

GENTLE POWER

GENTLE POWER

COLLECTED POEMS,
1995-1996

SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

GN PRESS, INC.

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book are invited to correspond with our secretary:

GN Press, Inc.
R.D. 1, Box 832
Port Royal, PA 17082

© 1996 GN Press, Inc.
All Rights Reserved
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 0-911233-67-9

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

Library of Congress Cataloging—in—Publication Data

Gosvāmī, Satsvarūpa Dāsa

Gentle Power/ Collected Poems, 1995–1996 / Satsvarūpa Dāsa Goswami.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-911233-67-9

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

BL1285.84.G662 1996

294.5'512—dc20

96-22457

CIP

Linocuts by Guru-sevā-devī dāsī

CONTENTS

1. Entering Vṛndāvana	1
2. Europe 1994–1995	
An Excuse For A Poem	37
<i>Japa-Vrata</i>	38
Orleans, Just Off The Highway	40
Fair Morning	42
Home Base	44
Preparing The Seminar	45
I'd Like To See Your Prose And Poems	46
Prayer To Lord Kṛṣṇa	48
Black Mole Dead	50
Gentle Power	51
For The Poets	53
<i>Brahma-muhūrta</i>	55
A Solace For My <i>Japa</i>	56
Thinking Of Writing Stories	58
Where Are You Now?	59
Go That Way	60
Memories And Living Now	62
Selfish	63
A Poem At Night	65
Chanting With Dina-dayārdhra	68
Goodnight #1	69
Wonderful Cues	71
Missing: Falling Short	73
To That Gladness	75
The Dearest	76

Just Something Simple	78
Lord Kṛṣṇa Is Speaking And I Want Spirit	79
Goodnight #2	80
Walking With Śrīdāmā	82
I Call Them Writing Sessions	84
The Sheep That Died	86
<i>Japa</i> Walk	88
Hearing From the Scribe	90
Reading And Dreams	92
Poems For Prabhupāda	94
Only This	97
Name-calling The Grouchy Man	98
Death Talk	99
Reasons	101
Rest Break	103
Replay	104
Someday I May Get Down	105
Outpouring	106

3. Kārttika Lights: Remembering Vṛndāvana While On The Road In Spain

107

ENTERING VṚNDĀVANA

1

A disciple wrote of me,
“Eyes of a frightened deer,”
to which I add
teeth from a dentist’s lab,
heart of a milking stone
underneath the spleen,
ātmā bekownst to him
is pure spirit soul and
arrives in Vṛndāvana fog
this last day of '95.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, deliver me all year.
You rule me and all of us.
I pay my obeisances in
cold dirt to you and
Vṛndāvana and your
followers blessed.



2

Three typewriters kept in
a trunk in Vṛndāvana for two years— what
do you think happened to them?
I've been away too long.
Believe, believe, he intones
in prose. He'll write a
little longer. I promise even if
the electricity goes off we will
borrow a Zen generator,
a Catholic Mass
and pray.
“Water our couch in tears,”
said Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī.
Sincere suppliants, Kṛṣṇa will have
mercy on us and free us
from the hankering of senses and mind.

Prasanna-manaso bhagavad-bhakti-yogataḥ.
O crows and parrots and
pigeons of *bhauma* Vṛndāvana,
this too-stuffed-with-possessions
so-called *sādhu* yearns for
being
for being what
he wants to be.

3

There was no water in the tap,
then a trickle—enough to
cup in my hands and splash my face.
Imagined I was at Yamunā-side
bathing in winter sunlight,
having walked there—
a long way—from this room
I rarely leave.

The parrots screech in the
distance and the day nears
noon. I have finished off a
packet of letters and I'm
free, but what can I say?
My brain is stuffed,
crippled. Now a selfish
old boy can't cry.

Answered so many letters
that they swarm inside my head.
I am tired
and my answers were tired: "I'm
in Vṛndāvana with disciples and
I'll be teaching a seminar on
'Prabhupāda Appreciation.' Hope
this meets you in good health."

4

Vṛndāvana realism and
surrealism. 5 minutes to 11.
Tired eyes of the Dubliners
who took three days to get here,
“Starting with chopping the ice so our
rowboat could cross from Inis
Rath to the mainland.” They arrived,
twenty-seven of them, including children,
who interrupt the guru’s meeting.
Mothers rush them out
while he says, “Lord Caitanya is
most liberal and merciful.”
But not to noisy children
who talk stupidly in the
small room filled with thirty adults?
Take them out, take them
out into the hall whining so
we can discuss philosophy and
be serious about *brahmacāri* chanting.

After devotees left the room last night I
tried to sleep in bed under covers and
thought, “Forty people have been breathing and
heart-beating in this small room with
the windows all closed. Is their
karma or psychic sense still
present disturbing me?”
I longed for an island
of automatic prose,
a surreal doze.

In Vṛndāvana, *bhajan*s are
broadcast. A *sādhu* sits
with his only possessions—is he
rolling a cigarette? I watch him from the
Guesthouse fifth floor screened
porch in my mohair sweater,
peeping at him critically.
Is he a Māyāvādī? Am I
a farcical materialist?
Are you, dear reader, going to judge either of us?

5

I wrote about Vṛndāvana in the other notebook. It's not for a guy in battery-heated socks who stays in his room and draw pictures of the gone world.

I see in my head packages of *sādhus*, toads, squirrels, angels, hogs, red spot on forehead of Gujaratis, Swami Nārāyaṇa followers. Their *mandira* is better than ours, but we have a better philosophy. Allen Ginsberg can't understand us. George Harrison understands a little better, met Prabhupāda and liked him, drew the affection of the master. He's rare for that. Vṛndāvana is escaping me. I've been here three or four days. Or is the point being a servant, tongue controlled, mind in harness, and chanting?

6

In Vṛndāvana the
bell is ringing in our Mandir
and someone's singing outside
our wall. Put it together.

I can't.

Lord, I just go along
this way until death?

7

After *maṅgala-ārati* he called me over and gave me a leaf-covered leaf-plate: “Prabhupāda’s *mahā-prasādam*.” I uncovered it and saw big milk sweets, gave them to Bhāgavata Purāṇa dāsa who chants *kīrtana* from 1 to 4:30 A.M. Rādhā-Śyāma in warm violet shawls.

I depart from a photographer’s realism to tell you I went down the mental chute and forgot where I was, couldn’t pay attention, got beyond self . . .

Fat lady all wrapped in many *cādars* and sweatshirts. No *tulasī* in the pot. Hog on street, fluorescent tube—I see them all as I look both ways down Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg at this hour. The guards wrapped in scarves sit upright asleep. No rickshaw.

8

Vṛndāvana is that lady
singing Rādhe Rādhe Rādhe
Rādhe Raad-hey.

And someone hammering,
me on my feet.

Vṛndāvana is not me. I'm not even
a speck of touchstone sand here.

I'm grit from the West
in battery-warmed socks.

But I'm grateful to be here.



9

Vṛndāvana is beyond me. I
ate apples tonight at the Māyāpur-
Vṛndāvana Trust building where
I was sitting with my disciples.
Then I saw the full moon and quoted
Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura,
“O moon of Gokula.”

A disciple daughter gave me
a reticule containing last flowers
from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s body when he
rode the palanquin on November 15, 1977, and
a piece of cloth that was tied to
it. I thought, “Why this?”
But the point is that that was the last we would
have of him and he is the most
important spiritual person.
He’s what we needed then and need now.
Because of him I’m able
to be warm and witty
with my own disciples, and strong
and precious and eat apples.

10

In Vṛndāvana, Kali-yuga
doesn't enter.

Man Singh offered Rūpa Gosvāmī
money, but Rūpa was renounced:

“If you like, you can construct
one nice temple for Govindajī.”

What looks to us like *māyā*
is the sty in our eye.

In Vṛndāvana Kali cannot enter.

Kṛṣṇa's *lilā* is always going on
in Vṛndāvana, seen in the core of
the hearts by those with
love-anointed eyes.

Who can know it from the
academic viewpoint or even
from a beginner's *vaidhi*?

Be patient and work hard
under the spiritual master's order.

One day, one life,
many years from now,
the crown glory of humble
love may enter our way
if we're lucky.

In Vṛndāvana I sing
a beggar's tune.



11

Vṛndāvana is going on out there
and I'm missing the *parikrama* and
harināma and lunch in
institution and faxes and celebration:

“Rejoice, rejoice
finally it's here,
the Centennial year.”

They stayed up until midnight in many temples
and all night in some on New Year's Eve.

I'm in Vṛndāvana. I was up
too in quiet solitude
celebrating
Śrīla Prabhupāda in my life.

In Vṛndāvana if you throw paper
in the trash pail, they use it
to make paper bags. If you
walk out alone they may
attack you for your money,
the *guṇḍas*. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to
save the *mlecchas*.

I will praise him by telling
stories—how he was kind to
me in '74 when I came here
as his servant before the temple
was even open.

12

In Vṛndāvana, nightly meetings
with my disciples,
warm-cold room,
japa-kathā and
my fatherly role,
their love—
is it false? No, it's
protected by
our Guru Mahārāja.

13

I

In Vṛndāvana the electric heater
keeps me warm.

My *tapasya*

is to endure the social scene and
meet with Godbrothers and
perform in the seminar and
answer letters from disciples,
who have intricate lives.

I study these in their handwriting
and make solid replies.

My *tapasya* is minimum—
to chant although dry.

Oh I wish I could call out
to Gaurāṅga and Nāma Prabhu:

“Please deliver me from the
clutches of this world.

Please place me in real Vṛndāvana.”

II

Hari Śauri told how Prabhupāda ordered a
“sentimental devotee” to clean up
some dirt and the fellow replied,

“But Śrīla Prabhupāda, this is the dust
of Vṛndāvana.” Śrīla Prabhupāda said (angrily?
loudly?—as Hari Śauri tells),
“You see it as Vṛndāvana dust, but
I see it as dirt!”

III

I’m chanting before votive candles
on my altar each morning.
It *is* nice. O Kṛṣṇa, although I
am shackled in bad, long
habits of inattention, I beg
You to give me mercy to
chant Your sweet
holy names.

IV

Preserve us Lord,
mittened hands,
sādhu’s naked *tapasya*
for reaching beyond agony
to bliss.
You can do it,
spirit soul, ignore the
flesh—get past bones
to sweet Lord playing,
to Rādhā handing Kṛṣṇa a flower.

Her love warms all
souls who know Her
service, they say.
O Kṛṣṇa, I saw You.
O Rādhā, were You warm enough?
O devotees in the dark,
did you show up out of
sincere desire or
just to make some points?
As for me,
in Vṛndāvana I am—
and cannot impress it enough—
I am here
wanting to know the truth
of my being, but
there is so little time.

14

In Vṛndāvana I laid back and heard, on prompting, the happy and friendly sounds of crows, pigeons, wheeling birds, parrots, peacocks, people who break coal, temple bells, *bhajanas*. Yes, friendly and happy, no need to imagine a place. This place itself is secure for one who listens and thinks, I'm not in the city but Vṛndāvana town, where devotees live and even the watchmen chant "Hare Kṛṣṇa" as they pass you in the dark.

In Vṛndāvana the mystery unfolds for rich and poor—provided one seeks it in righteous, pious chanting of Kṛṣṇa's holy names. This blind pilot adds his voice to the voices and pens of the wise and devoted to affirm Vṛndāvana-dhāma as the home and shelter of the soul—although I don't know it.

Here sinners who die
take a next birth as hogs,
dogs, monkeys in the *dhāma*
for one life of punishment
before going back home.

In Vṛndāvana maybe I'll plan
my life opus—literary.
Maybe Kṛṣṇa will give me an
idea, not just a green light,
“Go ahead and do your nonsense.”
I'm so much into this
personal writing, what else could
I listen to? Someone competent is
doing *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*.
Let me write my life story or
something wild—God's rev-
elation in daily life. I
don't know.
Maybe it will come. Baladeva and
I doing trance work to tap
my brain and heart—we are
making a list of topics.
I asked him to knock
on my door at 1 A.M.
A list of topics with energy and
interest and then a structure to
put them in . . .

In Vṛndāvana, take rest early
in the chill, get under
thick Indian quilts.
O Kṛṣṇa, I am with You,
in touch with You
whether I know it or not.
This friendly happy place
where birds chirp and where
although it may be noisy with *bhajan*s
you don't feel the threat of
break-in. The people are Kṛṣṇa-centered,
Rādhā-centered.
Jaya Rādhē Rādhē Rādhē
Rādhē Govinda.

15

In Vṛndāvana
they say you have to get out
from the ISKCON campus and
go into the far bushes of
Vraja to really know Vṛndāvana
even a little.

But I'm not leaving my
room #42, Guesthouse.
Confined by headaches.
Here I see Prabhupāda's pink scarf
wrapped over his chest, and
under that, his heavy brown *cādar*,
a saffron *cādar* under that.
He looks fine and handsome.

In Vṛndāvana the bell rings
for *maṅgala-ārati*.
I'm up here saving myself
for the afternoon seminar
and planning, praying, hoping
to get the theme and working title
of a next book
before I leave.

16

In Vṛndāvana I dreamt
Dwight D. Eisenhower
was furious at my friend.
Ike had never been so angry in his life!
I woke and thought, “What kind of dream is this
to be having in the holy land?”

17

Vṛndāvana is closing in on me.
I mean, I'm missing the essence,
yet my time is running out.
We all make a date to come
back here when we die, but
we may not be so lucky.
This visit may be our death
visit and there will be no other later.
It's rushing by, but still I make
plans to leave early.

A brother who lives here writes
to me—he's an American-but-
Indianized *sādhu* and
speaks of himself as “we” instead
of “I” and has other Hindi-isms in his
speech and manner. He's been sticking to
the dust of Vṛndāvana for years and
what do I know of the *bhāva*
that I smirk at?
He prays to the lotus feet of Rādhārāṇī,
he says. Why should I doubt it?
I pray to whom? Natalie Goldberg?
No, don't bash me either—I'm
a Western-traveling *sannyāsī* of ISKCON.

Vṛndāvana is passing me by. Is she
rejecting me? I have limited health
and can't go out into the lanes or
ride an old bus to Govardhana and
walk around there. It's too cold,
too hot, too hard. Too
Indian. I . . . I . . .

Vṛndāvana is big, vast, eternal,
but my mind is small and
occupied with mortal things.
Vṛndāvana is *madhuraṇi-madhuraṇi*,
honey for the saints and
sādhus—pure and simple, deep
Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *bhāva*.

In Vṛndāvana they follow *aṣṭa-kaliya*
meditation where you remember what Rādhā
and Kṛṣṇa are doing throughout twenty-four hours—
but I think of when to do my *āsanas*,
when to drink juice, when to pass stool,
when to lecture, and when to write.

The lecture room is austere.
“Harsh,” I said, but a lady
corrected me and said, “It’s Vṛndāvana.
It’s nice with the curtains on the
bare walls, students sitting on
the old rug on a cold floor and
no furniture.” Stark, sunlight
filtering in, electric power failures—
but we’re all in Vṛndāvana
hearing of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s days in NYC
1966.
In Vṛndāvana.
Wish you were here.

18

Vṛndāvana is Western devotees in
padded coats and Indian devotees almost naked outdoors,
bathing under the temple faucet.
Dark, dark, the Samādhi Mandir
glistening white. Rādhā-
Śyāmasundara giving Their mercy
even to me struck dumb by
self-absorption and distractions.
I see only statues and
reflections of my mind and cold,
but gratitude too.
“I pray to be grateful for all They have
given me,” I told one man,
and then realized I know nothing
of prayer. Cold hands,
yoga *āsanas*, bizarre dreams under
the Indian quilt, then happy to awaken
and discover I’m in Vṛndāvana
a little longer.

19

In Vṛndāvana my Prabhupāda *mūrti*
wears a garland of yellow marigolds
with one red rose.

I bathe him in warm Yamunā water
and then he sits waiting in the mild sunlight
around noon.

I pray to be able to write
good books.

Vṛndāvana is a special realm;
anyone sensitive can feel it.

“Come to Vṛndāvana,” Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote,
“and you will immediately feel Kṛṣṇa conscious.”

I am not this body,
I am not this mind.
Still, I can't help
noting the twinge behind my eye,
the uneasy stomach,
the plague of those who would
talk *prajalpa*.

Giving class in the afternoon
will help, being present
to play the tape excerpts, and
to remember Swamiji.

20

Vṛndāvana is the place where
I beg for extra mercy,
although part of me says cut
back and just do what you
can. Don't ask for an opus,
just write one book at a
time. "Beggar,"

I say

I'm a beggar, but not
blind or crippled and
sitting by the roadside in
my British scarf and
longjohns. Not that kind of beggar
but a beggar for sure.

I have no niche in Vraja,
yet still I ask, "Please let me
write or
whatever
You want."



21

Vṛndāvana is calling me and I
respond with a prayer for a service
I can take with me when I leave. May it be
Vṛndāvana-centered, a Vṛndāvana
series of books to write.
May I be faithful to Vṛndāvana
Kṛṣṇa wherever I go.
I've got a children's
“Dreamland” series,
picture books with narration
from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Tenth Canto.
I use it for collages alongside my
stick-figure children and *bhaktas*
and parrots. May I be faithful
to Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma.

O Lord, Rādhā-kuṇḍa is in Vṛndāvana
and is cold in January.
Sādhus still walk around
Govardhana—pilgrims in eternal
Vraja. If I don't go out
there on this visit, it may be
I'm not ready. Please guide me.
I want to be a good devotee.
I want to write, write in my
last years, a book
I will love to do and to share
with others.

In Vṛndāvana

I'm happy to stay in my room

“always something reading and writing,
something reading and writing.”

I'm too fragile to go out—catch colds and get
headaches.

I can stay here all the time and
answer letters, plan new books—
no end of things to do.

This is Vṛndāvana too.

Its blessings come through the walls.

EUROPE
1994-1995

AN EXCUSE FOR A POEM

I've got an excuse.
I had a dream and rushes of excitement
like creeks pouring downhill
strong flowing, a dream
of writing and publishing Kṛṣṇa conscious
literature. Where does it come from?
I know it comes from God,
Kṛṣṇa, and the only conduit
for me of His mercy,
Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The morning is cold and sparkling.
The sun will come up over those mountains, but
not yet. Finished reading Dhruva's prayers,
dictated a letter about an exciting new plan.
Am I kidding myself to think my writing sessions
contain an inner form? Can I
see Kṛṣṇa's symmetry even there?

Alone, brilliant theater of the universe,
sky out and in my lungs,
I walk with a cane to sink into the earth.
It is nice to come home between
high hedges, and to find this excuse
for a poem.

J A P A - V R A T A

Chanting, chanting, my friends
chanting in this house. One sits on a pillow
on the cold floor chanting loudly, the
other paces, chanting, before last embers.
I go outside in the small yard
to chant. Against the hedges,
I peer through them, then turn and
walk to the white wall,
and turn and chant mechanical mantras.
And my mind! I'll get there yet
by His grace.

I wish I could get beneath the
veneer of "Hare Kṛṣṇa" with
its cultish or institutional buzz word
connotations. But even unappreciated,
misunderstood, "Hare Kṛṣṇa" is absolute.
In journalists' usage it stands out
as a diamond, even in an essay
on fashion where a male
model wore a skirt and shaved his head
and they said, "Mr. Greer looked
like a Hare Kṛṣṇa monk."

My daydreams slip through my hands like mercury. I wish I were a stalwart Vaiṣṇava in the upper stages of *bhakti*, budding toward *bhāva*, strong and sturdy, an upright teacher of *paramparā*, completely aloof from sex and honor, always preaching, not thinking of myself. Śrī Kṛṣṇa would come to me in dreams and speak and I would feel compassion for fallen souls and do whatever He wants. If I met myself and gave advice, I'd say to love and go on serving, chanting better.

ORLEANS, JUST OFF THE HIGHWAY

I am in France just off the highway
writing this declaration,
this poem, this note—
be a man, brave,
true, gentle, and modest.
What do I mean? Start off in the
direction given by Prabhupāda.
Read his books carefully and
when you're tired and can't pay attention,
do something else that befits his follower.
I won't berate myself. I might as well
do the best I can on this path
I have chosen, or which has been given
to me. I am a writer. I want
to be alone. This aloneness has sought
me out. Even in Vṛndāvana
I wanted to go alone.
Now I'm alone in my van
with my friend. Kṛṣṇa has given
me this solitude. Will I take it
and use it for Hṛṣīkeśa?

Am I nervous because there are no
night watchmen, no big walls, no large
community to protect me? I must be on
guard against *māyā* and I pray to Kṛṣṇa for
protection.

When I am alone to write,
I want to be free and relaxed and
personal—I've sought solitude for this—
but I want to preach and speak in
paramparā. I have to sort this out:
how to write, what to say.

Make it student's notes on *Bhāgavatam*?
Allow "anything" in? Well, of course
not *anything*, but you know what
I mean.

I am in France, just off the highway, writing this
alone, to Kṛṣṇa. I am nervous. I have no
shelter but You. Please give me Your shelter
and entrance into Your name and
my spiritual master's purports.
The rest will follow naturally.

FAIR MORNING

Happy. Tired. Back from the walk.
Started collecting rocks. The first one
was red, redder than a Govardhana *silā* but
I put it back and thought, “A Vaiṣṇava can’t
collect rocks because he worships *silās*.” Later
a brown-white-gray mottled and fractured stone
caught my attention and I decided to keep it
and remember Kṛṣṇa.

The second one I chose—or did it choose me?—
out of thousands strewn on the beach as I
walked looking at rocks instead of sky where
the jet trails and blue converge
on the earth (I forget who I am as I
drink in fresh air, my eyes clear,
tired but happy) was a
white pebble with holes in it like
a pierced earlobe.

On the beach this fair morning I
also read aloud from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and
practiced like a forum orator.

“This is the way Prabhupāda engages us,”
I said. “We can *know* that Kṛṣṇa is helping us
to come to Him.” I caught my
breath and drove my points
home excitedly. A devotee can’t know
how much he is benefited by the Lord.

The more he serves, the more the Lord
encourages him. I read it and felt good.
One of these days I could make a
quantum leap. One
fair morning, even with
cold fingers, sitting on a
pebble-piled beach.

HOME BASE

Madhu suggested we get a
little house in the country, a home base.
Newlyweds think like that. They walk past
a fresh running stream and say yes, we shall build
a little home like Yeats' house "of wattles made."
It's illusion because time steals all
time and we're left with no life.



PREPARING THE SEMINAR

Pink lengthwise strips of clouds.
A little rain on me.
My voice says, "Listen, Kṛṣṇa is really the
center of existence and of your life."
I get a new idea for a seminar and record
it into the dictaphone. Two machines, one
in each pocket, a walking stick,
a bead bag, a rolled-up umbrella,
and my book bag—more than I can
handle all at once. My ankle aches.

It will be a writing class. I will
introduce the intellectual level
of a *Gītā* verse, then ask them
to write ten minutes what
they feel, ask them to pray in writing.
While they write, I will also.
I will read their pieces later in my room.
It could be a good seminar
even if I don't learn to pray right now.

But what about Kṛṣṇa? What about me?
Walking, didn't I seek Him and pray, "Please
reveal Yourself to Your suppliant"?
No, I just chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa and *Jaya*
Prabhupāda and kept walking.

I'D LIKE TO SEE YOUR PROSE AND POEMS

Is there a contradiction, something wrong
in my whole attitude toward writing?
I want to perceive with my senses
but Kṛṣṇa consciousness is only heard.
That's all right—use your nose to
smell the incense offered to the Deity,
your tongue to chant.
I do those things wholeheartedly,
but what about what I
smell and write in my own life?
Can that be Kṛṣṇa conscious?
That's my question.

I think it can, but I have to be
careful. I'm not liberated
where *whatever* I do is spiritual
love of God. Yes, I can walk
the beach in Kṛṣṇa consciousness
and remember my mother and
Queens, New York and bicycles, but
not to binge. It has to have purpose.

Why don't I write more of Dhruva Mahārāja and
songs the way great Vaiṣṇavas wrote them—
the Alvars and the Six Gosvāmis?
Am I afraid to extol the *Bhāgavatam*?
No, not afraid.
Then ashamed?
No, not ashamed.
I want to live in Him,
empathize with Dhruva's feelings of regret
while he stood face-to-face with the Supreme
Person from whom all universes come, all
species of life, the beasts, birds, *devas*, and humans.
But I also want to write that
I read of Dhruva while sitting on a beach,
the dawn sunlight flooding the Atlantic Ocean
and warming the air, brightening the sand, while a
small boat
was moored and bobbed up and down. I had the whole
place to myself. What about that?

So I sit on the beach, thinking over
when the day will come when
I will see the beloved Lord wherever
I turn, when I will live to serve only Him,
when I will write such prose and poems.

PRAYER TO LORD KṚṢṆA

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa,
someone asked if we prayed
just to Prabhupāda or to You.
I said, "Prabhupāda taught us to pray
to Kṛṣṇa. We see the Deity
on the altar and the Lord in His names
because the Swami said so."
He said, "That's great.
You get both guru and Kṛṣṇa."
Yes, I said, that's the way
Prabhupāda taught.
He never said he was God and that we
should chant his names.

Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa,
I am reading again Your *Bhagavad-gītā*
and hearing my master's lectures.
He hammers home to all audiences
that You are the Supreme Person. Your
name is all-attractive.
You appear as Your son or prophet,
but especially as Kṛṣṇa, whose
activities are most pleasing.

Lord Caitanya gives us
the easiest method to
reach the topmost.
Don't talk of *varṇas*, He said,
that is superficial. Direct
chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa
is love of God made easy.
If we still fail, what can be said?

No one knows I'm here
praying to You in my closet.
Not everything I do is prayer,
but You are everywhere, even in my
life of devotional service,
as ordered by my master.
I wish to know You better,
to serve You and love You.
Prabhupāda tells us we can't expect
to come to the standard of the *gopīs*, who gave
their foot dust to the Lord. But try.
So I pray to serve You.

BLACK MOLE DEAD

It was light when I walked,
so I found a dead mole on the path.
He was not eaten at and I wondered how
he came there to die. Did he take a few
last steps out of the grass
and fall dead in the middle
of the path? Black mole body,
curled tail. No good for anything now.
He'll rot into the earth like the leaves.

After seeing him everything seems browner,
more real. The puddles shine.
Was he thinking? Talking to himself
like a creature in *Wind in the Willows*?
Or did he choke and die
with no bright thoughts?
A human can do better if he's
practiced to chant God's names.
Otherwise, no better than a black mole
toddling to a stop, keeling over,
and rotting into the earth while strangers pass.



GENTLE POWER

I compiled references and comments
on the 64 qualities of Kṛṣṇa from NOD.
Made it into a little book.
The editor said, “Add
more material on gentleness
and on the power of the holy name.”
Today I added it while walking.
It’s wonderful when we are treated gently
because that’s what we want. A *sādhu*
is gentle, relaxed.
I knew some readers will poke fun at this,
so I argued against their macho stance.
I said we all want to be treated gently
if only we could find someone
so powerful that his gentleness
wouldn’t be bluffed. I gave the example of Christ.

Now I’m thinking that sometimes Christ
wasn’t soft when he spoke of punishment for sin
and throwing away the chaff,
the useless disciples,
and he smashed the sellers outside the synagogue.
He blew the minds of rich men
and yelled, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”
He had sharp retorts for the Pharisees.
He didn’t condemn his persecutors, but asked
forgiveness.

He lived his word
and turned the other cheek.
I also thought that Prabhupāda was gentle
with me because I have
a thin skin. I think we all do.

As for the power of the holy name,
I said it's more powerful than atomic energy.
I wish I could get some of that power
and drive away my blues, my emptiness.
Then I could be patient and gentle
with others—if I knew the power
of the holy name was always ready
to enter me and I had nothing left to fear.

FOR THE POETS

Yevtuschenko, Carver, Neruda—
poets who represent the people, their conscience,
speaking out against national infamies.
Is writing poetry like scribbling a note to be sent
into an underground to give hope?
I keep forgetting, Why do I do it?
Finally, before it's
too late, I remember what even sensitive
Yevtuschenko or Neruda or Carver can't
remember—that *Kṛṣṇa* is the center,
that recitation of His name or something about Him
from *sāstra* and the pure devotees
will be real amelioration. Because what's
wrong in the world anyway? It's not one
set of rebels against a government, it's not
capitalists
or communists, but the gross neglect
of the soul, of knowledge of the soul—
neglect of recognition that there is a supreme
puruṣa and everything belongs to Him.

They say Kṛṣṇa consciousness is
a tacked-on canon I use to
resolve a poem that really should stay in the
sensual, compassionate poet's realm.
No, it's the center of all people and poets
and government control. It's the difference between
untruth and reality, love and oppression. It's
understanding both sides of the dual
wrongs and partial rights of this world—
seeing everything in Kṛṣṇa. Do you think
He's a Hindu god, you
fine poets? As if you,
Yevtuschenko, are yourself the forger
of the human soul.

BRAHMA - MUHŪRTA

Pre-dawn starts to fade and
bird songs appear, *brahma-sabda*.
I'm prepared to tell them
that first Sarasvatī gave Lord Brahmā
the *kliṁ kṛṣṇāya govindāya* mantra
and then she blessed him to hear
Kṛṣṇa's flute, which
came out Brahmāji's mouths
as *kliṁ kāmadevāya vidmahi . . .*
Although all the truths of the maidservants
of Kṛṣṇa were not revealed to him,
he was able to sing, beginning
with *cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu*.
Kṛṣṇa is the source of all, and
those who are wise
serve Him in love.

A SOLACE FOR MY JAPA

It's raining. I wear rubber
rain gear from head to foot and
walk the roads instead of the windy beach.

Chant, chant.

But I don't beat my mind.

Chant anyway. It goes
deeper, it goes deeper than

I know it. God looks on.

Chant, chant.

I'm sorry I'm not better. I love
to write and publish,

so why don't I love to chant?

You do, I tell myself. *You do*.

In your own way you do, like

that country song: "I'm always true to

you, darling, in my fashion, / I'm always true
to you, darling, in my way."

I'm not endorsing poor *japa*,

just giving myself solace.

I love the life of chanting and

beads and bead bags and people

who chant and any sincere enthusiastic
praise of *japa* I hear.

Pebbly road,
gray with rain, no one else is awake.
Back indoors the raindrops roll off
my rubber coat and pants,
and I smile and talk with the men while
I keep this discovery of solace to myself,
until I write it here to help me remember.

THINKING OF WRITING STORIES

Sat by the ocean harbor.
My beads are my beads.
My life is my life, given to me by Kṛṣṇa,
the Supreme Creator.
My illusions are mine too.
Now I'm starting to tell stories
of my youth and then my life in
ISKCON.

Why? I want to get good
at it. I feel it will develop; it's a skill
to be open and to tell the truth
palatably. I can insert
Kṛṣṇa conscious sermons into my
real stories.
There's no harm in that
because that's how my life was.
I wandered and got lost and my spiritual
master rescued me—an old
story of a fresh triumph—victory tacked
on to defeat again and again.
If you can make a purse from a sow's ear,
a *vīṇā* from broken wires
and a smashed gourd, I can make a Kṛṣṇa
conscious poet out of that guy in the
drip-dry shirt working in the welfare office, the
guy with the fashionable shoes, the scrawny guy.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

We played, “This *rasa* is my favorite”
while we walked the lanes of Vṛndāvana, heard
stories from *paṇḍas* and even from one
who had reached the stage where he wanted only
to talk of Rūpa-Raghunātha.

Well, where are we now?
Two hours south of Roskof, France.
My deity is Prabhupāda.
We carry him everywhere. He sits
on any clean, flat surface I find.
I carry him, he carries me; he
accepts the offerings of food I
make by reciting his *praṇāmas*.

What else? Whom do I love? Am I afraid of
death? I’m afraid of you, of me, of death by a
man who’s my neighbor if he comes
in the night with a gun—afraid.
I know Kṛṣṇa will protect me, but I’m not eager to have
it tested in tight places. Kṛṣṇa’s protection comes
at His bidding.
Precious night, but there’s still sun and dandelions.
I’m grateful.

GO THAT WAY

He walked the willow ways,
thinking himself better than T.,
a light-weight intellectual,
and better than S., a scholastic—
“What does he know about writing poems?”
He thinks himself better, but knows better.

He seeks their ways,
strange that those nondevotee poets haunt
and influence more than we'd
like to acknowledge.
What is their power? To be able
to write a graceful line, uncork
a truth? I want to learn it
for Kṛṣṇa, but it is dangerous to go
to them and ask, “Teach me.” They will
extract a price I don't want to pay.

Why not continue my clumsy Brooklyn
Dodgers approach? Knock them over the right-field fence
only 297 feet away, as
Duke Snider did forty
times a year. Knock them out of sight
like Campy swung and Reese
gobbled up the ground balls.
I can do it—
whatever I learned in the sandlots.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura says to
turn it over to the Lord.

The Lord is the origin of all.

He can teach me any language,
smooth or rough. Go that way.

MEMORIES AND LIVING NOW

He asked, “When you were informed
by Prabhupāda that you were on the GBC, did
you feel the responsibility of it?”

I don’t remember. I was a skinny T.P.

The skinny T.P., he’s in
samādhī. I don’t want to tell bad tales
of 1970. It was at least full-time
service, which can lead us back to
Godhead, but first our Guru Mahārāja
will have to train us further—a
few hundred lifetimes?—until we be-
come brave and clean and desireless except
for the greed to hear of the
Lord,

believing with all our hearts and *doing*
whatever he asks.

Try to sell a hundred magazines or books in a
day. Convince them to change the
name of the airport to O Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Whatever.

I have no time for a crack in our society.

I recall it (1970) now and at
the same time plan to drive
to Rome and catch a plane to
India and go on *parikrama*
without my shoes.

I will be serious.

SELFISH

Walking on the beach, reading the *Gītā*,
I thought about selfishness.
I thought about selfishness in my Godbrothers
and of course in myself, how we
came close to Prabhupāda but with
purposes of our own. He must have seen it,
but he allowed us. *He* was not selfish.
He lived what he taught: “Please Kṛṣṇa.
Make Him comfortable. That is Vṛndāvana.”

This poem is selfish too. I’m writing while waiting
for breakfast for you know who. I glance
at my Seiko watch and want someone to get me
a new sweatshirt, this one is partly worn out,
give me the moon and the sun to see.
But devotional service is kind to us.
It makes us pure. When Hari Śauri asked
how he could come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness since he was
born in a low-class family, his
spiritual master said, “It is like Prahlāda
Mahārāja. He did not become degraded by
his birth in a demoniac family.”
He is so kind to see it that way.

Prabhupāda’s not selfish.
Śrīla Prabhupāda, I want to write freely
and then give it away freely. To not take credit,
but to live the vocation.
Is that selfish, a false sense of possession?

I want to give myself to you, yet be myself.
I walked along the edge of the harbor,
saw the mild lake water
rippling in first sunlight, the jet trail
painting across a blue canvas.
I saw a white lump on the
beach and came closer. It
was a dead lamb and I did not
approach nearer. I did not want to see.
Is the desire to be free of that, to
not be bewildered by death, selfish?

The *Gītā* says that a devotee is not selfish
like a *jñānī* or *yogī*.
He's too busy serving the Lord to
focus on sense gratification.
I think I understand the principle,
but how to apply it
except sometimes when I give you
something I like or do something
because you want me to?
You want us to work,
convince the world
to give everything to Kṛṣṇa.

I'll start with how not to be selfish.
Offer the breakfast to Prabhupāda.

A POEM AT NIGHT

Sunlight in mid-October reminds me
of sun rays in Tompkins Square Park when
we sang with the Swami
three hours on warm Sundays.

Nṛsiṁha dāsa said, “I can’t understand
some things in your poems.” I
wrote back, “Poems are not direct
messages like, ‘Zeke Prabhu, please
close the window. It is starting to rain.
Then go out and sell a BTG to
this man who is waiting at the bottom
of the stairs.’” Poems pick up
things we can’t normally express and they
try to say them. Or is that pompous?
“Anyway,” I said, “tell me what you
didn’t understand.”

Maybe he means he can’t understand why
they are not a hundred percent *śāstra*. Lord Caitanya
said to Sārvabhauma, “Oh, I understand *Vedānta* as
clear as day, but you cover it up. I
can’t understand your nonsense jugglery.”
Nṛsiṁha dāsa may mean that.
I don’t know *what* he means.

Prasādam left outdoors. A fat black
cow munches the leftovers.
We sun ourselves like
turtles. Can't go back indoors right away—
it's too nice out. I went back in the hills,
over the creek with its sweet noise and clear
cold water running over the rocks—prayed
to hear Lord Kṛṣṇa speak in His verses,
mattaḥ parataram nānyat.

Kṛṣṇa, You are the
keeper of cows, the lifter of
Girirāja, the one source of all.
You are our friend. We will
remember You, praise You,
the Lord of love,
the inconceivable supervisor.
Knowledge of You is the confidential
secret of the *Vedas*.
Knowledge of Gaura the
secret within that.



CHANTING WITH DĪNA- DAYĀRDHRA

We chanted *japa* in the room
together. Dina-dayārdhra stood in one corner.
Usually we walk back and forth,
but this morning he stayed in
one place by the door. He's 64, has
straight gray hair, is thin almost as a
woman is thin. He's a *brahmacāri* from Rome.
He joined this movement not long ago,
his children grown up and on their own,
his wife dead. He stood by the door,
chanting, and I thought, "It's getting too loud.
The neighbors are on the other side of
that wall." I went up beside him,
wondering why don't I chant absorbed
like that instead of worrying so much?
"Dina?" He didn't hear me at first.
"*Haribol*." When he looked
I said, "Too loud." He
didn't understand my English. I gestured
to the wall, "Too loud," and he understood.
"Yes, yes," he said and went back to chanting
slightly quieter and facing away
from the wall.

GOODNIGHT # 1

Reading Swamiji's letters before
rest, just fifteen minutes, one to Indira
and Ekayānī, high school girls from
the Bronx: "Chant on your beads,"
he told them. In another, "Satsvarūpa
has edited TLC. Once is enough.
Jadurānī can leave the Boston center to start art
dept. in S.F. if Satsvarūpa will leave
her."

A little tired in the head.
Electric heater humming.
I thought I could pray, but couldn't
figure it out. At least I read in faith
and spoke the words of Kṛṣṇa on my walk,
which ended at a waterfall.
Prayer is not always words,
but the hope He'll notice our intentions
and the schedule we followed
offered in *bhakti*. Whether He
accepts it is His choice.

Secular poetry is an indefinite
science of words placed
exactly right to achieve an effect in a
sensitive, agnostic reader.
I have to proclaim the life of spirit.
That's my job, my mission.

Goodnight. To the chamber of sleep, a
hood like a snake's covers my head in
sleeping bag. Eye mask, ear plugs, I fearlessly
enter the world of dreams and return.
Most of them don't seem worth the effort to
retain. Go to sleep, God-protected.
I anticipate the morning when I will wake
and wipe my eyes with
damp tissue, clean my glasses, and sit up cold,
facing the window at the little table to write my
reluctance and assert it is prayer, is all
prayer. God lives without a doubt. No
one can understand except His devotees.

WONDERFUL CUES

All I do is write about
a gray dawn walk, joy walk,
feet, Kṛṣṇa coming out of
my mouth, an inherent
stream. Every *jīva* is entitled to chant,
unfortunate as we are.

Gray pebbles soldered together
by workmen. No cars at this hour. I
can't see a hare running yet—too dark.
Puddles are silver and my eyes can
make out the road. Chanting.

I think of clever cues to give
students about writing: “Imagine you love
Kṛṣṇa.” “Think of a time you saw Him
and realized that everything is in Kṛṣṇa.”
Wonderful writing cues. I wait
for the day when I can give out notebooks
and Bic pens and say, “Go. Ten minutes.”
Everyone's head down, they're writing
their realizations. Painful for some.
“I can't do it! I have no realization!”
“Then write that.”

At the bridge, water stronger from rain.
A new whitewater side-
stream pushes over the rocks and
joins the waterfall. Lights from
an approaching truck—but this is an off-road.
He won't come across this bridge.

“Kṛṣṇa says *tat sṛṇu*.

Write something positive:

‘I like hearing

from Kṛṣṇa directly because . . .”

I walked past the sign, “72 acres
and old farm house.” It now has a diagonal
banner across it, “Sale Agreed.” Too bad. I
could have bought it and written a tome
while living there. I would write
based on verses from *Bhagavad-gītā*
6.29 or 6.30, about the devotee and
at the same time about Kṛṣṇa. They go together
and can't be separated. Not that Kṛṣṇa
is alone without His devotee
or that we exist without Him.

FALLING SHORT

I

I have to ask myself why I have come here.
To praise the Lord of mercy.
A few young *bhaktas* in the city
of Baltimore live together,
worship, and know that the holy names
are forever.
“Keep cool,” she said, and gave me a check
to use in Kṛṣṇa’s service.
Dija hear that six vans raced all over America,
brahmacāris in summer distributing
36,000 pieces of literature—Prabhupāda’s books?
Rejoice! The spirit is back,
the land rejuvenated
while we weren’t watching.
Between 1969 and 1978 a generation
appeared who are not against the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.
Their parents had bought Prabhupāda’s books.

II

I finished answering the mail.
Finished Sunday or Sunday
finished me. Now it is Monday
and I don’t have to work for a *karmī*.
I am fortunate.

What am I saying?

I am saying I want to go for a walk
and chant better, and when I am at the half-way mark
after half an hour,
under the less-than-half-moon
in the bluing sky,
then I want to speak by God's grace.
I start a letter beginning, "Dear—"
and pour out sincere feelings—
I love you, I love the earth,
I fall short, please lift me up,
please let me serve the devotees.
You are so kind.

A narrow tarmac road in Eire
and the walk goes by quickly
as I reach through the paragraphs of the letter
and reach a likely conclusion,
a little disappointed
because nothing is new.
When I reach the cattle gate near
our house I cut it short,
"Thanks for this. It really has been nice."
Then on up the hill,
trudging out one last round
before I enter
where my companions greet me
as I take off my boots.

TO THAT GLADNESS

To the mouse whose body I found
but could not find the next day,
a small prayer, "Please save me too."
To the sharp rocks, to the slim waterfall,
to words and especially to
my own mind,
I bid you good day
on this cool May made radiant by God's grace.

THE DEARMOST

The lamb standing by the door of the
outbuilding has an infected foot, skin
boiled up pink, a painful knob there.
She shifts nervously, slightly, when
I approach. Looks like a modest girl
who wants to come out of the shadows
and beg something.

I've decided I have to preach and think
about preaching even while alone for awhile.
But I also have to chant alone,
see into the problems
of my inattention.
It's a yogic *siddhi* to be able to
fix the mind the way Prahlāda
prayed to Nṛsiṁha.

Just chant and read—I
do a pitifully small amount of reading—
and write to find that nonpretentious voice.
Overturn, rebel, see Kṛṣṇa as Master
and most important person in your life—
more important than me or the
lamb by the doorway,
the dawn, stars, jet trails in the sky . . .
Everything is Him.
Sarvam kalv idam brahma

The work is to find Kṛṣṇa dearest
in my body and the world and
perceive with senses, even dreams and
tongue and to serve
Him, please Him. I don't understand or
feel yet how it all goes on,
but *sāstra* says that it's
not for His benefit but ours that
we surrender. It's not
"too much to demand."
Kṛṣṇa is the Lord.

JUST SOMETHING SIMPLE

Just something simple to counteract
the madness of scribbled art—
my own and that of *New Poets of the*
'90s, those tough, hard-edged stories
of Chicago, Chinatown, killings and
L.A., going to the movies and coming
out and seeing the World.

Just something simple such as offering cereal
to my spiritual master or my new plan to
read aloud before him from his book
in the afternoon. Just now I fingered the *Īsopaniṣad*
and *Nectar of Instruction* and thought,
“I’ll read these again, these
small books written by my spiritual master.”

LORD KṚṢṆA IS SPEAKING AND I WANT SPIRIT

I spoke softly, “Kṛṣṇa is speaking,”
and heard it. I want to be religious,
mystical enough to beat the mystique of
monk and Hare Kṛṣṇa person and prayer illusions and
experience something real.

I want to appreciate the Lord’s words, spoken
directly to each of us.

I walked to the bridge. It took twenty-five
minutes. Now it’s raining. I am upstairs.
These are words of innocence and
experience. Breakfast soon.

I want spirit, dripping down mercy. I want to hear
and feel even as I walk the road surrounded
by hills.

I want spirit, to teach it in a
classroom to devotees, something not
ordinary, not academic: how to hear
the Lord speak and how to pray.

GOODNIGHT # 2

Goodnight. Chanting myself to sleep.
I use this bed for sleep atop the mattress,
burrowed, warm, soul encased in body.
I don't use swans' down in my sleeping
bag. Don't dream wrong?
But they come out their own way;
I don't take much stock anymore
in awry dreams of
wiseguy poets attacking
the melancholic and even the
allegiance to speak of holocaust and
city crime.
Sure I'd call a cop if thugs
came, but that's a different
thing.
Law and order.

Just serve Govinda and your obligations
are paid to sages, fathers,
animals, vegetables, corpses,
nations, demigods . . .
Just serve Govinda.

I can't explain so expertly how Kṛṣṇa consciousness
is nonsectarian. Essayists attempt it—
His partiality is impartial, He favors those
who are impartial, whether one is
Jew, Christian, or Hindu, if they love Him.

I can't always get it straight.
I admire those who do.
I write my tale of a day
each day.
What I know, what comes down
and what I read and comprehend in
my master's books.

Tomorrow is Rādhā's day.
Next week, Vāmanadeva, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.
This is the September season when Prabhupāda
arrived in America and Haridāsa Ṭhākura
disappeared in Puri before Lord Caitanya.
Goodnight. We are not mad or insidious
or brilliant. God is all.

WALKING WITH ŚRĪDĀMĀ

Śrīdāmā and I walked together.
We didn't talk because I don't speak
Italian and he doesn't speak English.
He walked behind me, letting me
be alone, but he was there.
I looked back a few times to make sure.
He in white pants, purple jacket, both
of us carried walking sticks on
up the hill. I'm older,
the guru, he the disciple,
but we are both fallible men.

I tell him in sign language
that this hill is steep.
“If you don't want to walk it, you
can wait here.” But he comes along
up my hill and into the dense forest.
Today it's misty dark at 5:30 A.M.
Yesterday I saw the brilliant moon
and talked about it into
my Sony machine: “A great treat,
almost looks like a car headlight.”
Then I added, “Hare Kṛṣṇa,”
because my moon talk
was not Kṛṣṇa conscious.
The incline is too sharp. I stop for breath.
I feel a pebble in my boot and stop
to remove it while Śrīdāmā watches.

All the while we chant and
that makes it special. As Ajāmila
chanted his son's name, "Nārāyaṇa," we
chant God's names because we've been told to.
Kṛṣṇa, Hare, and Rāma.
I think of telling Śrīdāmā in sign language
to pray when he chants,
but that would be presumptuous
since I can't do it myself. He has
no questions. It starts to rain.

I CALL THEM WRITING SESSIONS

Satī passed away.

Lord Śiva, angry, snatched
a hair from his head and laughing
crazily, threw it to the
ground. The giant demon Virabhadra
was born. Lord Śiva ordered him:
burn down the arena and kill Dakṣa.
(Stop me if you've already heard this, or
would you like to hear it again?)

I feel squeamish to read of the
ghosts and goblins whose yellow and
gray bodies ran into
the women's tents to "threaten" them.
They urinated into the sacrificial fire.
They arrested the escaping demigods.
Virabhadra caught Dakṣa and tried to cut
off his head, but he couldn't until he
looked around and saw the "wooden device"
used to slaughter sacrificial animals.
With that, he successfully beheaded the
prajāpati and kicked out Pūṣā's teeth
because he smiled when Lord Śiva
was insulted. Then they burned down the
arena and left, shouting.

Satī died, but no one dies. She was
reborn as Himavati.

Meanwhile, the surviving *brāhmaṇas* appealed to Brahmā,
who told them to surrender to Śiva.

I plan to write into the heart
of this today, three times a day,
writing sessions, whatever comes.

My outer life is quiet.

I have no memories of me as a WW II pilot
or as a child wetting the bed or as a lover
talking into the night and who was exposed in
a poem. It's just me on a stiff chair, me
and my spiritual master and Kṛṣṇa and out the window
at dawn the houses near the lake and
this writing.

THE SHEEP THAT DIED

A sheep died—a fox tore
a hole in her side. She stood two days
waiting for death. Flies hovered around her
white woolly hide. She drank a little
water and stood quietly, not nervous,
when I passed close by she did not
jump away because—I didn't know it—
she was waiting, standing.

And it came.

Madhu found her fresh dead, no
birds pecking at her corpse.

We told her owner. He said it's the
foxes. The farmers go out at
night with "flashers," shine them into the
foxes' eyes, and they know a tune or
human call that will lure them
forward. They shoot them.

The owner says that naturalists have been
breeding foxes and dumping them live in the
woods to deliberately counteract
the farmers who shoot them.

Seems they want the wildlife supply
well stocked. Everyone thinks he's
doing God's work.

All this while I still walk alone
figuring out the balance between
active city preaching and being alone
to chant and read and pray,
writing to myself, "What do I want?
Where are my roots?" I know the
answers but I want to
hear them again, purchased from within
by labor of anxious introspection.
The sheep and fox-killing remind
me that there is no peace in solitude, no
lovely setting in the world, although the
creek's burbles pacify weary nerves.

JAPA WALK

Sign with pointed arrow
for the hikers who pass here.
The light on in the
rich people's estate but
they never come here to enjoy it.

The brown snail on the road.
I didn't have time to stop for him
although he was beautiful
sticking out of his shell home,
his long, slimy head with antennae.
Hello—good-bye, I walked fast over
him, but didn't step on him.

My red beads. I hope
to hold on to them my whole life,
or what's left of it. The beads ought
to be able to outlast me.
I can patch them if one
cracks open like an autumn chestnut.

Chant, chant. I use my head but
don't know how to chant in the heart.
Maybe I'm too orthodox and have to learn.
I think I'm far out, but actually
I'm a timid and conservative soul
and don't know
what it takes to love.

I saw no one at all on the walk,
although a bird feared my approach.
Walked into the tent of
tree forest, leaving no shadow.
I counted and counted—
9, 10, 11, and 12—my rounds.
The hard dirt.

HEARING FROM THE SCRIBE

Steer to Kṛṣṇa, my constant refrain.
Delight to be listening
over a new tape recorder to
“The Teachings of the *Vedas* Personified.”
I didn’t know it was so pleasurable. I
thought it was all arguments against Māyāvādis,
which it is. But he was saying
chanting and hearing, chanting and hearing
are so important a devotee doesn’t even care
for liberation. He simply wants to go on
chanting and hearing Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma
Rāma Hare Hare.
There was a nice prayer by Śrīdhara Svāmī inserted,
and a discourse on *ṣaḍ-darśana*.
I thought, “I’ll tell them what I heard and
that will be my preaching:
chanting and hearing are important.”
That is my pixie dust, although
I know there are plenty of other things you
could tell devotees to motivate them
to produce results
in a preaching movement.



READING AND DREAMS

Dreams often leave me with
deeply moved feelings
more than I feel from reading
the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.
I wish it were the other way around,
but I'm confessing this,
hoping it will change my life.

If I can't feel ecstasy when I read
but only when I dream, why not
dream of Kṛṣṇa coming home after killing Dhenuka,
the *gopīs* rushing forward to
behold His beautiful young boy body
covered in Dhenuka's blood—lovely
as Śukadeva said it was?

I usually dream of riddles,
a drama played by ISKCON
devotees and me doing something that
doesn't make sense—
a brother turning me out from his temple
and me wandering the streets lost and alone
experiencing many adventures,
meeting all kinds of people,
until finally that Godbrother comes
to me again with a car and says,
“Now come on. I will give you a ride.”

It feels like something happening
in my roots. I want to feel like that when I read
the scriptures. Let me dream of the scriptures.
I send this request to my dream-self,
and to my book-reading self,
and to Śrī Kṛṣṇa who already knows
and will decide what is best.

POEMS FOR PRABHUPĀDA

A Kṛṣṇa devotee ought to make
a different kind of poem.
He reads *Bhāgavatam* and is inspired
to repeat what Nārada instructed Dhruva
as it comes down to us
through the millennia.

Prabhupāda says fools don't know
how to preach in the West.
They measure things against the
Hindu standard.
They don't know how to
adjust for America and France.
Prabhupāda married the boyfriends to their
girlfriends, encouraged Murāri dāsa
to "go on playing your guitar in *kīrtana*.
There is no need to learn to play sitar.
Life is short and education is long—
so use whatever you've got
in service to the Lord."

Prabhupāda, may I write for you,
poems as we used to
in 1966 and '67 in our mimeographed BTG?
We wrote New York City free verse. You
liked it. "When I was chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa
and the sun was going in and out
I was afraid lest I'd be taken
on a chariot ride down the length of the rainbow . . ."

I wrote one about sweetballs
you kept in a jar
in a corner of your room.
You invited us to take one whenever
we wanted instead of smoking cigarettes.

What poems now to match those?
Today's poems are just as good
provided we find ourselves and what
we lost through the years, provided we confess
and that our hearts are able
to notice *we can't hear*,
we actually can't hear. When we open
the door and see rain at 6 A.M.
and a string of headlights on the highway
toward the city, all we have to do
is hear. The *mahā-mantra*
will do the rest. But that's exactly
what I can't do. Then for a moment
I hear a *mahā-mantra*
and then a sparrow.

I admit life is harder
now that Prabhupāda doesn't write to me and say
I owe his book fund four hundred dollars.
And, "Do what I say and let me
know by return post."
Now we're not so sure. We still serve him,
and write poems in new permissiveness.

ISKCON's new pluralism
is healthy,
and I wouldn't give up this anxiety
because it's all I've got.

ONLY THIS

It's been a long week of rain and gray sky,
many little leaves on the branches.

I tried drawing some of them with
a green Crayola.

Big clouds with withered edges,
battleship gray, the white sky
just over the hills and trees.

Down, down goes the collection of
days and years. Mine.

NAME-CALLING THE GROUCHY MAN

“I’m not going to eat you.”
The cross man frightened the children.
In Wicklow he’s known as an enemy
but was himself taken aback
to see the children recoil from him.
“I’m not going to bite you,” he said.
They weren’t sure.
They knew him from their households,
from their daddies and moms,
that grouchy man who curses their fathers,
who keeps cows to kill,
the demon.

Prabhupāda writes and the *Bhāgavatam* says that
whoever doesn’t praise Kṛṣṇa is an animal.
I know it sounds harsh, said Prabhupāda,
but we must repeat Kṛṣṇa’s words.
Mūḍha, dog—and
those men who praise others,
who don’t praise Kṛṣṇa.

DEATH TALK

I talked about death in the woods,
made it sound not impossible:
you think of your spiritual master,
the pain of the body closes in on you,
you can't see the next world,
but somehow you are a success.
At least you're counted on the right side.
But all this is speculation.
It's bound to be the severest trip
because of the death rattle— *gar, gar*—
and the high stakes in the last hour—
will you think of Him
or something else?
Finally you slide under,
and not so good, you are afraid.

I talked about that and then saw
a flattened frog, dead a week
and on the road, a fresh-dead mouse,
its neck ripped raw. I figure
it was that tabby cat. I saw her
yesterday crouched like a tiger.
Human death will have more dignity
perhaps.

Chanting in the woods, taking that
as positive, to my credit.
Death makes me want to chant more.
There's no better way to stock up for the
lean and desperate times ahead
than to learn how to chant.
But it's taking a long time
and my time is short.
Anyway, I want to be positive and
chant as I walk down the dirt path
past the dynamited rock and
further into the woods,
moving the counter beads
one after another.

REASONS

“Well, I am not up to a poem,” he says.
He says I can’t expect to write them
every night. I’ve got other projects—
prayers, *japa*, worries—
living here takes a
lot of mental effort—
and my writing projects are similar
to one another.
Besides, I just borrowed energy and
inspiration from two nondevotee
poets. With all these reasons, my
gremlin rests his case.

I don’t care. Mist white
like gauze or smoke, but sitting
in one place on the hilltop. It’s darker,
Ekādaśī night, and I did sixty-four.
Did I once call out to the Lord?
Maybe. He knows. The names
are the way for this age and I did
it. I chanted all day
in my room, looking out the window
at the hill and sky. It has to be a
good way to spend an
Ekādaśī.

Now that I'm writing I can feel
from the day's chanting
freedom from worry. I worry too much.
All day I put it aside and chanted,
and to hell with those reasons. I'm
happy to write melodies on a page, my pen
a clarinet in the darkening light.



REST BREAK

What I do is lie down on my back
fifteen minutes before breakfast.
I've been up seven hours since midnight,
working nonstop at devotional practices.
Then I relax, go deep,
let go of legs and feet,
but no sleep.

Each day the blue-cloudy, misty, early
morning sky clears and finally
I speak to the spiritual master
whom I think of in my own way.
Through him I speak to the Lord,
who has many forms and who appears
in the form desired by each devotee.
The scriptures say His forms
are not material and we too
have a *svarūpa*
in which our outer form is actually
our innermost desire form
for pleasing Kṛṣṇa.
I'm a long way from that,
lying down in this body, relaxing,
hoping the soul will rise up
at the right time to
pray and poem and work
until the end time.

REPLY

I asked myself if it were okay
to remember my past before coming to
Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I mean, if it just comes up—
as it does. Will it detain me?
Will it detain me to hear again
the drumsticks of Philly Joe Jones
and Miles' sweet intonation,
"Round Midnight"? I feel foolish to ask this.

Will it detain me
or am I already detained?
Is it harmless to hear a muted trumpet?
But he said even a little, little material
desire and you can't go back to Godhead.
It is that simple.
You can't be liberal.
You have to give it all up—
the sense of I and mine
and the willingness to follow blind men into a ditch.

Poets, Kafkas, Coltranes—
I told Murray in 1966 while standing
just outside the storefront—
he was his own man and poet and
I said, "I am working for the Swami."
He smirked.
I went back inside 26 Second Avenue
for a chance to see Swamiji
in his room.

SOMEDAY I MAY GET DOWN

I get sick of writing talk.
I put it aside and just walk
deep into the wet woods.
It's almost summer, white blossoms on berry bushes
and sharp rocks underfoot.
Where they dynamited the rock
I walk through
and I pray, I pray that
some day I may get down and beseech
the Lord, break my cool
and cry, "Please, I have been chanting
and You know I love to write,
but I want to serve You in this life.
I've read that if one can't fully surrender,
he can still chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.
Please let me chant better than this.
Please."
The Lord waits to hear
my earnest cry.

OUTPOURING

We will drive up to a temple
where we have been before, maybe Villa Vṛndāvana.
Someone will say, "That's Satsvarūpa."
We will get out and fall on the earth.
We will buy air tickets and
go to India.
A man, *sādhu*,
dependent on God, the only *puruṣa*,
and *prakṛti* still singing
until he's done in.
I will keep writing and
dragging over the continents
until I'm struck down
crying, "Now, Kṛṣṇa, please give me a
good place next life. Next life
I must rest in You."

KĀRTTIKA LIGHTS

REMEMBERING VṚNDĀVANA
ON THE ROAD IN SPAIN

I burn candles every morning while I chant *japa* in front of my altar. One Godbrother suggested I burn ghee wicks instead since they're more Vedic than candles. I suppose I could, but since I travel so much, candles are easier.

It was candles—skinny little birthday candles—that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us in the autumn of 1966. It was a surprise. I remember going to his room in the evening as usual one night; a little ceremony was in progress. On Prabhupāda's low table, which was his altar in his worship room, he directed each of us to go up and set the candle on the tabletop, which we did by first dripping a little wax onto the table and then fixing the candle into it.

When we asked Swamiji why we were performing this small ceremony, he replied simply, "To increase your devotion." Only later did I understand that this was our first observance of Kārttika. Although this ceremony is observed in beautiful and opulent ways in Vṛndāvana, there will never be anything as sweet as placing those birthday candles on Swamiji's table in 1966. After we lit our candles, we sat around and watched them burn down. We joked quietly to one another that the candle represented our souls. We wanted to see whose soul would be the first to go out—"There goes mine!"—and we would laugh as a puff of smoke rose into the air.

I am writing in that same mood of watching our lives burn down day by day, mine and yours, as we try to increase our devotion. Each day during Kārttika we light a fresh candle, a new wick, that gradually burns down and expires. The next day we light another. Our supply of candles is not unlimited and neither are our days. We live in this way, seeking devotion.

We sang *Dāmodarāṣṭakam* in the temple room, Madhu leading with harmonium. Rādhā-Govinda-candra—She an innocent young girl, He *śyāma*, the transcendental Lord.

I remember last year's Kārttika—the rapid drum beats in Vṛndāvana and that Hindi lady singer. The sounds floated around us in that quiet place that Bhūrijana took us near the edge of Govardhana. I followed my Godbrothers. When one bowed down, I did too. When one offered *daṇḍavats* while grasping a rock, I did too. I kept my distance, but I prayed, “Dear Govardhana, please make it clear to me how to surrender to Śrīla Prabhupāda.”

I stepped on a thorn in that rarefied atmosphere. The rocks were dull gray, streaked pink-red-brown. Beads of dew sat on the grass blades. Ants crawled up my back. Mosquitoes buzzed. Sunlight, peacocks, and my Godbrother's camera shutter clicked.



Lord Kṛṣṇa played on Govardhana Hill. He lifted it into the air as a child lifts an umbrella. How to cross the barrier of time? How to keep Kṛṣṇa in our hearts?

Kārttika rushed up on me this year suddenly. We're not in Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “. . . even such unserious persons who execute devotional service according to the regulative principles

during the month of Kārttika, and within the jurisdiction of Mathurā in India, are very easily awarded the Lord's personal service." (NOD, pg. 103)

Storks landing in a paradise of chimneys in Spain, the belfries of churches their favorite roosts. It's a strange sight.

Perhaps Paris or persimmons—perhaps words—can release me from bondage.

Foolish. He tries in various swash themes, in dreams, and by exploring the six enemies of the mind to find his lost way. They are bitter enemies.

The path is sacred, the attempt noble. Surrender is best. It can be offered gradually, pursued regularly. Give up all attachment to the monkey world. So what if you get a few mosquito bites?

The world is a fearful place. My life is so sheltered in ISKCON that I see the danger only in dreams. In Vṛndāvana, *kīrtana* goes on twenty-four hours a day. The sour violin notes come over the loudspeaker from the "Nitāi-Gaura-Rādhe-Śyāma" man in his dark *āśrama*. Bala-deva and I joked about the Indian mode while we sat in front of Prabhupāda and the bell tolled an evening hour.

Kārttika is here too, the
leaves turning brilliant orange
and yellow from green
in heartland Spain.
We're heading north.
How is this Kārttika like that one
in Vraja? I have my desire
to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda
in a deep way in his books.
"May that son of Śacimātā appear
in the innermost core of your heart."

This is life too if
I can just feel the pulse
and pray, “Hari, Hare Kṛṣṇa,
Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.”

I’m not eating sweets for Kārttika. While eating lunch *prasādam* today, it occurred to me that there wouldn’t be a sweet. Perhaps I put too much of my heart into anticipating sweet foods. I could invest that same energy, that same love, into chanting the holy name.

I began to wonder, since I was denying myself sweets whether I had actually received sweets today in another way. Then I remembered Madhu singing this morning and how we offered our lamps before beautiful Rādhā-Govinda-candra, how They gave us Their full *darsana*.

An old memory. I will chant instead.
Do the dance of love, sidestepping
petty truths and concerns of the mind.
Ever so gently
push out
the thoughts of the mind
and reside in the sound of
hari-nāma awhile, awhile.
There’s no other cure for
what ails me.
Please let me return
back to Godhead.

I have to die. It’s not so far away now. Better chant in *that* mind. I know a fellow who passed away before his thirtieth year. A young girl died smiling. It’s happening every day—bodies are being burnt at the Yamunā. I don’t mean to depress you, friend, but it’s a fact of life. On

the highway, in the stack of red *sindura* you see in a Vṛndāvana market, in the spinach you buy in America. Did you notice that man's missing teeth? Did you see that bent-over widow? Even a plump *guru-kula* boy carries the message: death stalks us all.

Don't cling to mortal pleasure, but sing Kṛṣṇa and Rādhē. Mahārāja Parikṣit's seven days soon became six, winding down as he heard *Bhāgavatam*. Better avoid hurting others or even failing to be happy when you see the Vaiṣṇava. Better pray for strength and mercy.

In the quiet off the highway, I remember Vṛndāvana and how the evening sounds well up. Someone practices beginner's tunes on a harmonium. Monkeys rumble in different directions. At least two different Hindi speakers from two different *āśramas* broadcast their messages. Bells ring for evening *ārati*.

Here, I'm answering mail. Devotees talk about Jesus, how women need to get married. This land is so deserted that it was hard to find a place to stop for the night. Big, black bull sign on the horizon. The stork nest on the deserted church steeple looks like a bale of hay. A maniac sped by earlier on a motorcycle, veering sharply, low to the ground.

She wound up in a mental hospital
because her husband mistreated
her (she said). Lost touch with
reality and lived in a mental
fantasy.

She could hurt herself that way because we live forever. The spirit soul doesn't die. Who is to say where we will go next life? We are all little *īśvaras*. We'll live out another chance to serve. I have nothing to say except please chant sixteen rounds and follow the four rules as you promised.

City of Burgos ahead.
Kārttika lights, little
candles of faith and hope.
Unless we get some nectar
of love and hope, how
can we go on just doing duty?
We light our candles
wanting to be straight and honest.
Light a candle and see your face-soul—
the flame of your aspirations.

Maybe it's not a symbol for body and soul, for a brief life burning down, but for aspirations of love of God and readiness to sacrifice that's burning bright.

The moon is rising, an almost-full, white moon just topping the van. I remember Prabhupāda sometimes calling the moon the "Kārttika moon" as he looked up and saw this same moon, this same sky, these same clouds. Why should I think this moon is foreign to me? Everywhere belongs to Kṛṣṇa. This moon is also shining over Vṛndāvana.



In Vṛndāvana, I looked out the screened window, screened in myself. I saw those rare birds with the down-swept beaks and young monkeys climbing around the leafy branches. Healthy parrots flew and expanded their chests in mid-air. A pigeon—seemed sick or old—sat for hours on the ledge outside my porch. It seemed that the healthy creatures expanded themselves according to their tiny capacities under Kṛṣṇa’s direction.

I tried to write in codes, in metaphor, to express something beyond myself. I realized that many of my phone calls, correspondence, and thoughts were temporary—just a flurry of memos and arrangements and worries. Occasionally I broke through to something more in writing, perhaps in the perception and description of a cloud. I still savor those moments.

Someone once asked me, “What is *your* life? What are you doing to relish?”

He told me of his interests,
and that he went to America and saw
isolated people, no good communities,
nobody doing *kīrtana* together anymore.
“Maybe they forget how.”

What did I find in Vṛndāvana?

I was defensive and had to explain that
I got headaches. “But from this room I
see peacocks” (I’ve never
seen one), “and parrots”
(that’s true), “and monkeys, so
I feel I’m in Vṛndāvana even
without leaving this room.”

Then I mumbled something about
disciples and letters and seminars and
sannyāsa-dharma, travel . . .

At 7 when the bell tolled
and far off the *mṛdaṅgas* rumbled,
I sat by the open window and
tried to write poems.

Alluded to the truth of sparrows and the fate of the bee who was eaten (alive or dead) by ants. I saw it on my bed and flicked the large corpse onto the floor. A devotee is supposed to live in Vṛndāvana.

This morning we each lit birthday candles. Mine was blue, Madhu's pink. Wax dripped onto the wooden desk as we circled the flame before the pictures of Prabhupāda and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, singing in unison Prabhupāda's *praṇāmas*, the Pañca-tattva mantra, and Hare Kṛṣṇa. Instead of reciting *prema-dhvani* at the end, I said, "The wax dripped onto the desk."

A devotee is supposed to live in Vṛndāvana, but either here or there, we have to be there in our minds.

No doctor can cure,
no past can alleviate,
no word as sweet as that
from above,
no warning as certain . . .

Into the trash can of rhetoric go so many words. We can go through them later with silky fingers, but don't get cut. Who knows what we'll find in the garbage?

I chant a few rounds and attempt to pray, then chant a few more and try again.

But there's no one to help us rhyme,
or rather, we pick up everyone's
life and times and wisdom—
Mother Teresa, Lao Tzu,
Ben Franklin.

I concede that all that noise is too
much in my brain.
Now I avoid the worst,
but the rabbit's closed eyes
don't mean he is safe.
Chant the holy names
chant the holy names,
and again, chant the
holy names.

A *mātāji* at New Vraja-maṇḍala gave me a green-yellow feather just as we were leaving and said, "This is from Vṛndāvana." That's just what I want. It looks like a parrot feather fallen off a wing and into the dust. It's the king of *dhāmas*, Vṛndāvana.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—My dear Lord,
words come out of my pen,
unrealized.

Please make me an exclusive devotee of Gaura-Nitāi. Give me a taste for the excellent *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

I want to open my mouth like a
little bird and
sing, chirr-up.
Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one
and They separate for
sacred passion and
then become One again
as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Kārttika is for increasing devotion. Devotion is a *part*, apparently. We choose that one part—the best part—and then we get Everything. We choose to make Kṛṣṇa conscious activities rule our lives—the reading part of us, the celibate part, the part that listens to *kīrtana*, and the part that seeks entrance into the nectar of service and sacrifice.

Then just chant. I chanted fifteen rounds sitting in one place. When I know I have plenty of time and nowhere to go, it's better for steady chanting and prayer in *japa*. That happens when we're traveling. Now we're on a ferry. My voice sounded weak and not quite connected to my body when I chanted, disembodied. There's something unreal about being out on an almost deserted ship's deck and walking past the model of the Queen Mary and ads for the beauty salon and restaurant onboard and into the fog as the ship tilts and my steps go off into the air. Chanting was my anchor.

A devotee wants to prepare himself for death. He has to take a natural approach to things, to face himself actually, and to see with attention what's in his heart. It's not *māyā*; it's important.

I heard a nice statement by Prabhupāda about *vijñāna*. Some people think we simply have to accept what Śrīla Prabhupāda says, that it's complete, and that there's no need to speak of our own understanding or realization. Śrīla Prabhupāda said: "*Jñāna* and *viveka* . . . *Viveka* means personal conviction. That is called *vijñāna*. One knowledge you get from me and then you practically apply your consciousness, that 'Yes, what Prabhupāda has said, it is right.' That is called *vijñāna*. Accept knowledge blindly from the authority, that is knowledge. But how it is practically made or done, that understanding is called *vijñāna*." (Room conversation, October 31, 1975, Nairobi)

Tonight we light candles before the altar, candles of hope. “This love of God is now in a dormant state in everyone’s heart. . . . Now the heart has to be purified of the material association, and that dormant, natural love for Kṛṣṇa has to be revived. That is the whole process.” (Bg. 12.9, purport) Prabhupāda is sitting in front of me. I don’t have to say every little thing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following disciples and friends who helped produce and print this book:

Anurādhā-devī-dāsī

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa dāsa

Caitanya-dayā-devī dāsī

Guru-sevā-devī dāsī

Kaiśorī-devī dāsī

Keśihanta dāsa

Lalitāmṛta-devī dāsī

Madana-mohana dāsa

Mādhava dāsa

Madhumaṅgala dāsa

Nārāyaṇa-kavaca dāsa

Prāṇadā-devī dāsī

Vegavati-devī dāsī

Special thanks to Prāṇadā-devī dāsī for her kind donation to print this book.

