, distribute books, distribute books. We want them in every home; never mind that people may not immediately appreciate them. These books that you have given us are not different from the Lord. This is Kali-yuga, when *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is thrown in the garbage and the trash is profitably marketed at every corner bookstore. . . ." After an hour, my stone heart began to melt. I was grateful to be in the company of devotees. Śivānanda Prabhu said he has been reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters. "Prabhupāda is genuinely concerned about his disciples. And that friendly nature," said Śivānanda, "inspires me to go on

in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I want to pass on that warmth and friendliness to others."

When another devotee read of the importance of associating with Vaiṣṇavas, I wondered, "Does he mean these people?" I answered myself, "Yes, *these devotees of Prabhupāda*."

The children wrote funny homages, fresh and frank. "Prabhupāda, you have the energy of a young boy." "If it weren't for you I'd be a *karmī* eating meat and going to church every Sunday." A child notes, "Although Russia is a communist country, you brought Kṛṣṇa there." And, "Prabhupāda, you wrote seventy books which were all perfect."

During the readings we often looked up to the *mūrti* of Śrīla Prabhupāda. I noticed the wavy vein on his left temple, and his loving features.

### *On the Theme of Travel*

Thinking ahead of travel in India, I wrote to my disciple Mādhurya-līlā dāsī, who is a resident of Krishna-Balarām Mandir in Vṛndāvana. I had heard that she was going with the *pada-yātrā* to holy Badrinath in the Himalayas. I asked her to find out if one could ascend the mountain without walking, since my arthritic left foot has made me lame. Now she has written back with information about the tour to Badrinath.

Further up the mountain, there is a place at the border of India and China where Vyāsadeva's cave is to be found. But they say this is not the actual cave, and the real cave of Vyāsadeva is somewhere in China. There is also a place in the mountains where Bhīma was supposed to have built a bridge across a steep gorge by placing a boulder there so that the Pāṇḍavas could cross it while they were in exile.

Apparently, one can see gorgeous vistas of mountains and rivers, including a place called Vasudhara, a waterfall which is the source of the Alakānanda River. But Mādhurya-līlā dāśī wasn't much impressed:

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. This place is four thousand meters 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!

Further up, ardent pilgrims trek to Kedarnath. One can walk, go by horseback, or ride on a palanquin for the last fourteen kilometers. The palanquin is carried by four men and costs rupees five hundred to go and return. If you want to go to the mouth of the Ganges, where she comes out from a glacier (Gomukh), you have to walk or ride on horseback for eighteen kilometers. My correspondent advises that I forget the whole trip:

Actually you don't need to go to all these places because they're all present in Vraja-maṇḍala. Vṛndāvana and devotional service to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are the highest. Half-way up there through this trip, I was wondering why we were undergoing so much austerity. It wasn't to develop love of Godhead because that's better done in Vṛndāvana. I thought, What is the point of going to see all these places? Is it going to help me develop into a pure devotee?

While receiving *darśana* of the Deities of Madana-Mohana in Vancouver this morning, I reflected on this Badrinath travel report. Then my eyes fell upon the

Bengali-style Pañca-tattva painting on the altar, the pastels of the Pañca-tattva's *dhotīs* and their golden-hued bodies. By the positions of their arms and the looks on their faces, they are distinctly from Navadvīpa of the spiritual world. So I thought, "Why not go to Navadvīpa or Māyāpur and from there describe the pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu?"

Śrīla Prabhupāda said a world tour is useless unless it is used for spreading the *saṅkīrtana* movement. But for *that* purpose, one can travel anywhere, including the Himalayas. For example, Lord Kṛṣṇa sent Uddhava to Badrinath to inform the sages about the last pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa on earth. That was a preaching mission. And Śrīla Prabhupāda constantly traveled around the world in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda writes about the travels of Nārada Muni:

It is the duty of a mendicant (*parivrājak-ācārya*) 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.

For preaching, a devotee may leave Vṛndāvana, and keep Vṛndāvana in his heart.

### *In the Backyard, New Gokula*

There used to be a garden here with circular plots of flowers. It was a work of constant devotion by Balabhadra and his wife. After they left, the garden was taken over by Dhruva Mahārāja and his wife, who also made it wonderful, but they also have left. Those devotees are now living at Gītā-nāgarī. Now Śivānanda tends the garden. The earth turns over. There are new

flowers, not as wonderful as before, but blooming now. The gardener changes, the temple president changes, the GBC man changes, the zonal-*ācārya* is gone—or rather, he's returned as a compact-size *guru*. Kṛṣṇa also changes, but His changes are all for the good, and ours are questionable.

In a temple or institution where there are many changes it seems important to find a clue to steadiness—who stays on and what enables them to be steady?

Some people leave for *māyā*. The bitter ones say, "The devotees living within the movement are also in *māyā*." And one apostate (who's still a devotee at heart) remarked, "I'd rather be in the illusion of material life than in the illusion of spiritual life." He means that we inmates of the temple are pretending we are transcendentalists, but actually we are no different than anyone else. There's truth in that, as Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "A sincere sweeper in the street is far better than the charlatan meditator who meditates only for the sake of making a living." All right, but then *be spiritual wherever you are*. Even if "the movement" is all pseudodevotees, why should you give up rising early, reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, chanting, and following the four rules? There is no justification for giving up the orders of the spiritual master, no matter how much hypocrisy you find in the so-called representatives of ISKCON.

I write here as a warm-up for my meeting tomorrow night with some heavy apostates. One said, "If that Satsvarūpa Mahārāja wants to come to our house, tell him he better wear pants and a cap; 'cause we don't want our neighbors thinking we're into (spit) Hare Kṛṣṇa!"

We held a meeting of my disciples in Vancouver. I sat on the couch and they sang *Śrī-guru-carāṇa-padma* as in the old days. Previous to the meeting I had heard the opinion that my disciples here are somewhat independent of temple authority, and not so happy.

I spoke about the *guru*-disciple relationship as personal and mutually accountable. I told them what I am doing in my post-GBC-man career: "I'm paying more attention to my disciples. I'm doing that mainly by writing. Also, I'm taking more time than I used to for reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books daily. And I'm trying to be a decent *sannyāsī*."

Then I asked them to tell me what they are doing, to honestly reveal their problems so that I can help. They asked questions and made comments in the intimate atmosphere of *guru* and disciples. One asked, "We want to see you as perfect because you're our spiritual master. But in your writings you often express that you're imperfect. So we could take it that you're being humble, but because we also have to believe that you seriously mean what you write, we may doubt. How to take this?" I explained, but after the meeting I thought of something else I wanted to say: The Vaiṣṇava conclusion is that the more one truly thinks himself imperfect and fallen the more he progresses toward the highest stage. The question, then, is not when will we become free from such feelings of inferiority, but when will the quality of these "complaints" be spiritual? When will I actually take up the mood of the *Śikṣāṣṭaka* and feel myself lower than the straw in the street? In order to qualify for spiritual lamentation, one's behavior must also be standard and in obedience with the *sādhana* rules and regulations. The Vaiṣṇava acts as a devotee should, but he laments that he's not a real Vaiṣṇava.

Another disciple said bluntly, "Are you a pure devotee?" I laughed and they laughed with me. Some think the *guru* should assert, "I'm topmost!" in order for the disciple to be enthusiastic in his service. But shouldn't it be enough if the teacher is honest and doing what he asks them to do?

Now I can expect more letters. But will they admit what's wrong and ask for help? Or will a wife-beater merely write, "As you know, I am acting now in the *gr̥has̥tha-āśrama*"?

### *Thursday Hari-nāma*

It's two days before Ratha-yātrā. In my dutiful study of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, I'm now reading how Rādhārāṇī felt when She saw Kṛṣṇa at Kurukṣetra (*Madhya-līlā*, Chapter 1). Lord Caitanya felt the same way when He saw Lord Jagannātha at Ratha-yātrā. Rādhā was not satisfied at Kurukṣetra because the atmosphere was not congenial for Their meeting. "She thought of Him in the calm and quiet atmosphere of Vṛndāvana, dressed as a cowherd boy." This is why everyone desires a secluded forest—it's like Vṛndāvana, most suitable for meeting Kṛṣṇa.

This nectar can be found in Prabhupāda's books, and I am simply repeating it here because it has awakened me from a dull, slumbering state. I don't know if this will much change my wooden attitude toward chanting on the streets, or whether it will bring me compassion for distributing the literature of His Divine Grace. Yet, the descriptions are so powerful that it can rouse anyone who has at least a spark of desire for Kṛṣṇa consciousness.



As we arrived at the corner of Georgia and Granville Streets, the only devotee on the street was Urukrama, in his wheelchair. I started the *kīrtana*, and after twenty minutes, Vipramukhya Swami and Śrīdhara Swami arrived along with others, and then we were about fifteen to twenty strong, with women and small children. The traffic was noisy, but we were also noisy. When passers-by put their hands over their ears, I could sympathize with them—our *karatālas* were clashing—but it's good that they hear Hare Kṛṣṇa breaking through the *māyā* of the city. Śrīdhara Swami said, "There's no energy like *hari-nāma*."

I saw a man driving his truck while talking excitedly into his CB microphone—he was obviously describing the *hari-nāma*. Mahā-mantra dāsa and Navadvīpa dāsa were poised and appealing, unphased by sardonic expressions or turn-off remarks. They smiled, stood, and spoke. The BTGs were flowing hand to hand. . . .

One man made sure that each of us saw his obscene gesture toward us, but so what? We continued chanting. Another man with a very large, unhappy face shook his head at the sight of us, as if to say, "What a pity! Why is it allowed?" I admit I was affected by the maddening varieties of dresses, faces, human follies, attractive women, old ladies, egoistic male-heros, and old fellows who can't even put their clothes on straight.

Quite a few Chinese people went by with typical oriental impersonalism. For the most part, the Canadians were more conservative than Americans. They were more restrained in their enjoyment of *hari-nāma*, but they also refrained from any violent expression. They seemed a bit like Englishmen. The businessmen were less passionate; they took time to at least look at the Hare

Kṛṣṇas. There were about four or five punk rockers, but even they, despite their wild hairdos, were conservative toward us. They didn't share the attitude, "You are outrageous and so are we!"

The two sailors in white, the four athletes, the motorhome family with mom and dad in front and two kids in back—all reacted among themselves as soon as they saw us, *about Hare Kṛṣṇa*. A young man on a bicycle stopped in front of our chanting and spoke into a walkie-talkie. Then he held the microphone up toward the *kīrtana*, spoke some more into the mike, then held it up again to capture the chanting. Three muscular, clean-cut men strode up to us, laughing and joking with much confidence. They stopped by the *kīrtana* and one of them took a photo of the other two posing in front of the *hari-nāma* group. Just as the picture was snapped they made "V" peace signs. Then they each went their own way, but once they separated, each one looked forlorn and serious.

Ten-year-old Nīleśa took up the task of distributing ten BTGs. I saw him get rejected brusquely, but then he finally gave out a few and came back smiling with determination. "That's four down, six to go," he said. The *mātāṅgs* did well, talking with passers-by who were often pleased to take a BTG.

Today I listened to the complaints of two ex-ISKCON men. Many of the criticisms were incontestable—the record of marriage breakups, the history of unqualified *gurukula* teachers, the leaders and other devotees who think themselves more spiritual than they actually are, the tendency of devotees living in the temple to fear or hate all nondevotees, the devotees' unawareness of their own psychological problems, the

superficiality of relationships among devotees, the tendency to go through religious services in the temple in a mechanical way, the fact that many householders are breaking the principles regarding sex but are too afraid to talk about it with others, etc.

The critics went overboard into generic condemnations. They said that almost all devotees with very few exceptions are guilty of all these wrongs, whereas many persons who are not living so strictly in Kṛṣṇa consciousness are more aware and honest. At one point, one of the critics began to comment in the same way about our founder-ācārya. I asked him to stop. "All right," he said, "but maybe you should hear it." Yes, if I want to destroy the growth of my devotional creeper, maybe I should indulge in hearing criticism of my spiritual master.

When is dialogue with critics helpful, and when is it destructive? They say that doubt is part of the maturing process; you doubt, and then you overcome your doubt, and thus you mature in faith. But faith is also fragile, especially in Kali-yuga. How much doubt can I overcome? We can't be blind to our wrongs, and yet we have to protect ourselves. We have to reform, we have to persevere.

I also feel dissatisfied with aspects of life in ISKCON, such as the superficiality of friendships, but usually I take the lacking as my own fault. The ex-ISKCON critics and their psychiatrists, however, take a different viewpoint. They stress that we should not be burdened by so much guilt. They also imply that the *japa* or the devotional practices are simply "too spiritual." Thus they throw doubt on the whole attempt of a devotee to become free of "material nature." They make it seem as if full surrender is utopian, destructive—and

so better to give it up.

The dialogue over these problems points out how difficult it is to actually come to the transcendental stage. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to forgive us for our faults and assure us. And he would reprimand us for our wrongs. Now in some ways we act as if we are bereft of his strong presence. We have to cry out to Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa to save us and guide us. Even when we become covered with mistakes and shame, we must remain true to the goals he has given us. There will be no let-up to the attacks of *māyā*, but we can't give up. As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in a letter:

This attack of *māyā's* agent is not very uncommon. When Kṛṣṇa Himself was present He was being attacked by *māyā's* agent almost every day during His childhood.... So *māyā's* agents do not let go even of Kṛṣṇa, what to speak of Kṛṣṇa's devotees. They will act in their own way, but as Kṛṣṇa miraculously saved Himself from the hands of all these demons, similarly He will always save His devotees. Therefore, your only business is how to become a pure devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then everything is all right. Please remember this truth always, and do your duty for strongly pushing on this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement....

—March 15 1969

### *Urukrama dāsa, an ISKCON Vancouver Soldier*

Urukrama dāsa was born and raised in Turkey, where his father was a *mullah*. He was a soccer-playing young man, but now his body has become hopeless with multiple sclerosis. The doctors say he has only a few years to live.

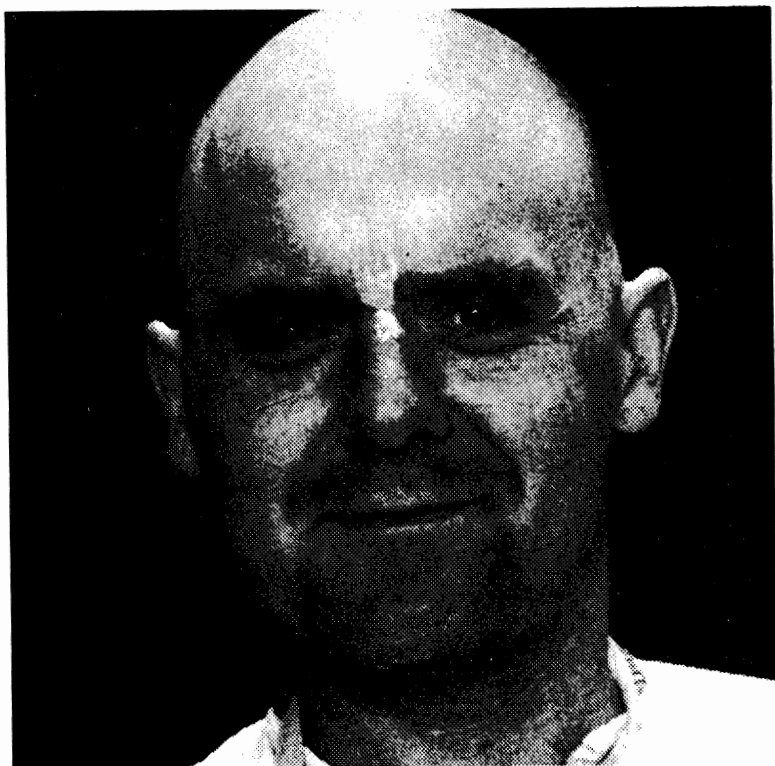
When he first joined the temple, he limped. Then he took to walking with a cane, and finally he became

confined to a wheelchair. A few months ago he entered the hospital, and at that time he was not able to chant his rounds.

Bhakta Patrick jokes with him, "If you don't take these vitamins we'll send you to the psyche ward." Urukrama says that Patrick makes him laugh until he can't stop and that this laughter is extending his life.

In his wheelchair on *hari-nāma*, Urukrama sometimes holds up books in both his hands. His main service now is to hear and chant. He cannot easily read. He speech is slightly muddy.

When Urukrama first joined the temple he was



Urukrama dasa Brahmacārī

well-known as an early morning *japa* chanter. It used to take him twenty minutes to hobble with his cane from the *aśrama* to the temple for *māṅgala-ārati*, and everyone could hear his loud *japa*. For this he earned the nickname, "General." And Yamala-Arjuna dāsa wrote a poem about him:

His shuffling feet, with his walking cane  
 Calling out the holy names,  
 The town-crier for New Gokula,  
 for those who wish to hear.

And when he falls over  
 he takes it as Kṛṣṇa's mercy,  
 laughing all the way till he lands.

Recently, while on one of his regular shopping outings (he still rides the Skytrain and goes out alone), he was returning down the steep hill along Royal Oak Road when his wheelchair overturned. Dyutidhāra Swami had to go collect him, and in the meantime a rescue squad, ambulance, and police car had arrived.

He has been trying to save money in order to go to Vṛndāvana. But now he says that wherever Kṛṣṇa is that is Vṛndāvana.

### *Vancouver Ratha-yātrā*

In one sense, the Ratha-yātrā cart and festival is a very fragile existence. If you were driving past the boulevard, you might easily miss it. Even if you saw the Ratha-yātrā cart, it is only one of many things. For example, there is also a flock of Canadian geese pecking



The Vancouver Rathayatra cart

the earth right near the cart, as well as motor boats racing in white froth, and there's a woman smoking a cigarette and watching the river, and there are trucks, cars, bridges . . . The Ratha-yātrā cart is a fragile existence.

The red and yellow canopy of the cart is clean and freshly painted, and white *camaras* hang from all its edges. Within the cart are the deities of Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā, and Baladeva. And if you choose to concentrate your senses upon Lord Jagannātha, He is very special.

The sound of the *kīrtana* competes with many motors. But if you hear the holy name sympathetically, you can transcend material consciousness. At least we devotees are concentrating on Lord Jagannātha. We intend to follow Him right into the heart of Vancouver.

But we also are distracted. Although the sky is free of clouds, some mental clouds pass over me. I mean, threats of scandals and attacks to ISKCON, which make me think, *This festival is fine, but what will happen in the future?* But isn't there *always* something ominous? Is there ever a time in this world when there is not danger at every step? Better concentrate on the Ratha-yātrā *yajña* and create auspiciousness.

The starting cry, "Jagannātha Svāmī, *ki jaya!*" Many holy Indians pulled the ropes. I watched the faces especially of those onlookers who seemed to be catching sight of Lord Jagannātha for the first time. Some faces were soft and some were tough, but even the tough ones cracked. Dyutidhāra Swami was like a new generation Jayānanda, strong-armed and deeply tanned, moving back and forth between the ropes, eyeing the cart's progress, and assuring the police. As we passed high-rise apartments, a second *kīrtana* shot out from the



buildings—our echo. A man in a white robe stood on his balcony calmly smoking a cigarette and looking down upon us.

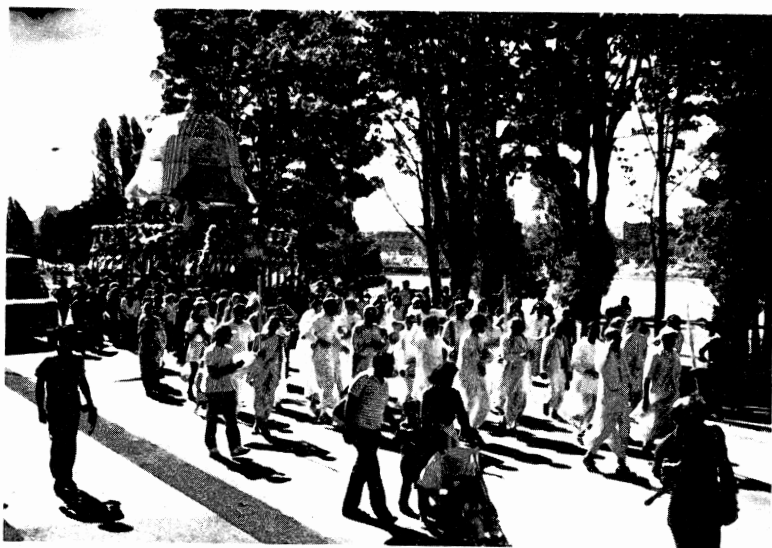
Indradyumna Swami was wildly dancing barefoot, happily holding the *mrdanga* high in the air; Haryaśva was matching Indradyumna's jumps.

When the cart stopped too long, Bhakta Peter, who was steering, shouted "Pull!" Gaṇeśa dāsa, his face covered with perspiration, sang loudly into the megaphone.

From the second floor of the English Bay Café, onlookers waved back to the children who waved from



Indradyumna Swami and Haryasva  
in the midst of *kirtan*.



The festival procession.

the top of the Ratha-yātrā cart. The people had abandoned their café tables and were crowded at the window with binoculars and cameras.

Sea breeze, white gulls, red and white maple leaf banners—these accompanied Lord Jagannātha's procession in between the sea and the buildings. I saw Indradyumna Swami grab the hand of a bearded man, bring him under the ropes, and induce him to run back and forth before the deities.

Then I noticed, "The cloud is gone"—the mental cloud. I was a composite of sea breeze, *cāmara* waving, and forgetfulness of pain. After all, material anxiety is temporary, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is beyond it. Jagannātha Svāmī is the truth. Even the critics watching the Ratha-yātrā were softened.

The big wheels rolled by slowly. People looked up,

squinting at Lord Jagannātha and the children, and they all seemed pleased.

We passed the green bust of David Oppenheimer, a nineteenth-century mayor of Vancouver. Then we entered the shade of big trees of Stanley Park. A little girl riding on the cart had fallen asleep.

Dadhi-hartā asked me if I would like to carry "one of Their Lordships." I carried Lord Jagannātha, one hand under His lotus feet, the other behind His neck. I felt indescribable physical transformations. Then I climbed the stage and sat beside other guest speakers.

The Vancouver crowd seemed to be made up mostly of devotees. At least many seemed to have a previous connection with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They knew the chants, like "*Jaya Baladeva, Jaya Subhadrā,*" or they wore an old Jagannātha T-shirt, or neckbeads, or, at the very least, a knowing, friendly smile toward Lord



Congregational chanting of the holy names.

Jagannātha. After the lectures, I mingled with the crowd. I met many people who have left ISKCON. But today they were all in a mellow mood. Even some of the same critics who had been speaking harshly with me the other day, now expressed their love for Kṛṣṇa. It gave me hope that one day we may have a harmonious congregational family. For us inmates of ISKCON, it's always a shock to see devotees who have left, the ladies now dressed in the latest styles and the men with mustaches, regular pants and shirts. But there's really nothing unusual about such congregational devotees, especially after they overcome their initial bitterness. All this mutual acceptance occurs naturally at a festival when love of Kṛṣṇa comes to the surface.

One teenage boy said, "I really *did* like to chant sometimes in *gurukula*. Especially when I was in Śrīla Prabhupāda's room in Vṛndāvana."

An eighteen-year-old girl: "I realize now that I have so many friends from when I was a devotee. Most people don't have such friends as I do. And they're the greatest people. I've been feeling real close to Kṛṣṇa lately."

# Chapter Thirteen

## WRITING RETREAT

### TRAVEL TO SAN FRANCISCO

#### *Border Name-Calling*

Madhu told me of an exchange they had with the immigration officer when they passed into the U.S. He and Haryaśva were dressed in civilian clothes, and at first did not reveal their religion. When the woman asked for I.D., Haryaśva opened his passport to the photo and joked, "Pretty good-looking, huh?" Madhu passed muster with his Irish passport. The lady asked Madhu whether he had worked in Canada or was seeking work in the U.S. "No." Then Haryaśva jibed, "He doesn't work, he's a Hare Kṛṣṇa." The woman changed her tone, "Hare Kṛṣṇa?" She became serious and asked numerous questions about the contents of the van. Then she closed with, "Hare Kṛṣṇas don't work. You live off other people, don't you?"

When Madhu related the incident to me, he said, "They weren't like that when we went up to Canada—it was prejudice. We're back in America." Of course, it was just a tiny exchange, but I also became worried thinking about ISKCON's reputation and prejudice in the U.S.

When I turned back to the reading of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Prabhupāda reminded me that any chanting

of the holy name is better than silence. I had been thinking the border incident was unfavorable. I considered Haryaśva careless for unnecessarily saying "Hare Kṛṣṇa." But Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja states: "Jagāi and Mādhāi uttered Your holy name by way of blaspheming You. Fortunately, that holy name became the cause of their deliverance" (Cc. *Madhya* 1.195).

It would be better if they praised us as religious monks and said kind words about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, as the Hindu speakers did yesterday at the Vancouver Ratha-yātrā. But *nāmā-bhāsa* is better than no holy name at all. They will say, "Hare Kṛṣṇas are bad people. The Hare Kṛṣṇas don't work. Hare Kṛṣṇa is brainwashing. Hare Kṛṣṇas are fanatics and hypocrites. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa . . .

### *Olympic National Forest: Writing Retreat*

Bhakta Kent told us the boat ride to Bremerton would be a half-hour long. It was actually a full hour. He told us the car ride into the mountain retreat would take forty-five minutes. It took two hours. We drove on, not knowing when it would end, just me and Bhakta Danny in the van, past lakeside cottages, along a winding road. Danny said, "You wrote that Prabhupāda said travel is useless unless it's for preaching. So right now we're traveling without preaching. Just driving around, it's useless." When he said that, I thought, "Uh-oh, that was a low note." But now I think the drive was preaching, because we needed it to come here.

We are high up in a woods-clearing with a great view of thousands of acres of pines. As we unpacked our gear, the motorhome still at a tilt, Madhu said, "Did you see Mount Rainier?" *Mount Rainier?* What was he talk-

ing about? I looked out to the same place I'd looked before, in the sky over the trees, but this time the mountaintop had appeared.

"It's like seeing Kṛṣṇa!" I said.

"We didn't see it before because of the mist."

"It's far away, too."

"The other side of Seattle."

I thought of a poet who once bowed down before the sight of a mountain. Śrīla Prabhupāda also said aborigines bow down to a great mountain, their primitive idea of God. This is an auspicious beginning of the writing retreat—seeing snow-capped Rainier in the sky.

Why not just read and chant? Why a writing retreat in the woods? Because I'm trying to make sense of the rest of the world. I can't just shut it all out. And according to the Vaiṣṇava, the world is not false. It is reality and is meant for the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

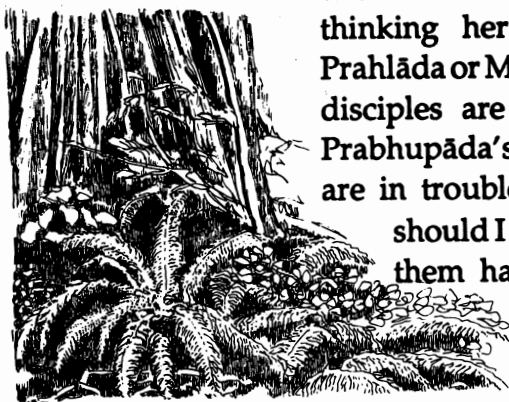
I'm trying to preach. We are here in the mountains for four days because I want to write something Kṛṣṇa conscious besides daily reporting. I am regularly reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, but I'm also trying to see the trees and weeds as part of Kṛṣṇa. I am also facing some tough facts of life by thinking of them in leisure. I also thought that maybe part of me gets lost in the routine, and so by walking on a back trail, I may find myself. It's all intended for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Would I like to hear that other devotees are also going up to the hills, keeping journals, and listening to nature's silence? I suppose not, or they shouldn't stay long. We belong in the cities or in the farm communities, congregational chanting, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class each morning. But a writer has certain needs.

Out here in Olympic Park, we're far from phones and mail, yet I am still with my disciples in many places. "Do you think of us?" they ask. "Do you know what we're doing?"

Danny is thinking of joining Bhaktivedanta Institute. Maybe they'll let him construct a model of the universe. Haryaśva is in Seattle trying to sell paintings. Gaura-Nitāi dāsa is walking up to people in parking lots in New Jersey, just as he did years ago when someone hit him on the head. Nandarāṇī dāsī is baking a cheesecake for the temple president, and when he asks her why, she will admit that she has been thinking of him unkindly. Nārada Ṛṣi dāsa is going to see Indian men in their homes in New York City; he is smiling like a young boy and preaching strongly. Madana-Mohana dāsa in Washington, D. C., is neatly dressed, going to work as a commercial artist, and his wife is cooking for the Deity. Another Madana-Mohana is meditating on the land of Śaraṇāgati—how to avoid electricity? He thinks the time will come soon when the economy will collapse, and there will be no other alternative.

Mohiṇī dāsī is playing with her two-year-old baby and working part-time as a dentist. Lots of mothers are with their babies, maybe each one thinking her child is another Prahāda or Mīrābhāi. How many disciples are regularly reading Prabhupāda's books? How many are in trouble right now? How should I help them? Some of them have eccentric ideas.

One wants to write a book





about how he was exploited as a *brahmacārī*, but when he explained it, I said to him, "I don't approve." Another man can't make up his mind for two days in a row where to serve or with whom. Some have gone far away. It's enough to try and keep up with the willing connections.

My service is to help them connect with Kṛṣṇa. I walk down the path in the forest and chant on my beads so that I can tell them, "Everyone chant, and try to improve; it's very important." I read, and I tell them to read.

### *Whose Nature?*

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*.

While I was in Vancouver, I received a letter from a man in India who likes to read the life of Śrīla Prabhupāda and "the history, and if I may say so, the *romance* of ISKCON." The word "romance" made me think of ISKCON's indomitable spirit, despite its ups and downs. It also made me think that those who are willing to participate in ISKCON are high-spirited knights of faith.

Aside from the exact application of the word romance, there is an undeniable urge for spiritual life in the heart of every human. Even as we struggle to reform our *guru* system and *gurukula* system, or as we try to patch up the public image of ISKCON, we should never forget the sublime call to the higher nature. Spiritual life appeals to the idealism within man and calls him to give up the material world and to live in an entirely different way. As *Bhagavad-gītā* states, "Aside from this material nature, which is destructible, there is another nature which is eternal (*sanātana*)." Every one of us, before we even knew of ISKCON, sometimes felt the urge to quit the oppressive world of material reality to seek for something better. Maybe we thought of going to live as a recluse in the mountains, as expressed victoriously in the poems of hermits:

In solitude by the brushwood gate where no one else  
arrives.

In an empty grove I meet alone with the white clouds.  
—Wang Wei

To think that we could become a North American hermits or Himalayan *yogīs* covered with deerskin was romantic in the fictional sense. But Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us Lord Caitanya's *sankīrtana* by which we

can attain spiritual life to our heart's content, even while remaining in the cities, or married and with a daily job! Spiritual life is as down-to-earth as the everyday *sādhana* of chanting sixteen rounds and avoiding the four pillars of sinful life. And although we become disturbed and disappointed when ISKCON's leaders fall down, or when the media expose and slander us, yet the jewelmine of spiritual truth remains unexhausted and always open for him who seeks freedom from birth and death.

True spiritual life is the greatest adventure. By comparison, external adventures such as sky-diving, or running for political office, or making war seem childish or insane. Satisfied in the pursuit of this goal, even the neophyte is sure he will never go back to his old ways.

Giving up the world and going to the mountains, seeking and finding God in the wilderness, becoming enlightened and free of anxieties—these are the goals of high-spirited human beings. Literatures like the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* encourage us to try for this with all our hearts and never again get stuck in the well of materialistic life. A poem of Mīrābhāi's titled "Why Mira Can't Go Back to Her Old House," states, "Approve me, or disapprove me; I praise the lifter of Govardhana Hill day and night. I take the path that ecstatic human beings have taken for centuries." Mādhavendra Purī also takes this path, even though his friends and relatives think him mad or too proud. And when five-year-old Prahlēda was asked by his demonic father, "What is the best thing that you learn in school?" Prahlēda replied:

O best of the *asuras*, king of the demons, as far as I have learned from my spiritual master, any person who has accepted a temporary body and temporary household life is certainly embarrassed by anxiety because of having fallen in a dark well where there is no water but only suffering. One should give up this position and go to the forest (*vana*). More clearly one should go to *Vṛndāvana* where only Kṛṣṇa consciousness is prevalent, and one should take shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

—*Bhāg.* 7.5.6

There is a bittersweet sting to renunciation, depending on how much attached one has been to the false forms. It's not all celebration and praise. The in-laws of latter day Mādhavendra Purīś may be heavy guys and resort to deprogramming. Latter-day Mīrābāīs are dragged from their houses, and their love for Kṛṣṇa is severely tested. The exasperated devotee thinks, "I'm just a beginner, how can Kṛṣṇa expect me to give up the whole world?" But these obstacles are also part of the romance. How else can we prove to Kṛṣṇa that we want to go back to Godhead, except when we resist the opposition in whatever form it takes?

I'm thankful to be reminded that ISKCON is a romantic adventure. But whether considered as romantic or realistic, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the truth, and we must pursue it. May Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is in our hearts, continue to inspire us so that, at least occasionally, as on a very clear day, we may get full sight of the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. May we be blessed with the yearning to assist Them in the perfection of Their loving affairs. And may we do this by assisting Śrīla Prabhupāda in his mission of worldwide *sankīrtana*.

*When Will I Be a Poet?*

"Here and now" means reading and chanting in this present moment with my own breath, mind, and senses. I do not become a traitor to life when I turn away from other particulars and pay attention to the Absolute Truth as handed down by the *ācāryas*. On my own I may sniff the ground or bark at the sun and moon, but until I hear from the transcendental sources, my everyday mind is useless. So it's not traitorous to look up and hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with rapt attention.

When Mahārāja Parīkṣit knew his end was near, he did not simply gaze at the Ganges water, but he sat there to hear about Lord Viṣṇu. And the sages who gathered did not come for bird-watching. They also wanted to hear from Śukadeva. And why Śuka? Because thoughts and emotions of Kṛṣṇa filled his whole being, and he repeated sweetly what he had already heard from Vyāsa. Certainly birds were singing at that time and plants were growing, and probably some *sūdras* of that neighborhood wandered by, neglecting to listen to Sukadeva. But if I believe that the *sūdras* and the birds and plants were the *real action*—if I turn to them and away from the gathering of sages, then I'm making the same mistake that has led me to the cycle of birth and death.

Therefore, I'll sit and hear when the pure devotee comes my way. I'll enjoy the mountain spot if it allows me to hear better. And as for the fact that most people turn away from *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, that should not make me join them in *māyā*.

Especially now in my precarious state, when I have not realized much Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I must practice

*śravaṇa* while I can. Practice patiently, and then—when nothing else is attractive to me, and when I feel very sorry in His absence—*then* I can go to the page and write. At that time, even if my words are imperfect, they will be helpful for others. And when I am actually a *kavi* for the Lord, then the birds and trees will also come within my praise of Kṛṣṇa.

### *Mountain Talk*

As I read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in view of Mount Rainier, Śrīla Vyāsadeva kindly reveals images of Lord Varāha as mountainlike. At a time when the earth had been plunged into the Garbhodaka ocean, Brahmā deliberated on what to do. He then breathed out from his nostril a small form which soon expanded into the appearance of Lord Varāha. Varāha took the shape of a gigantic boar and flew into the sky where he “roared



Mount Rainier

tumultuously like a great mountain." Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: "It appears that great hills and mountains have their roaring power because they are also living entities. The volume of sound vibrated is in proportion to the size of the material body." The roar of a mountain? Yes, certainly. Mostly they remain silent (at least to most people's hearing) but when Mount St. Helen's exploded a few years ago, that roar was heard for many miles, like the blast of an atomic bomb.

In another verse, Vyāsa describes Varāha as *mahīdhraḥ*, which means a "big mountain" or the "sustainer of the earth." Prabhupāda writes, "In other words, the Lord's body was as big and hard as the Himalayan mountains; otherwise, how is it possible that He kept the entire earth on the support of His white tusks?" So the mountain is power the mortal may meditate on, as when Vyāsadeva says *aga-indra* "great mountain" and *mahīdhraḥ* "big mountain" to give us a visual glimpse of the infinitely solid and blasting loud—and flying!—form of Varāhadeva. And when Lord Viṣṇu dove into the ocean in that form, Vyāsadeva said He was *vajra-kūṭa-āṅga*, "like a great mountain." And Jayadeva says that Varāha's white tusks were like the scars on the moon.

We think or speak of a great mountain in order to glorify Lord Kṛṣṇa's strength and beauty, but ultimately it's a poor comparison. When Kṛṣṇa manifests His personal form, then the pride of the mountain is diminished. This is expertly described by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, when he narrates the beauty of Lord Viṣṇu lying on the Śeṣa-nāga:

The luster of the transcendental body of the Lord  
mocked the beauty of the coral mountain. The coral moun-

tain is very beautifully dressed by the evening sky, but the yellow dress of the Lord mocked its beauty. There is gold in the summit of the mountain, but the Lord's helmet mocked it. The mountains, waterfalls, herbs, etc., with a panorama of flowers, seem like garlands, but the Lord's gigantic body, and His hands and legs, decorated with jewels, pearls, *tulasī* leaves, and flower garlands, mocked the scene of the mountain.

—*Bhāg.* 3.8.25

In his purport to this verse Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

The panoramic beauty of nature, which strikes one with wonder, may be taken as a perverted reflection of the transcendental body of the Lord. One who is therefore attracted by the beauty of the Lord is no longer attracted by the beauty of material nature, although he does not minimize its beauty. In *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.59) it is described that one who is attracted by *param*, "the Supreme" is no longer attracted by anything inferior.

### *Reassessing U.S. Travels*

Summer lasts only three weeks more, but the main ease of it is gone. Our U.S. tour began in spring, and our hopes were high—to see the good in ISKCON and contribute to the enthusiasm of each temple. Has my enthusiasm waned? I'll say it has matured, but it's definitely not a spring flower turned into a puff ball, or a summer vacation now passed.

Our intention was to help the temples, yet in at least one case our party made a serious mistake, and the temple president probably wishes we had never come. That is the exception, but unfortunately it stands out in



people's minds. Justifying our travel is an ongoing meditation, but I shouldn't doubt. Travel is ideal for a *sannyāsī*. The question of where or how to preach, or whether it is better to travel by plane or train or motor-home are details.

Sometimes I lose concentration because of the splayed-out nature of constant movement, or from exhaustion, but that is not the fault of the road miles. I should not stop traveling on a mission to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, to reassess travel mostly means to keep up courage for the right cause. So many things may discourage us no matter what we attempt to do. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to preach in India and wanted to cooperate with his Godbrothers, but often those attempts seemed futile. Yet Prabhupāda never gave up. In one letter he wrote "although it is a hopeless business, still, as you know, I never became hopeless in any case."

My personal lackings are another source of depression. Why didn't I meet more people? Why didn't I go out more on *hari-nāma*? Why didn't we distribute more books? Why didn't I improve my chanting and reading? But maybe there was improvement, imperceptibly, in all those areas. As I wrote in one poem, "You feel much better/ than when you worried at home." At least I'm still in a good position to improve on all aspects of spiritual life.

In other words, *I am grateful*—to travel for Kṛṣṇa, to speak *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* regularly in classes, to write (and to distribute what I write), to receive the *darśana* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. These great opportunities far outweigh the problems.

What's ahead? Will the shelter of ISKCON always remain a fact so that I and others can live and travel from

one temple to the other on pilgrimage? The answer is yes. As long as there are devotees, as long as we do *hari-nāma* and willingly sacrifice for *sankīrtana*, court decisions can't stop us; no power can overcome us. As Brahmā said to Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Accept my humble obeisances until the annihilation of this material world. As long as there is sunshine within this material world, kindly accept my obeisances."

### *Travel into Oregon*

After four writing days in Olympic Park, we hit the road again, 775 miles to Berkeley–San Francisco, the next ISKCON temple. We plan to reach there in three days of regulated travel. The first leg is 330 miles to Grants Pass, Oregon. We are committed to travel, and so we must keep up our Kṛṣṇa consciousness while riding in the van.

We depend on technology. Our party moves with a motorhome as well as a van and small trailer. For writing, first I use pen and paper, then a dictaphone, then electric typing, then mailing the manuscript by jet and courier to the press, where it is composed and prepared—as our pressmen proudly say, "with the most advanced technology on the face of the earth"—(computers and laser printers). It is then printed and distributed with more up-to-date technology.

The use of technology was approved by Śrīla Prabhupāda and by his spiritual master Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. But it is revolutionary according to the conventional ideas of renunciation. It is also easy to misuse the principle of

*yukta-vairāgya*. Everything may be used for the service of Kṛṣṇa, provided nothing is used for one's sense gratification. One has to avoid creating unnecessary burdens or anxieties while earning money in order to meet the demands of the technology. One has to regularly reassess and trim down any unneeded involvement with machines.

Are we attached to our computers and businesses? Should we attempt to do like Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī and sit down chanting by the municipal latrine so no one will bother us? Not if we want to spread the word worldwide. But while using machines, be simple, be satisfied with chanting, and be ready to give it all up if necessary.

Kent is now chanting rapidly aloud as he drives.

"You're not chanting this as your sixteen rounds, are you?"

"No! This is extra."

We left scenic Highway 101 in order to make better time on Interstate 5. As we entered the highway: "Midway Meats, Custom Slaughtering." Then a billboard with a big picture of Uncle Sam: "Politics, the second oldest profession and similar to the first" (Prostitution?).

"There's Mount St. Helens!" said Kent. Forty miles ahead, in sunny mist, we saw the famous mountain with its top blown off.

### *Dictation on I-5*

In one sense it is unnatural to talk to one devotee after another as I do in dictating letters. It's another arrangement of technology. I read what he or she writes

and I respond spontaneously, repeating something relevant I've learned from Śrīla Prabhupāda. It is like an exchange of voices in the sky.

I read Manu dāsa's personal description of the festival at Inish Rath, and then I looked up for a moment and saw the crushed body of a German shepherd on the highway. Which is more real, the sights and sounds of Interstate 5 or the letter message? That which is *sat*, Kṛṣṇa conscious, is the only reality, whether it occurs here on the road or a month ago in North Ireland (as in Manu's letter) or in my spoken reply. Everything which is *asat* is mixed down the drain, destroyed: *āyur harati vai puṁsām . . .*

Manu writes, "I am looking forward to reading about your engagements in America. It seems a very hellish place to try to tell people about Kṛṣṇa. All the deprogramming and antireligious propaganda. Nevertheless, when there are devotees like Haryaśva and Caitanya-Nitāi and others, there seems to be great hope." Aye, and Northern Ireland is also a hellish place, but with devotees like Manu, even Belfast gets relief.

A logging truck went by carrying long, chained-down logs with the bark still on them. Kent said the logs were Douglas firs. Cut down for what? For newspapers, houses . . .

Everything seems wrong and we are all implicated. The *Vedas* don't say that a man shouldn't cut down a tree, but it should be done sanely, according to God's law. Otherwise, even cutting a tree brings serious reactions.

"I've seen many animals killed," said Kent. "But the living entity that puts out the most pitiful sound

when it is killed is a virgin redwood."

"Do you mean it makes a sound other than the cracking of the wood?"

"Yeah, it's like a sigh. The Indians say it cries. And then it cracks, and then when it falls it's like an explosion of dynamite. It's horrible."

I told him what I had read about the deforestation of the planet. China effectively deforested itself by A.D. 1000; India by A.D. 800. The soils of the Mideast were ruined earlier. The forests that once covered the mountains of Yugoslavia were stripped to build the Roman fleet, and those mountains have looked like Utah ever since. The soils of southern Italy and Sicily were also ruined by slave-labor farming under the Roman Empire. And the soils of the Atlantic sea-board in the U.S. were ruined before the American Revolution because of one-crop (tobacco) farming.

"Sounds like man was greedy," said Kent, "from the year One."

And here is what Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote about the logging industry:

Trees should be given protection. During its lifetime, a tree should not be cut for industrial enterprises. In Kali-yuga, trees are indiscriminately and unnecessarily cut for industry, in particular for paper mills that manufacture a profuse quantity of paper for the publication of demoniac propaganda, nonsense literature, huge quantities of newspapers, and many other paper products. This is a sign of a demoniac civilization. The cutting of trees is prohibited unless necessary for the service of Lord Viṣṇu. *Yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra loko 'yām karma-bandhanaḥ*: "Work done as a sacrifice for Lord Viṣṇu has to be performed, otherwise work binds one to this material world." But if the paper mills stop

producing paper, one may argue, how can our ISKCON literature be published? The answer is that the paper mills should manufacture paper only for the publication of ISKCON literature, because ISKCON literature is published for the service of Lord Viṣṇu. This literature clarifies our relationship with Lord Viṣṇu, and therefore the production of ISKCON literature is the performance of *yajña*. . . . The cutting of trees simply to manufacture paper for the publication of unwanted literature is the greatest sinful act.

—*Bhāg.* 7.2.12

### *Entering Oregon*

Big sign of a cute, yellow chicken with a bib on, as if he's ready for dinner. Smoking stacks, factories pouring junk into the Columbia River. I go on complaining about industrialized life, but I also take advantage of it. In fact, I'm a soft creature, used to many comforts provided by industry, such as the smooth roads. Again, reminders: It's our duty to keep pace with the times, but we should be ready to give up the conveniences.

### *More Letters from Devotees*

"Why don't you visit us more often in our temples?" I explain I'm cut loose of any particular zone, yet I am freer to give my best.

From Guyana, a young man who had become "crazy" and inimical to his Godbrothers writes that he's now back in the temple, more enthusiastic than ever, humble and repentant. This proves they can come back. We shouldn't despair in any case.

Some letters explore the delicate question of *śikṣā*- and *dīkṣa*-gurus and the relation of my disciples with Prabhupāda. In this connection, Madhu made an interesting comment yesterday. We were reading the songs

of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and one verse stated:

When will my master, Lokanātha dāsa Gosvāmī, place  
me at the lotus feet of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī?

Narottama wanted to approach the previous  
ācārya, Rūpa Gosvāmī, and so he prayed to his spiritual  
master to help him.

"Sometimes your Godbrothers," said Madhu, "get  
nervous that we disciples are approaching our spiritual  
master and not Śrīla Prabhupāda. But we also have that  
yearning to approach Prabhupāda."

"But you try to do it through your spiritual mas-  
ter?"

"Yes."

In another letter, a wife wrote that her husband is  
having extra-marital relationships, drinking alcohol,  
and going to hell. What should she do? Be sympathetic,  
but don't go to hell out of family duty.

After Eugene, Oregon, the scenery turned more  
natural, but the day was very hot (105 degrees). The sun  
blazed on the van, and I became drained. I counted the  
hours and minutes until we reached our stop. At the  
destination, Grants Pass, the first two campgrounds  
were filled. I lay down in the hot van, an ice pack on my  
head. Travel for the sake of traveling? Forget it.

*Rādhāṣṭamī, Les Clare Campground,  
Grants Pass, Oregon*

Hot weather and the near-end of summer has  
lured the RV crowd out in bigger numbers. The local  
streets are filled with Winnebagos, Pierce Arrows, etc.

We were lucky to find any space in the campgrounds and settled for two spots beside the Rogue River, with no tree shade. The men in our party were unshaven during the last few days, and some had a month's growth of hair on their heads. So last night we all shaved up.

While Madhu and Kent were shaving and cleaning up in the public bathroom, they noticed a middle-aged man with a beard and mustache looking at them.

"Would you like a nice haircut?" Madhu asked, brandishing the electric buzzer.

"No thanks, I think I'm all right," he laughed.

Madhu asked him what he worked at, and he replied that he was a construction agent in Hollywood. He said his name was Randy. He asked Madhu where he was from.

"I was born in London."

"I was in London for a while," said Randy, "before going to 'Nam. I've traveled a lot. What are you doing here?"

"I'm traveling with my spiritual master. We're Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees visiting our temples in North America. I'm getting to see a lot of America, too."

"I bet you are. What kind of reaction do you guys get? I guess you meet some pretty ignorant people, especially in the hick places."

"We meet good and bad."

"Bhakta Kent came out of the toilet. 'Tomorrow is a really special day,' he said. 'We're celebrating the birthday of a very important spiritual personality. We'll be cooking a big feast. I'll save you some.'"

"No thanks, I'm not interested in religion. I'm a Catholic convert from a Baptist background. My two



uncles are preachers. I see through all that crap. They say one thing and do something else. I'm into wine, women, and song."

"I can agree with you," said Madhu, "about saying one thing and doing another. I also met a Baptist woman in Tennessee and she was very narrow-minded about religion. Her definition of God was very confined."

"Sure," said Randy, "there's the same God for all of us. I don't say what He is, but it's not that the Baptists are right or the Catholics are right and everyone else is wrong."

Rādhāṣṭamī on the road means no grand temple worship, but getting up early to chant *japa*. And everyone will cook a preparation for a Rādhāṣṭamī feast.

On Rādhā's day  
some blackberries  
are still red.

The men ate most of the Rādhāṣṭamī feast, but they saved sweet rice for distribution to our neighbors. One group was only about three feet from our trailer. They were two older families, and they spent most of their time seated at a picnic table. When we first arrived, Madhu had offered them *halavā*. They "accepted" it, but with no response at all. I doubt if they ate it. Today when I offered the beer-bellied man a cup of sweet rice, he said, "No thanks, I think we'll let our stomachs settle from our fish dinner."

I asked them where they were from.

"Ojai, California. We're just visiting my brother who lives here."

"We're all vegetarians," said Kent, "and priests traveling and telling people about God. God said He wants us all not to kill."

An older gray-haired man, also with a large belly, said, "We believe everyone does their thing. We do ours and leave everyone alone."

"We have vegetarian restaurants all over the U.S. called Govinda's," said Kent. "We serve food with no animal products."

"There's nothing wrong with fish," said the woman.

"They're mammals," added the man seated beside her.

"Well, take care. We'll be leaving at five in the morning. Good night."

"Good night. And thank you."

Looking through the *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, I wondered about my aloofness from government and social concerns. (What am I doing to stop the forest fires? What about Nicaragua? What about AIDS?) But my desire to avoid *māyā* is what Śrīla Prabhupāda advocated. For example, I read that the American Civil Liberties Union is protesting the appointment of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. They say he is too radical and doesn't respect the U.S. Constitution in regard to civil rights, privacy, and separation of church and state. The ACLU's fear of this man made me think, *If the Supreme Court becomes too radically "conservative" it may mean more difficulties for ISKCON.* But wouldn't Śrīla Prabhupāda take it more philosophically? He would say this is symptomatic of Kali-yuga. And his main response would be to push on strongly

with pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Especially as a *sannyāsi*, I can't become a political activist. Sometimes I'll get dragged into the legal or bureaucratic networks, but I should stay aloof as far as possible. For me, political action is wearing Vaiṣṇava dress and markings, the *sannyāsa* way of life—writing, preaching, studying, chanting, and remaining celibate. These are revolutionary acts, and thus I make my political declaration.



*Travel Day*

We entered California before dawn. Highway 199 goes along the Smith River, which is supposed to be one of the cleanest rivers in the world. Just yesterday, I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda say that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is weak now, but when we grow, we should take part in all-around betterment of society. And so he spoke of all the rivers he had seen in his worldwide travels—"All very, very dirty."

As we entered the redwood groves, Kent was at his tour-guide best, and I was interested to see and hear. Why do so many redwoods fall over? Because they have a shallow root structure. Goloka-Vṛndāvana dāsa seemed uninterested and went on with *japa* in the back of the van.

Kent used to live in this area of California. He said it is not uncommon that avalanches dump cliffs into the valleys and onto the roads, and sometimes there are tidal waves and volcanos. "It's kind of nice," he said. "It humbles people to know that the environment is in control."

The road narrowed as we entered the Redwood National Park. Goloka lay back to take rest, but then he moved up front. "All this scenery is exciting," he said. The road closed in, dark and tight with redwoods. They stood solemn in the dawn, living entities punished to "stand on the bench." Naked. Tolerant. We strained to look out the windows—but we couldn't see the treetops.

The highway went straight into the midst of them. But we knew that this was just a relic from the past, like the buffalo herds. Outside of this one coastal passage, these giants have been wiped out by the loggers. After twenty minutes, when we left the grove, it was a disap-

pointment to see the first sign—"MacDonald's."

"The best grove is still ahead," said Kent. "Just on the other side of Crescent City." I saw a sign at a Crescent City mall: "This town was hit by a tidal wave in 1964." At the Shell gas station, the kids were very curious to see the shaved heads. As I entered the gas-station store, one was saying, "And they have these strange markings on their foreheads—"

I felt like the stranger in the cowboy movie who enters the saloon.

"Here's one of our magazines."

"No, thank you."

"It's about our ranch in Vancouver," I said. "Please take one."

"All right."

Other signs of the tidal wave are found in local names—the Breakers Motel, the Wave Restaurant.

We entered the next grove in a thick fog. They say fog is necessary for the redwoods' growth. On one side was the ocean and beside it the forest. We couldn't see but only heard the sea, and the redwood shapes were enshrouded in mists.

After a while, I began to recognize them. They don't have much vegetation, some scrubby pines, rough barks and cones full of seeds. But *huge mama-tejas*! By comparison, the nearby birch groves looked like match sticks. Douglas firs are also big. The redwoods were so large that only a few fill up a big space of land; competition for room is tight in the forest. In India people would probably worship trees like these and place vermillion at their trunks, or sprinkle milk and circumambulate them with prayers.

As we passed over the Klamath River, we saw

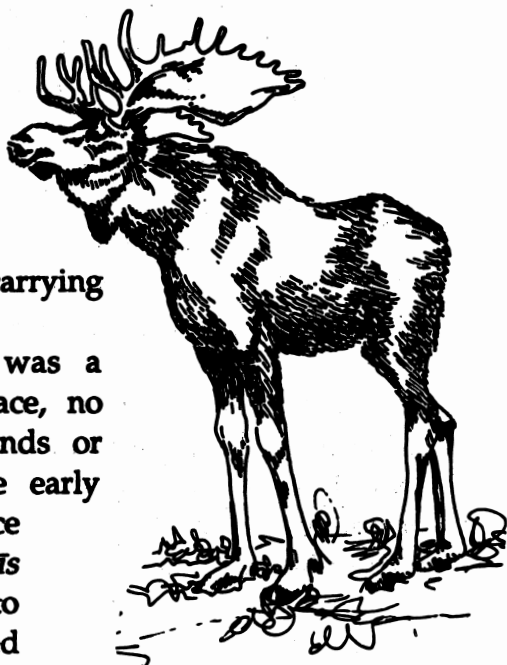
crowds of sportsmen in their rubber boots, wading and fishing for salmon. Kent said that the Indians were further up the river with their *gil* nets. Between the white men and the Indians, almost no salmon make it up this river for spawning.

As we entered the biggest grove, some trunks looked ten and twelve feet wide. Gray, shaggy, vertically grooved barks, like big muscles and ligaments, with moss on their sides. They don't spread out with many angular branches against the sky. Just straight up. While looking into the woodside grove, I thought of the mango grove in Bengal where Prabhupāda stopped on his way to Māyāpur.

And as we left the grove, we saw a Roosevelt elk with mighty antlers.

Exiting at the sign for Ladybird Johnson Grove, we went up a side road into the mountain. Just before the grove we came upon a woodmill with hundreds of stumps and chopped sections of redwood trees. And logging trucks roared loudly out of the mountains, carrying chained-down logs.

Ladybird Grove was a charming, secluded place, no billboards or food stands or music. We were there early enough to enjoy the place alone. The *brahmacārīs* joked as we walked into the woods, but I asked



them to be quiet and just chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. At numbered locations, we read aloud from the tour pamphlet: branches that fall from the tops of the redwood trees were called "widow makers" by the pioneers. The trail pamphlet highlighted eighteen different places within the grove, and the final item was titled, "How do you feel?" It contained this invitation to write:

Try writing down just a few words to express your feelings. For centuries people have written their often intense feelings and thoughts into short poems. Care to try it? The rules are few: the form must be simple and direct . . . This expression of self-awareness in nature is called "haiku."

It is not easy  
to leave this cool, green garden  
for the dusty road.

—Anonymous

Taking the invitation, we wrote our poems.

By SDG:

Looking up  
at silent giants:  
for what misdeeds?

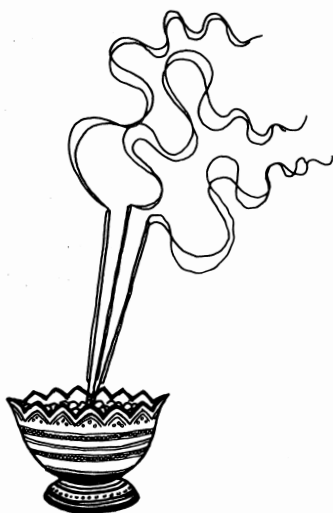
In the redwood grove  
touching the wood  
*tulasī-mālā*.

By Goloka-Vṛndāvana dāsa:

Tall prisons for naughty *jīvas*.  
We came for a walk,  
chanting *japa* along the way.

By Bhakta Kent:

Sleeping giants, fallen brothers,  
to this one's mind desires.  
How long does one remain  
fixed upon this *mama-tejas* pose?





## POEMS FROM THE ROAD

### *Return to 26 Second Avenue*

After a year in Boston,  
I arrived at midnight;  
Brahmānanda opened the door.  
A spot for me on the floor,  
just two feet away from  
Second Avenue's splintered glass.

Brothers whispered  
"Hare Kṛṣṇa";  
I slept four hours  
before the altar steps.  
An odor of incense.

We could not see  
the years ahead,  
but we knew  
*Śrīla Prabhupāda is arriving tomorrow!*

*Accepting a Moment*

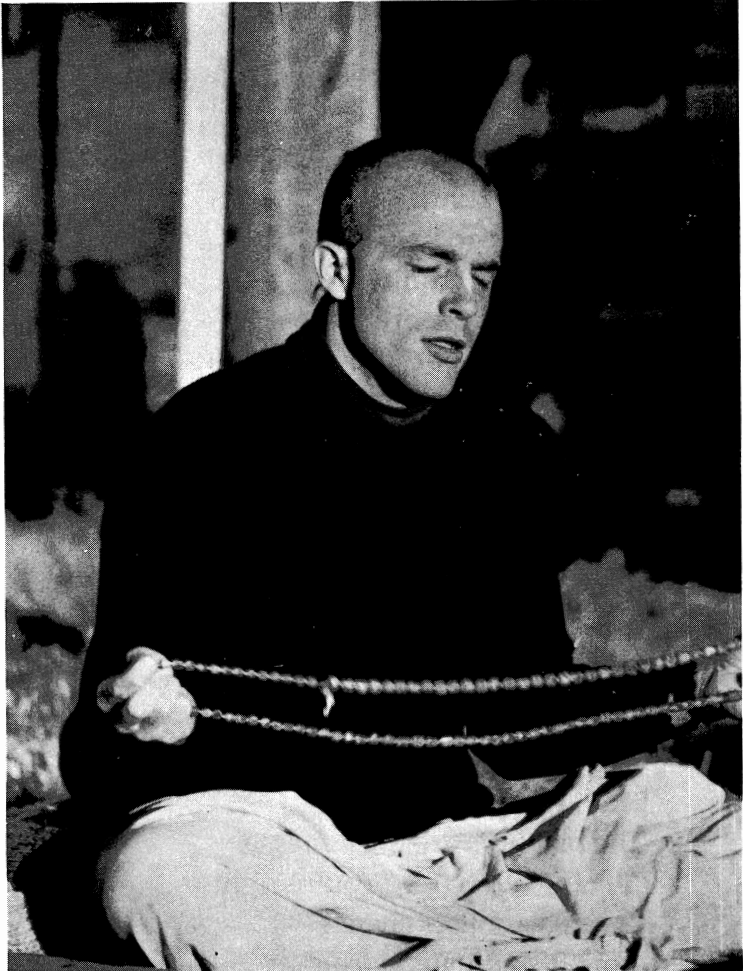
Wood *chowki*, cushion on floor,  
sunlight through Kāmadhuk window,  
sitting for breakfast  
by the side of altar Deities,  
hot cabbage, carrots, potatoes, *capātis*,  
cool morning air,  
and here's Prabhupāda:  
"One who's convinced that nothing  
belongs to me, he's *akiñcana*."

*My Days as Mahābhāgavata*

A typist became a *guru*.  
"Why not?" I thought,  
"the humble shall be exalted."  
But they challenged:  
"How come you try to act  
just like Prabhupāda?  
Are you as good as he?"  
We met in committee  
and wrote a report:  
"*Mahābhāgavata* may be taken  
to mean ourselves.  
That is the sense."

But again we were challenged:  
"How come some of you  
act like you're crazy?"  
We met again,  
kicked out one,  
resumed our perfection.

Then two fell, then three.  
The brothers arose *en masse*,  
"Okay," we said. "You're right.  
Give us another chance."  
Now it's adjusted.  
But sometimes I wonder  
how we could have been so blind.



Jiva Goswami Prabhu focused on *japa*.

*Attentive Chanting*

**Why not:**

**I have tried it enough.**

**There's always something else  
for the mind.**

**Who can keep focused  
just on three names?**

**Impossible.**

**Why:**

**Practice for the end.**

**I want to.**

**I'm no atheist.**

**I have tasted the bliss.**

**It's duty.**

**I will disprove the blasphemers.**

**Please let me love You.**

*Fears*

I am afraid  
someone may kill me  
and take away my manuscripts.

Some *apsarā* might land here  
to ruin my reputation.

Will things turn out  
like it says in *sāstra*?

Afraid and weak,  
I take shelter at His feet.

*Persecution*

When Aurangzeb terrorized  
Vaiṣṇava bodies  
and broke the temples,  
the devotees didn't quit,  
but ran with Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa—  
it must have been intimate,  
carrying Him underground,  
promising to build a temple  
when the politics permitted.

*Even Jaḍa Bharata*

Some devotees are not so sharp,  
but even Jaḍa Bharata  
appeared to be a fool.  
One *bhakta* never heard of Dostoyevsky,  
another didn't know Ollie North.  
But we've all got a jewel,  
a shimmer of pure *bhakti*.  
"It's not my gift," said Prabhupāda,  
"it's your own original nature."



*To Critics*

I've been away from worldly life so long,  
I can't even remember it.  
You could say I'm out of touch  
with reality.  
But I reject your vision,  
you who gamble on the chance  
that worship of Kṛṣṇa  
may not be as important  
as service to man.

I'll keep on speaking  
against the follies,  
praising the renouncers,  
correcting my mistakes.  
Why don't you join us,  
help make a unified,  
pure spiritual movement  
for the benefit of humankind?

*In the Family*

Outsiders poke their noses  
into our family affairs  
with vicious intent,  
but the truth is  
there's much wrong to find.

The politics of who's-in-charge  
are not so bad.  
Even in heaven they fight  
over who gets the seat.  
It proves we're all persons, right?

But marriage breakups,  
lusty perversions,  
have no place in pure *bhakti*.  
We can blame it on our parents  
for spawning us as *varṇa-saṅkaras*.  
Blame it on America;  
its culture's and government's fault,  
the influence of the stars,  
the work of ghosts.  
Don't blame *us*.  
How to purge it?  
Four rules,  
sixteen rounds.  
Get rid of this shame  
or we are Kali's servants,  
and sin is our lord.

*Guru and King*  
*after Han-shan*

In a conquering mood  
I built my empire,  
traveled in grand style  
with my cooks, musicians, ministers,  
carriages, and women.  
My word was incontestable:  
"Do as I say."  
Astrologists said I'd always increase.  
Powerful and youthful,  
I chastised my brothers,  
for not being like me.  
"Who would guess I'd end up  
clasping my knees in the whispering cold?"

## LIVING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

### ENTERING THE DHĀMA

*āre āre kṛṣṇadāsa, nā karaha bhaya  
vṛndāvane yāha,—tānhā sarva labhya haya*

**"O my dear Kṛṣṇadāsa, do not be afraid. Go to Vṛndāvana, for there you will attain all things."**

—Cc. Ādi, 5.195

"I want to go and live in the holy *dhāma*, Vṛndāvana," said my disciple Pūrṇa dāsa. I knew he was having trouble performing his service of selling paraphernalia to raise funds for the temple. I was sympathetic, but why should he think that going to live in India would solve his problems? We had discussed this before, a year ago. At that time, shortly after he had returned from a pilgrimage to Māyāpur, he said that he wanted to go back and live there permanently. I had detected that his feeling was partly tinged with the philosophy of *prākṛta-sahajiyā*, that is, an inclination to take devotional service cheaply, and to think that one can imitate the highest stages, and to live in the mood of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. Pūrṇa dāsa had not been as attracted to going back to our ISKCON temple in

Māyāpur as he was to refrequenting the birthsite of Lord Caitanya, where he had experienced, he said, special feelings of ecstasy.

"You can go to Vṛndāvana at Kārttika time," I said, "or at the time when the devotees go on Lord Caitanya's appearance day."

"No, the only way I'll be strong is to go and live in the holy *dhāma*," said Pūrṇa dāsa. "This is just too much here. I have to go. I have to get purified." He then confessed to me that he had had several sexual fall-downs.

"So maybe going out on sales is too much for you," I conceded. "But if you stay back at the temple, you can get strength by reading and chanting and serving the Deity. Not that you have to just give up your *prabhudatta-deśa*. We need devotees here to help push on these temples."

But he persisted. "It is stated in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja was told, 'Just go to Vṛndāvana and there you will attain all things.' To live in the *dhāma* gives liberation. And even you quoted Prabhupāda as saying that a year of service in the *dhāma* is worth many years in the West."

"Yes, but Kṛṣṇadāsa was personally ordered by Lord Nityānanda. It is also said that you can't buy a ticket to Vṛndāvana. In order to enter the *dhāma* you have to have the blessings of the Vaiṣṇavas. Prabhupāda does not want us to retire, we have to have active service."

"There is lots of service there," said Pūrṇa dāsa. "They need devotees, and there's lots to do. Vṛndāvana is Prabhupāda's home and I don't feel that I will be doing anything wrong by going to the home of the spiritual master of my spiritual master."

"I'm not against you going to Vṛndāvana," I said. "Ultimately, you can do as you like. But you should be careful. Otherwise, you could have difficulty there too. As favorable devotional service is worth more when it's performed in Vṛndāvana, it's also true that offenses are hundreds of times more grievous when done in the *dhāma*."

Pūrṇa dāsa smiled, although I'm not exactly sure why. He asked me to instruct him more about how to approach Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*. He admitted maybe it wasn't the best idea to just take off and live there, yet he was feeling that in America, where sense gratification is so rampant, and where he was feeling so weak, he could not get his strength back. He said his main reason was to get purified, so that he could come back and preach. With the edge taken off our debate, we began to discuss the actual requirement and the best attitude a devotee should have before attempting to enter Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*.

This was a question that many devotees regularly ask themselves. Śrīla Prabhupāda constructed temples in the holy *dhāmas* of Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana so his followers could go there, especially for inspirational visits, and get the special benefits of devotional service performed in the *dhāma*. Sometimes devotees go to India and feel confused by the culture shock, or by the absence of their regular, intense service activities. Or as the case of Pūrṇa dāsa, they somewhat whimsically decide to give up all other service and reside permanently in the *dhāma*. In discussing these issues with Pūrṇa dāsa, I recalled how I had suffered through many approaches and misconceptions on my own pilgrimages to India. I also tried to think of which of my visits had been most beneficial and why.

The best years were when Śrīla Prabhupāda was there in the *dhāma* and devotees gathered to be with him. But even when Prabhupāda first went from America to Vṛndāvana in 1967, mainly to recover his health, he emphasized the need for preaching, whether one was in Vṛndāvana or elsewhere. At that time, he left a few disciples in India with instructions to procure property if possible for building. And to the majority of his followers, who were outside of India, he wrote, "I cannot stop my Western world activities and I have taken leave from you only for six months. . . . Vṛndāvana is an inspiration only, but our real field work is all over the world."

Over the years, as more devotees went to India, and as Prabhupāda spent much time and energy there, it became a tremendous opportunity for full service under Prabhupāda's direct guidance. The austerities were great, but the opportunities for advancement were unlimited. Yet as the movement grew in India, it simultaneously grew in many other countries around the world, and Prabhupāda always conscientiously maintained the interest of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in every town and village of the world. Prabhupāda's assertion, based on scriptural conclusion, was that any Kṛṣṇa conscious temple, with its community of devotees, was transcendental to the country in which it was located. The temple was not really in New York or London, it was in Vaikuṇṭha, the spiritual world. Nevertheless, places of pilgrimage were considered the most sacred. Prabhupāda wanted to invite everyone from all over the world, without discrimination as to caste or creed, to come and cultivate spiritual life in India, especially at the abodes of Lord Caitanya and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

When Prabhupāda instituted an annual pilgrimage for as many devotees as possible, hundreds of his spiritual children flocked to Māyāpur seeking and finding the shelter of the holy places. Most of the devotees who assembled *in response to Śrīla Prabhupāda's call*, preached in areas of the world where the modes of ignorance and passion predominated. Daily they had to mix with materialistic people, and it was inevitable that they would become worn down. The pilgrimage, therefore, was a chance for purification. After about three weeks in the *dhāmas*, Śrīla Prabhupāda expected them to return to their respective *prabhu-datta-deśas* and take up the duties of his worldwide movement. At the end of one Vṛndāvana festival, one of the devotees mentioned that everyone soon would be leaving again for the West. "Yes," said Prabhupāda, "that is our real business—to go and preach."

But how to best benefit from those rare opportunities when we can travel and stay for some time in the holy *dhāmas* of India? The question remains a subject of meditation for every devotee whenever he desires to enter the *dhāmas*. Speaking with my perturbed disciple, I shared with him some memories of times when I had gone to Vṛndāvana for a specific mission of service while writing the biography of Śrīla Prabhupāda. When my attitude was to serve in the *dhāma* and to learn submissively from its residents, then I had gained the most favorable reciprocation with the *dhāma*. One such visit was in 1979 during Kārttika when I went to the *dhāma* with four devotees to do research before writing the biography volume, *A Lifetime in Preparation*.

We flew to Delhi in mid-September. Even while on



the plane I was questioning myself, "What is this 'research'? How do I know Prabhupāda wants me poking after the facts in his life? Is this really important preaching?" But despite the self-criticism, I was fixed in my purpose: to write his biography was important. We were going to Vṛndāvana to interview people who knew Prabhupāda, especially in the years before he came to America. And I would attempt to record and understand impressions of the *dhāma*, so as to give a lifelike description of Prabhupāda there.

We arrived in New Delhi at 1:00 A.M., and our Godbrother Lokanātha Swami was there to embrace us, offer us flower garlands, and invite us to join with him in a big *kīrtana* at the airport. As soon as we were in a taxi, I took my notebook on my lap, ready to record my first impressions. Should I describe how at the first light of dawn we saw pale violet morning glories growing in bushes by the roadside? What about the homeless groups sleeping by the road, a cow lying in the gutter asleep, calves suddenly awakening at the approach of our car, and lorries approaching us head-on with their eerie green and yellow lights blinking and their pictures of Lord Śiva? What about the long queues of trucks waiting for diesel fuel? I realized it was not possible or necessary to record even a millionth of what I was seeing; I had to be selective and remember my purpose. We were going to Vṛndāvana to do a particular service for Śrīla Prabhupāda.

When we arrived at Krishna-Balarām Mandir, we got a grand reception, mostly from the *gurukula* boys who followed us up to our room. I told them that we had come to research Prabhupāda's activities and to write. I requested that they keep me in the corner of the action here, so that I could work in peace.

My first night in Vṛndāvana I had a dream in which Prabhupāda told me that it was right to concentrate exclusively on writing. In Prabhupāda's presence, I articulated a full question about my different obligations and the priority of writing. In the dream, Prabhupāda replied spontaneously, approving the writing intentions. Then I rose early and went outside to chant *japa* while circumambulating the temple. The atmosphere of Krishna-Balarām temple seemed different now that Śrīla Prabhupāda was no longer present in his physical form. Yet I could understand that he was certainly here in his teachings. I also admitted to myself how I was really unable to surrender fully when Prabhupāda was with us. It was a failing I had to live with now, yet I was also living in some hope of making up my failures to him with new service and improvement. At least during this particular visit, I was staking everything on the service of the biography, to praise and establish Prabhupāda's greatness.

In the darkened *kīrtana* hall, Śrīla Prabhupāda sat on his *vyāsāsana* with light above him and bright red curtains surrounding him as he overlooked the *maṅgala-ārati kīrtana* and the Deities of Gaura-Nitāi, Krishna-Balarām, and Rādhā-Śyāmasūndara. As a tiny member of this family, I felt fully sheltered in his home.

But our mission was a very particular one. Although Prabhupada was readily accessible in the magnificence of his ISKCON temple, I had come to try to understand Prabhupada before he went to the West, when there was no Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple. This was the time when it might seem, superficially, that Prabhupāda was a smaller, lesser figure. Of course, he was not actually lesser, yet I had to sense his particular greatness at that time when he was alone in Vṛndāvana

with no followers, only his plans for a worldwide movement, when he was writing and absorbed in Vṛndāvana. These seemed to be the ingredients for a good attitude while in Vṛndāvana: to be happy within the structure of ISKCON, and yet to be intent on a particular service or objective to be carried out while staying in the *dhāma*.

The men working with me, Śeṣa, Kuṇḍalī, and Baladeva, all set out for the *maṭhas* of Vṛndāvana to seek out Godbrothers and old associates of Prabhupāda. Quickly the pieces of the puzzle began to come together as to the details of Prabhupāda's life, exactly how much time he spent residing at the temple at Keśī-ghāṭa, when he moved to Rādhā-Dāmodara temple, the sequence of writing and producing his books, and so on. Our tape recording and transcendental sleuthing went on with the cooperation of devotees and friends who gave suggestions of persons to see and places to visit for more information about Bhaktivedanta Swami.

In addition to interviewing, I went on walks for gathering descriptive details and for trying to understand—in some small way at least—what it was like when Śrīla Prabhupāda walked there. At first I was bewildered at the external aspects of the *dhāma*. On my first early morning walk I was confronted by several large packs of street dogs. I saw one dog jump up on a porch and catch a rat in its jaws. At Sevā-kuñja we were attacked by the sight and smells of open sewers. When I sat down to write something, flies and ants crawled on my cloth and I couldn't think. It would take a while to get adjusted.

The picture of Prabhupāda that began to emerge from our interviews was of a mostly solitary figure,

although very pleasant and saintly, always writing his books and articles and moving to and from Vṛndāvana. Yes, they had heard from him his plan to go to the West, but they could hardly believe it. From what I knew of Prabhupāda's inconceivable greatness, I tried to appreciate his vision to go to the West and distribute books even while he was living peacefully here in Vṛndāvana. I had to see, to some small degree, how he lived here and how the order of his spiritual master was speaking to him day and night. I had to visualize how Prabhupāda moved in different places throughout India, printing his books privately, doing everything alone, and finding very little reception from his countrymen. Although at that time, no one knew whether Prabhupāda's dreams would be successful, now we know that he was being called by a genuine promise and that he succeeded beyond all good expectations, not only in getting permission to leave India and to distribute a few books, but in creating a worldwide movement of dedicated followers of Kṛṣṇa even in the midst of the worst millennium. This kind of meditation on Prabhupāda's early life in Vṛndāvana was beneficial, not only for his biographer, but for any devotee coming to Vṛndāvana. For all followers of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the village of Vṛndāvana is integrally connected with the eternal significance of Vṛndāvana as well as its ancient and medieval history, but Vṛndāvana is also the place of the *līlā* of Prabhupāda's residence there, the place of his meditations and writings as he prepared himself to come West to deliver the world from nescience. If Śrīla Prabhupāda had not lived in Vṛndāvana and aspired to come out with his *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, then there would be no question of our coming later to Vṛndāvana

or being able to seek its real shelter and the shelter of the holy name.

One of the important places to describe and understand was the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple. As I made repeated visits there I grew more accustomed to the sights, sounds, and smells. I was able to control my Westernized mind and senses that tended to dwell on the harsher aspects of life, the poverty and misery. Now I could see more, not only the fighting dogs and filth, but the red flowers blooming high on the trees, the red dawn and sunset, the people as spirit souls, and the Lord in many temples. I could still see the harsh sights, but I didn't dwell on them. In order to describe Vṛndāvana accurately, I could not write like a British colonist trying to expose the "depraved hindoos" or like a naturalist or realist novelist, but as a transcendentalist. Just as an artist portrays a scene and then finds in it an aesthetic essence and so conveys that, so the essence of Vṛndāvana was something mysterious and certainly beyond the merely empirical description of its woes. So I began to see and describe the woes with a softened use of words as I became sympathetic to Vṛndāvana. And I always tried to keep in mind how the real secret of Vṛndāvana, Gokula, was covered by the external, dirty Vṛndāvana, and that the vision of Gokula was also covered by my own impurities and my lack of spiritual vision.

Especially when I was wandering outside the protection of the Krishna-Balarām temple, I had to be careful not to fall into speculation or sahajiyāism. In our interviews also, we had met with persons who invented stories about Prabhupāda, and who made false claims for their own participation in Prabhupāda's going to the

West. Vṛndāvana could be a dangerous place for a naïve seeker. In the name of attempting to enter the *dhāma*, a neophyte could enter into deceptive relationships with bogus persons and ideas, which also abounded in this complicated, inconceivable land. Yet without speculation, I was trying to see Vṛndāvana through Prabhupāda's eyes. There were certain definite facts that we knew of Prabhupāda's views from his own words and writings, and certain facts as to his living situation at each different period of his life in Vṛndāvana. I could safely say, for example, that Prabhupāda chose to come to the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple because he sought the inspiration of working and living in a place inhabited by the great souls, Jīva and Rūpa Gosvāmī. By such perceptions I could see through Prabhupāda's eyes without speculation. And as for the details of the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple, the visual aspect was much as it had been when Prabhupāda was here, or for that matter it was similar to what it was when the six Gosvāmīs resided here. In this way, I tried to trace and present Prabhupāda's presence in Vṛndāvana through the perception of every detail and experience.

Just as a scientist learns more about the subject of his investigation by his close, studied perception, so a devotee, by thoughtful receptivity, can gain a greater appreciation of the *dhāma*. I was especially keen to understand how Prabhupāda wrote in his little room within the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple. This was a safe place, because it was permeated with Prabhupāda's presence and mission. He had written in a letter that in hot weather he used to shut the doors to this little room and run the electric fan. He had said that during the

times of intense Vṛndāvana heat, it required strength of mind. "I was never a lazy man," he had said. I noted that the stones on the floor of Prabhupāda's room were big sandstone squares, the same as those in front of Rūpa Gosvāmī's *samādhī*. The cot in Prabhupāda's room with its wooden legs and rope "mattress" was not the original cot that he used, but I could assume it was something like that. When Prabhupāda was here, were there sometimes squealing children? Did the women approach the Deity with cracked, emotional voices? When he was here were the *āratis* to Dāmodara conducted with clanging bells and the whomping and clashing of *karatālas*? After the *ārati*, did the *pūjārī* call out, "Rādhā-Dāmodara, *ki jaya!* Rūpa Gosvāmī, *ki jaya!* Sanātana Gosvāmī, *ki jaya!* Gaurapremānande, *hari-haribo!*"? As I sat within his room I realized there were many things about Prabhupāda's presence in Vṛndāvana that I could never imagine or understand. At least I could think of him in awe, how he worked here, preparing himself to deliver salvation to all human kind.

Our plan was to stay for twenty days; by the time we were to depart, we had accumulated many good interviews and filled in most of the gaps in the chronology of Prabhupāda's activities during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. We would have to move on to Delhi and Calcutta to get the rest. By now I was also feeling more enlivened. I liked Vṛndāvana more than ever and wanted to walk and see the forests, the water, trees, birds, and the Lord in many temples. I didn't want to leave now, and yet I knew we would have to go. We had to transcribe the tapes and go to a place like Gītā-nāgarī where I would actually compose the drafts of the biography.

On the last day, I felt something like separation from Vṛndāvana. We went on a rickshaw ride, and as I saw the familiar Madana-mohana steeple, I thought, *This is the last time for me.* It occurred to me that if I lived in Vṛndāvana permanently and knew that I could always see the Madana-mohana temple, it would seem to be a place of real shelter. As I walked back to the temple, through the town, passing by the row of *nīma* trees, I wished I knew the names of many different things in Vṛndāvana. I walked with the *gurukula* boys, and being with them also felt like shelter. *We have to leave this world, I thought, so why not do it in Vṛndāvana?* By my new feelings of affection for Vṛndāvana, I thought that I had gained a little insight into what it was for Prabhupāda to leave this peaceful place. At seventy years old, he had to leave Govardhana and Yamunā and Rādhā-Dāmodara, the place where all the Gosvāmīs resided until their last days. Prabhupāda very much risked dying in some strange, faraway place where he might never again see Vṛndāvana. As he wrote onboard the cargo ship *Jaladuta*, "I am feeling separation from Their Lordships, so far from Vṛndāvana." But Prabhupāda went to the West, came back, and now we have the best temple in Vṛndāvana, Krishna-Balarām.

On the morning just before we left Vṛndāvana, I entered Śrīla Prabhupāda's room at the Krishna-Balarām Mandir and made a prayer. "How do you want me to write the book of your sixty-nine years in India?" And I prayed that he would guide me not to make mistakes.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja was advised by Lord Nityānanda, "O my dear Kṛṣṇadāsa, do not be afraid.



Go to Vṛndāvana, for there you will attain all things." When I simply hear this verse I am aroused with the expectation that a great auspiciousness awaits me if I can go soon to Vṛndāvana. But I know I first have to have an authorized purpose; I have to obtain the blessings of the spiritual master and the Vaiṣṇavas, and only then will my journey to Vṛndāvana be successful.

## EXCERPTS FROM RECENT LETTERS

### *Saṅkīrtana*

Your words about *saṅkīrtana* are full of realization, especially when you say: "*Saṅkīrtana* is a real struggle and challenge. It takes all I have got, but I know that when I put everything into it, I will get so much out of it, and when I don't, Kṛṣṇa reminds me, in whatever way it takes, that surrender is the only way." This *saṅkīrtana* austerity of yours will make you very successful in spiritual life. I wish all devotees could engage more in distributing books and get the experiences you describe "like an electric current charging through my body." You are describing the highest taste of preaching.

You describe extremes of up and down while doing *saṅkīrtana*. Try to remain steady and not ride so much with the extreme emotions. You may be neither a pure devotee nor a dog, but just a servant.

### *Book Distribution Techniques*

Regarding the controversy about book distribution, please don't expect me to give a final settlement to this. You say that one can engage in *vaiśya* techniques in selling books, and some say that it should be done more strictly brahminical. On your side, you have some letters by Prabhupāda where he indicated that these kind

of sales techniques could be used. On the other hand, he said nothing dishonest. But our history seems to be that when Prabhupāda said things like "by hook or by crook, distribute the book," some thought "crook" meant that they could do whatever they wanted, as if the end justifies the means. But I don't think he ever intended that. He just meant be very determined and try to sell the book. So I worry whether your emphasis on *vaiśya* techniques might be misused by some devotees to get back onto the old "techniques" which really turn the public off. A devotee like yourself with a lot of experience and expertise may be able to do some of these things, and as you say, the people like it. But when other devotees try, they become very fruitive in applying the techniques and we get back into the old attitude of trying to get as much money as possible for selling a book.

At least on our traveling party we are emphasizing that the devotee should go out and do the *yajña* in a straightforward manner. This, of course, doesn't solve the financial problems. But I think it is better that financial problems be solved in another way, rather than by trying to make sizable amounts of money by selling books on the street.

### *Straight Book Distribution*

As far as doing the needful on book distribution, I think the needful is just to put in your time and sincerely approach people and try to sell the books. The good results will come as a by-product. After all, to be as you say "blissfully engaged, pure and simple" doesn't mean just that you're taking it easy. You're approaching people nicely, as many as possible, in a straightforward

way and depending on Kṛṣṇa for the results. It may be that such kind of approach will bring in less money, but I think it is better.

### *Janma Karma*

Your philosophical question is about the verse *janma karma ca me divyam*. We cannot understand Kṛṣṇa only in a theoretical or beginning way if we want to go back to Godhead. We have to attain *kṛṣṇa-prema*. So "knowing" Kṛṣṇa's appearance and disappearance means being thoroughly attracted to that *janma* and *karma* and having great desire to join Kṛṣṇa in His eternal *līlā*.

### *This Happiness Is Yours Eternally*

I was pleased to hear your happy response to reading Kṛṣṇa conscious books. You say you feel like a child on Christmas morning and you want to jump up and dance around. Actually this is a sign of the advanced symptoms of love of God. We are like persons in darkness who never knew this wonderful news about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, how Kṛṣṇa is so beautiful and how He is our dearest friend, and how we do not have to die, but can serve Him eternally with bliss and knowledge. So naturally the spirit soul becomes enlivened when in contact with this again. Don't think it's just like a Christmas morning that only comes once in a while, or that when you grow up it disappears. This happiness is yours eternally. But because we have been covered by false ego for a long time, we have to work at it steadily.

*Chanting as Service*

It appears that you have learned some essential lessons in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and Kṛṣṇa will not let you forget them. That is, you can understand that the lure of material sense gratification is a temporary thing, and therefore it is illusory. But unfortunately, you don't have so much taste for devotional practices, especially chanting *japa*. This dryness is not unusual. It is described in the *Upadeśāmṛta* by Rūpa Gosvāmī, where he compared it to the bitter taste that a jaundiced patient has even when he tastes sugar candy. But by tasting that sugar candy, which is also the prescribed medicine for jaundice, the person eventually regains the sweet taste. A lack of taste is due to offensive chanting.

Much of this is alleviated if we can chant in the association of devotees on a regular basis. They also may be struggling, but together we chant with faith. And the chanting is part of our humble service, not that we are demanding ecstasy in return. We chant and pray to Kṛṣṇa, "Please engage me in Your service."

*"What Do You Think of Varṇāśrama?"*

You ask me more about what I think of "*varṇāśrama*." Of course, the word *varṇāśrama* is used loosely sometimes, and we don't always know what someone means when he brings up the subject. According to the *Bhāgavatam* verses, *varṇāśrama* is meant for pleasing Kṛṣṇa. If one engages in *varṇāśrama* and doesn't please Kṛṣṇa, then it is all useless. So that has to be kept in mind. In the name of developing propensities for business and family, if one sacrifices pure devotional service, it is the greatest loss.

To help us advance in spiritual life we act out our *varṇa* and *āśrama*. *Varṇāśrama* is not for getting entangled in materialistic ways. If one faces economic realities of life, gets a job, takes the responsibility of marriage, and doesn't get distracted from Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then it is all right. Also, "*varṇāśrama*" doesn't mean that everyone has to engage in business. There will always be room for certain devotees to live in a temple. So there are different applications, and they have to be taken up individually.

### *Perfection at Home*

You have asked about devotional service outside of the traditional setting in the temple. Certainly, this is possible, and as the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement spreads, according to the prediction of Lord Caitanya, people in every town and village will be practicing in their homes. I think you know the way to achieve "perfection at home." You can turn your home into a temple, or at least some part of it, such as a room or an altar. If the other members of your family are agreeable, you can hold *kīrtana* and offer your food to a Deity or picture of Kṛṣṇa. And if you decide to follow the four rules and chant *japa*, then nothing can stop you in your advancement. If you do this, it may cause some awkwardness in your materialistic relationships, but you have to be determined to prosecute spiritual life, even without full support of others. But a devotee should also be friendly to everyone.

Summary Study  
of  
Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's  
ŚRĪ VRAJA-VILĀSA-STAVA

Based on the translation by Kuśakratha dāsa  
by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

(Summary study recommences with text 48)

In three verses, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī praises Lord Kṛṣṇa's flute, which weakens the pride of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Vaiṣṇava poets typically describe Kṛṣṇa's beauty as reducing someone else's pride. For example, "Love of Kṛṣṇa . . . defeats the pride of nectar and diminishes its value" (Cc. *Madhya*, 2.52). Everyone and every beautiful object through the universe becomes diminished and humbled before the supreme power of the all-attractive Lord.

As Kṛṣṇa's flute-playing sweeps through the universe, it conquers everyone who hears. But not everyone



is able hear. Mostly, we hear cacophonies of sounds, and even the best music cannot fulfill all our longings. We may revel in rock or classical music, but even when the particular instrument played is "the flute," it is not Śrī Kṛṣṇa playing. Kṛṣṇa's flute-playing can be heard only by those to whom He grants His special mercy. Whoever hears Śrī Kṛṣṇa's flute becomes an ecstatic lover of His Lordship.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī writes, "The fortunate flute deeply drinks the nectar of Lord Kṛṣṇa's lips day and night. I offer my respectful obeisances to this flute." The flute is a liberated person. If the flute were a dead object, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī would not have bowed down to it, nor would Kṛṣṇa put it so often to His lips. Lord Kṛṣṇa's playing on the flute makes the flute all-attractive, and yet the flute itself is singled out for praise. One *gopī* told her friend, "My dear friend, we cannot even think of His bamboo flute—what sort of pious activities did it execute so that it is now enjoying the nectar of His lips?" And another *gopī* asked, "How is it possible that the flute, which is nothing but a bamboo rod, is always engaged in enjoying the nectar from Kṛṣṇa's lips? Because the flute is engaged in the service of the Supreme Lord, the mother and father of the flute must be happy."

Indeed a whole chapter in the *Kṛṣṇa* book has been titled "The *Gopīs* Attracted by the Flute."

Love for the flute-player is provoked not only in the hearts of the *gopīs*, His most celebrated lovers, but in all living entities. Another *gopī* said, "My dear friends, the cows are also charmed as soon as they hear the transcendental sound of the flute of Kṛṣṇa. It sounds to them like the pouring of nectar, and they immediately



spread their long ears just to catch the liquid nectar of the flute. As for the calves, they are seen with the nipples of their mothers pressed in their mouths, but they cannot suck the milk. They remain struck with devotion, and tears glide down their eyes, illustrating vividly how they are embracing Kṛṣṇa heart to heart."

And a younger *gopī* told her mother, "My dear mother, the birds, who are all looking at Kṛṣṇa playing on His flute, are sitting very attentively on the branches and twigs of different trees. From their features it appears that they have forgotten everything and are engaged only in hearing Kṛṣṇa's flute. This proves that they are not ordinary birds. They are great sages and devotees, and just to hear Kṛṣṇa's flute they have appeared in Vṛndāvana forest as birds."

When Rādhārāṇī becomes inimical in jealous anger, Kṛṣṇa sometimes appears unable to pacify Her either by His *gopī* messengers, instructions spoken by His cowherd friends, and even by falling at Her feet and begging Her to forgive Him. At such times, "only Lord Kṛṣṇa's flute, disdaining all previous useless attempts, was able to very easily chase away that jealous anger. Let us glorify Lord Kṛṣṇa's exalted and powerful friend, His flute."

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